



Photo courtesy of www.leonardcohen.com

Reviewer Harry Burson shines the spotlight on Neil Young, a lackluster performer and Leonard Cohen, a singer with monotone voice but stellar audience skills.

Leonard Cohen's music featured in steamy sex scene

BY HARRY BURSON
Reviewer

Neil Young simply can't be shocking anymore. After 40 years as one of rock's most consistent artists, there's not a whole lot of ground left for him to cover. In his '70s heyday, he moved effortlessly between perfect country-rock and convincing garage rock with his backing group Crazy Horse. In the '80s, he widened his palette further, taking on rockabilly, big-band blues and electronica on a record in which his vocoderized voice spelled out his family troubles. Who said Kanye West's "808's and Heartbreak" was the first time a major artist took a bizarre detour into the land of electronic voices?

In this decade, Young has had an environmental concept record ("Greendale"), another country disc ("Prairie Wind"), a hastily recorded call to impeach the President ("Living with War") and a critically acclaimed hodge podge of old and new songs ("Chrome Dreams II"). So no one should be particularly surprised to learn that his latest release, "Fork in the Road," is another concept album devoted to his new electric car.

Written on the road and recorded quickly, "Fork on the Road" is most similar to "Living with War," in which Young thought all you needed to constitute a song was a vamp and a few repeated slogans. The songs obviously are not overworked.

This is both the album's greatest asset and its biggest flaw. The gritty, sloppy recordings have a certain garage-rock appeal — Young's guitar work always is invigorating. On the other hand, the lyrics on many tracks are unfinished ("Cough Up the Bucks" being the worst offender).

Recorded quickly, the album's immediacy works to its advantage on the final title track. The song has the best line on the record: "There's a bailout coming but it's not for me / it's for all those creeps watching tickers on TV." After this nugget, he patters off to complain about iPods and the state of radio like the old, weird man he is.

"Fork in the Road" is an enjoy-

able curiosity but could have been something more with just a little refinement.

Switching gears now, let's move to the latest from Leonard Cohen, his double-disc "Live in London."

If you've seen the recent movie "Watchmen," I'm sure you remember the incongruous scene in which Nite Owl and the Silk Spectre make love aboard the Owl Ship. The gratuitous nudity is made hilarious thanks to the score. Leonard Cohen's original recording of "Hallelujah." Over squelchy synthesizers and choir, Cohen monotonously his way through the song that is best known in Jeff Buckley's perhaps definitive version.

The song actually was well chosen. It's from the time period, and it is, in fact, about sex. It's also incredibly silly. From his debut in 1968, Cohen immediately rivaled Dylan as rock's pre-eminent poet and soundly defeated Dylan as one of rock's worst singers.

"Live in London" documents Cohen's welcome return to the stage. In 2009, after five years spent in a monastery, he discovered his manager had embezzled millions. So he set out on his first international tour in 15 years. Hooray!

Recorded at London's massive O2 arena last July, Cohen performs with a nine-person ensemble. Unlike Dylan, Cohen's voice has not deteriorated much. His baritone is as tuneless as ever. His band is tasteful, if a bit bland. Hammond organ, acoustic guitars and female back-up singers dominate the set.

Although the music isn't revelatory, Cohen is. He makes the most of his limited range and consistently jokes and interacts with the audience (check out the answers to life's great mysteries on "Tower of Song").

Most of his greatest songs are here in palatable renditions. If you're interested in getting into Cohen, this isn't a bad starting place. If you're already hip, this is a welcome addition to the discography. If you thought that scene in "Watchmen" was just a big joke, give the guy a shot — as recorded here, "Hallelujah" is much less corny.



Photo courtesy of www.nitrocircus.com

MTV is host to two relatively new shows, "Bully Beatdown" and "Nitro Circus," which offer viewers only a small amount of entertainment.

MTV show mimics "Jackass"

BY FRANKLIN CLINE
Reviewer

I don't watch MTV often because I find most of its shows formulaic, boring and only occasionally engaging — although I hear this season's "Real World" has been one of the best in years. A strange series of circumstances last weekend left me with little option other than to watch two of MTV's relatively new shows, "Bully Beatdown" and "Nitro Circus." Although both retained their MTV flavor, "Nitro" felt like a watered-down version of one of the stupidest and best shows to ever air on the channel, "Jackass," while "Bully" offered a pretty fun and enjoyable slice of simple entertainment.

Despite its cute, surreal title and the fact that it's ultimately about how fun it is to watch people getting hurt, "Nitro Circus" is disappointingly vanilla. It really is just "Jackass" without any of the appealing personalities or seriously dangerous stunts. Fronted by X Games gold medalist Travis Pastrana, each show takes place in a different locale and features him and his buddies doing pointless and painful stunts that typically involve a lot of falling off tall stuff. This type of show should have been obsolete long

ago, not just because the boys from "Jackass" could eat the remarkably tame cast of "Nitro" for lunch, but also because YouTube features tons of this stuff, and sometimes people actually get hurt during their stunts.

I know there's a lot more to be said here about this show acting as a way in which we can vicariously cheat death, something about a deep-seated prior thirst for immortality, but instead I'll just note that those guys are doing stunts that most bored suburban teenagers do after stealing two of their parents' beers. Don't watch "Nitro Circus."

Like "Nitro," the premise of "Bully Beatdown" is a really amusing one, but the show is far more successful in providing entertainment. Essentially, the show's host, a dude named Mayhem with stupid red streaks in his hair, challenges a bully to get into an octagon cage with a martial arts fighter. If the bully wins, he gets \$10,000. If he loses, the individual who nominated him, a.k.a. the victim, gets the money instead.

Sounds great, right? It is. You get to watch some jerk talk a bunch of smack about how he is going to beat the martial arts fighter's face in and then, sweet irony of ironies, be completely unable to defend himself

against a trained fighter. These bullies really do seem like bullies — one of the bad guys stole his ex-girlfriend's car, another would stand outside some poor guy's house and taunt him for hours — and there's a great amount of genuine joy in seeing some tough-talking blowhard get what's coming to him. It's also amusing how penitent most of the bullies are after they inevitably get what's coming to them. Call me a sucker for revenge, I guess.

I really like the show overall, especially the moral grey area in which it comfortably resides, something that Mayhem seems not to take issue with whatsoever. As a host, Mayhem is either incredibly annoying or incredibly funny — no grey area there. He usually falls into the category of the latter, even if some of the time I was laughing at him, as opposed to with him. Plus, I don't know if you realized this — his name is Mayhem.

So if you have nothing better to do on a Sunday night or need a break from studying, you probably could do worse than watching an episode of "Bully Beatdown." Granted, there are a lot better ways to spend your time, but this one isn't too bad. "Nitro Circus," on the other hand, should be outright avoided at all costs.

Efron plays Bolton again

BY TYLER GEORGE
Reviewer

Never really having been a fan of Zac Efron, I don't know why I expected greatness from last weekend's release of "17 Again." Maybe it was because I have been in love with "Friends" since my childhood (Chandler and Joey were the best) and I was eager to see Matthew Perry on the silver screen as opposed to the lame TV shows and crappy B-rated movies he has been doing since "Friends" left the air. Regardless, when the first scene opened and Efron was sweaty, shirtless and shooting free throws, I realized that I had no idea what I had gotten myself into.

Admittedly, I have seen (at the behest of my girlfriend) all three "High School Musical" films, and yes, I did like them ... to an extent. The fact with this movie is, if you have seen the "High School Musical" films, you can't help but see Efron as Troy Bolton. He even does some of the lame choreography that you might see in "High School Musical." But enough about "High School Musical" and its vacuum of musical worth.

Let's talk about another worthless film, "17 Again." The film is about exactly what it sounds like it is about. Mike O'Donnell (Perry) is presented with a second chance at the teenage years of his life, starting at age 17. During his original stint at high school, young O'Donnell (Efron) is a basketball hero, much like Efron's character is in "High School Musical." Beginning with getting his high school sweetheart Scarlett (Leslie Mann) pregnant during their senior year, his life goes into a nosedive. Instead of a scholarship to Syracuse and a bright future in the NBA, he ends up mid-divorce and living with his best friend, which is where the audience picks him back up about 20 years later.

Upon visiting his old high school, he meets a shady janitor who recognizes him as basketball hero Mike O'Donnell and casually asks him if he would take a second shot at it all if presented with the chance. Adult O'Donnell jumps at the chance. He later falls through a supposed tear in the time-

space continuum and finds himself in the same year, only 17 years old.

He sees this as an opportunity to gain a better friendship with his kids and help them through the constant bullying and struggles of high school. He does this in hopes that when he somehow magically is reverted back to his older age, he'll be able to convince Scarlett not to divorce him and give him a second chance at their marriage.

The acting was decent. Efron simply plays his part. It's good, but it's nothing spectacular. Nothing more than he has to do to get by with the role. Perry, for the little amount of time we see him, does well. It made me wonder what he's been doing since "Friends" ended. I'm sure, after 10 years with that sitcom, he doesn't really need money, but it does seem like he has been in hiding while the rest of the cast has been out and about in Hollywood.

Somehow, "17 Again" managed to be No. 1 at the box office this weekend. This probably is because although a movie might be absolutely terrible, it can get enough hype to bring in money at the box office. If there's enough advertisement and excitement about a movie (for example, "Watchmen"), it probably will do well in theaters regardless of the actual decency of the film. Such is the case with "17 Again." People see Efron in a potentially funny movie and want to see it just because it's Zac Efron.

More than anything else, the movie just made me thankful to be out of high school and in college. Other movies about high school might make me miss it, but such was not the case for this film. It just made me think about how immature the whole scene was and how frustrated I was with freshmen by the time I was a senior and ready to leave.

Don't see this movie if you can help it. And if you can't, don't see it in theaters. It's not worth the money you'll spend or the recognition it will get for making one more box office sale. If you absolutely do have to see it, rent it with a bunch of friends and be prepared to be amused by the cheesy script and mediocre acting.

"Regardless, when the first scene opened and Efron was sweaty, shirtless and shooting free throws, I realized that I had no idea what I had gotten myself into."

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