

Recognizing Leonard Cohen: a Canadian Icon in Style

By H. C. Miller

The Westin Hotel is the scene on September 24 of the 2005 Leonard Cohen Night and everyone is invited to attend. The evening promises to include music, poetry, an open stage, food and drink, and will recognize the considerable achievements of the Montreal-



Kim Solez

born Canadian icon.

Kim Solez is founder and president of Edmonton's Cohennights Art Society, a non-profit organization supporting the development of community-based cultural arts initiatives influenced by the 71-year-old entertainer. "We're celebrating Leonard Cohen, specifically remembering

his visit to the university in November and December of 1966," he explains. "That turned out to be a very important period in his career, as it represents the time when he transitioned from being an ordinary citizen to becoming somebody who is famous." Cohen wrote many poems and songs, and fostered lots of friendships during that time, he adds. "He changed the city and the city changed him."

Cohen performed nightly to packed rooms, and he realized for the first time that people were treating him like a famous person, adds Solez. The performer also returned to Edmonton several times in subsequent years.

The annual celebration of Leonard Cohen's work is growing in popularity and is becoming accepted by the arts community as one of Edmonton's many gala evenings. In July 2008, Edmonton will host the International Leonard Cohen Event, an exciting occasion for Cohen fans world-wide which is held every two years, and has been cele-

brated in Montreal, Greece and New York City since its founding. It will be held in Berlin in August 2006 and Solez is involved in sending Canadian talent to the event.

Ann Vriend is one of the performers at the September 24 happening. The locally raised singer has appeared at the Edmonton and Calgary folk festivals, toured extensively, and recorded on both Canadian and American record labels. Other musicians who will present works from Leonard Cohen are The CHICKADivas, Vicky Hynes, Dale Ladoceur, Lionel Rault, and Craig Shafer.

Bob Chelmick, the well-known radio show host on local station CKUA, will host the evening. Films prepared for the Leonard Cohen Video Contest and a silent auction will also be held.

Members of the hosting organization come from all walks of life and all ages. "We have fans from age 16 to 70-something," says Solez. "There are lots of young people



The CHICKADivas (pictured above) as well as Ann Vriend, Vicky Hynes, Dale Ladoceur and others will pay tribute to Leonard Cohen.

involved. A young sociology student, Nikki Olson, has been instrumental in preparing the music for this year's event, and Mark McVea is a computing engineering student who is helping with the robotic dog which is a product of Sony, the label which records Cohen's work," he says.

Earlier in the day, a free lecture at the Macdonald Hotel by Cohen biographer Ira Nadel will be held. "Ira has had a wonderful relationship with Leonard since they wrote *Various Positions: A Life of Leonard Cohen* together and he will be sharing some of that with the

audience," explains Solez. The introduction to the books states that readers "can learn the ... sources of Cohen's practice of Judaism and Zen; the various sculptures he explored, and the roots of raw emotion and intensity that have always characterized his art."

To RSVP for the lecture or get more information about the upcoming event, call the Leonard Cohen Nights office at 433-4652. Tickets are available by calling Tix on the Square at 420-1757, with reduced rates for students.

Included in the cost of

the ticket are a complimentary Red Needle, Cohen's signature beverage, and a meal specially created by the chef at the Westin who is designing a delightful Cohen-themed meal. The event sold out last year, and tickets are going fast.

"Edmonton is known as festival city, and area residents are beginning to recognize that this annual event is quickly becoming one of the regular celebrations," concludes Solez. "Come and join us for this great family evening which salutes a great Canadian icon."

One, blessed be He,