

A black and white portrait of President Barack Obama, looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. He is wearing a dark suit, a white shirt, and a striped tie. A small American flag pin is visible on his left lapel.

Rolling Stone®

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\$6.99

Bernie Sanders

WHERE WE GO
FROM HERE

BY MATT TAIBBI

1934-2016

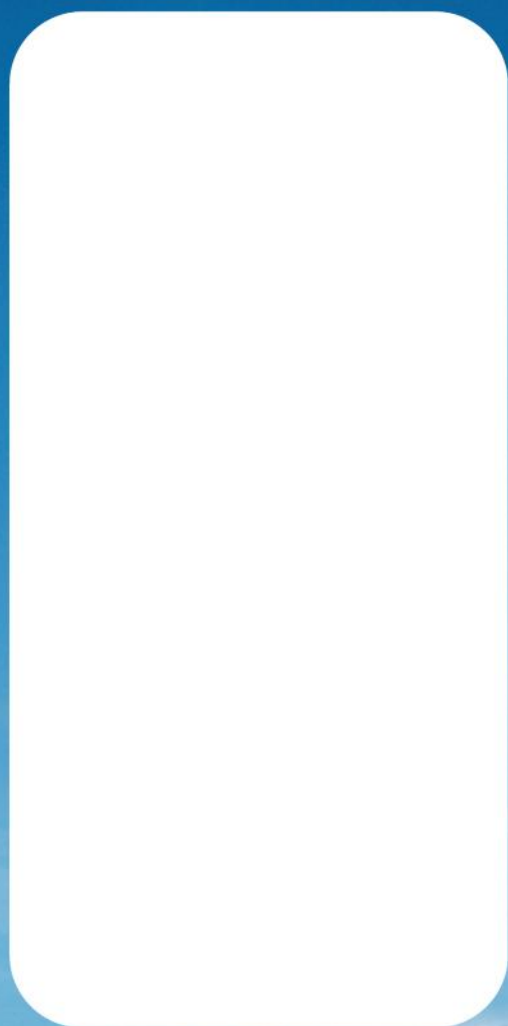
Leonard Cohen

VK.COM/STOPTHEPRESS

A CONVERSATION
WITH

President Obama

BY JANN S. WENNER





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RS1276/1277

"All the News That Fits"

FEATURES

A Conversation With Obama

The day after the election, the president reflected on his legacy and the path forward.
By JANN S. WENNER34

Bernie Sanders

The onetime insurgent candidate is now poised to reshape the Democratic Party.
By MATT TAIBBI42

Sting's Salvation

He's got a charmed life – so why can't he stop thinking about dying?
By STEPHEN RODRICK.....48

Leonard Cohen

The life and legacy of the poet of brokenness.
By MIKAL GILMORE 52

ROCK & ROLL

Year in Review

The best music, TV and movies of 2016 13

DEPARTMENTS

Letters.....8 | Records.....61
Playlist.....10 | Movies 64

ON THE COVER President Barack Obama photographed in Washington, D.C., on January 26th, 2016, by **Ruven Afanador**/CPI Syndication.

ANTHEM
Leonard Cohen,
1934-2016.
Page 52

MUSIC

THE BEST OF 2016

Our year-end coverage doesn't stop! Check out expanded lists of 2016's top albums and singles, plus deep dives into the year's most memorable releases in rap, country, pop and metal – including Metallica, Miranda Lambert, Beyoncé and more.



James Hetfield, Lambert, Beyoncé



Spencer

POLITICS

STORMING THE WHITE HOUSE

We speak with alt-right compatriots, including mouthpiece Richard Spencer, about Trump strategist Steve Bannon and being represented in the new White House.

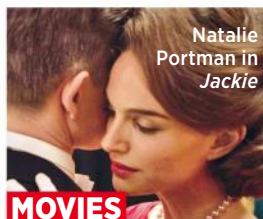


Moonlight

CULTURE

TACKLING RACE ONSCREEN

Moonlight, Barry Jenkins' ambitious movie about a young African-American male's coming-of-age, is just one of the cultural highlights that addressed race this year.



Natalie Portman in Jackie

MOVIES

NOT JUST ANOTHER BIOPIC

With his lens trained on 20th-century icons like Pablo Neruda and Jackie Kennedy, director Pablo Larraín is reinventing the biopic for a new generation.

THE STONES GOT THE BLUES

Mick Jagger and Keith Richards talk with Rolling Stone Music Now host Brian Hiatt about returning to the blues on their new album, *Blue & Lonesome*; the current state of rock; recording together again; and more. The podcast airs live on SiriusXM's new VOLUME channel Fridays at 1 p.m. ET before going online.

ALL THIS AND MORE AT ROLLINGSTONE.COM/PODCAST



Richards

POLITICS

MATT TAIBBI

RollingStone.com/taibbi

CULTURE

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MAIN OFFICES: 1290 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY

10104-0298; 212-484-1616

NATIONAL MUSIC ADVERTISING: 441 Lexington Ave.,

New York, NY 10017; 212-490-1715

DIRECT-RESPONSE ADVERTISING: 212-484-3492

REGIONAL OFFICES

333 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1105, Chicago, IL 60601;

312-782-2366

5700 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 345, Los Angeles,

CA 90036; 323-930-3300

Lewis Stafford Co., 5000 Quorum Dr., Suite 545,

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Miami Beach, FL 33141; 305-532-5566

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Bruno Is Back

GREAT BRUNO MARS COVER story ["Life on Planet Mars," RS 1274]. It's so refreshing to read that a superstar who appears so confident onstage is also an anxious perfectionist. It shows Mars' commitment to making records and not just hit singles.

Ray McDonald, via the Internet

LOVELY PIECE ON A VERY talented guy. I particularly liked the lesson from Lionel Richie: Enjoy the perks of being on top. Never get lazy.

Brian Olson, via the Internet

ONE OF MY FAVORITE TAKE-aways was discovering that Mars, winner of four Grammys, still plays weddings and birthdays. I never understood why so many stars think they're too good for that – why turn down free money?

Scott Boyle, via the Internet

BRUNO MARS: THE BEST PER-former, singer and dance man since James Brown.

Bryan Burchfield
Fultondale, AL

What's Hot 2016

I ALWAYS LOOK FORWARD to the Hot Issue ["The 2016 Hot List," RS 1274]. I'd never heard of LVL UP, but now I have them on repeat.

Lynn Marks, via the Internet

Congress' Inaction

In RS 1274, Andy Kroll wrote how Republicans continue to deny the existence of climate change, even as their home districts suffer countless environmental disasters ["Gospel of the Climate Deniers"]. ROLLING STONE readers responded.

KROLL WROTE AN EVEN-handed story about the reckless, deeply cynical obstinacy of modern-day Republicans. American voters want action on climate change – and yet? We're really screwed, and we're screwing the planet in the process.

Frank Law, via the Internet

SCIENTISTS CONFIRM EF-fects of climate change that nearly the whole world grasps and acts on; conservative U.S. legislators bought and sold by fossil-fuel industry reject and deny; a president ready to rubber-stamp any law these legislators see fit to pass or repeal. Holy shit.

John Quinn, via the Internet

DONALD TRUMP FAMOUSLY tweeted that climate change was a hoax invented by the Chinese. Now that he and the Republican Congress are eager to roll back U.S. efforts to combat climate change,

I'D BE LYING IF I DIDN'T SAY the Teledildonics photo made my hair stand on end, but the advances in virtual reality are fascinating. Make online sex more vivid and realistic while also keeping sex workers safe. Sex and technology: perfect pairing.

Anita Williams, via the Internet

NICE PROFILE OF THE GREAT Tinashe. I had her 2012 record, *In Case We Die*, and knew she was going to blow up. I hope now that she does have a label, she feels as free as she did when she was recording on her own.

Jessica Cohen, via the Internet

China is set to become the new world leader on clean-energy technology. Ironic.

Evelyn Sherr, Bend, OR

SO MANY CONGRESSIONAL Republicans call themselves Christians. If they believe God created the Earth, isn't it their duty to protect, not exploit, it?

Cathy Crouse, via the Internet

CLIMATE DENIAL ASIDE, the GOP has long been allied with the dirty-energy sector. Better get used to it now.

John Elliot, via the Internet

THE BIGGER STORY HERE is the rejection of science itself – from religious fundamentalists who prefer the Bible's easy answers to those whose interests are best served when people don't think for themselves. Denial of global warming is just the tip of the iceberg.

Stuart Lynn, via the Internet

YOU CALL A MISSION TO Mars a "Hot Destination" in the same issue in which a major story on climate change appears. A trip to Mars would require huge expense and energy. Wouldn't it make more sense to commit these resources to addressing the crisis confronting our home planet?

Nic Baker, Roseville, MN

ITHACA, NEW YORK, MAYOR Svante Myrick on the ROLLING STONE hot list! Myrick is widely admired for creating affordable housing and balancing the budget. Yes, his effort to create a safe-injection site for heroin

addicts was controversial, but also compassionate progressive politics at its best.

Jay Washington
Via the Internet

Band's Bad Blood

AFTER READING ROBBIE Robertson's book excerpt and visiting Levon Helm's studio in Woodstock, I feel the other side of the Band's story needs to be told ["The Birth of the Band," RS 1274]. In Helm's own autobiography, *This Wheel's on Fire*, he writes that he hated the idea of *The Last Waltz* and resented Robertson for breaking up the Band. It also explored how the writing of some of the group's greatest (and best royalty-producing) works were collaborative efforts, not solely the contribution of Robertson. True rock & roll fans should buy Helm's book; this will ensure that at least this time around, royalties won't end up in the pocket of the wrong Band member.

Dave Finley, Orange County, CA

All Eyes on Keys

LOVED SEEING THE BEAUTIFUL, brilliant Alicia Keys in the magazine [Q&A, RS 1274]. She's such a thoughtful person and gifted artist. My heart did break a little when she spoke about playing the DNC and wanting to bridge the gap between Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton supporters. To use her term, now more than ever we must "focus up!"

Francine DeLeon
Via the Internet

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The Playlist

OUR FAVORITE SONGS, ALBUMS, AND VIDEOS RIGHT NOW

1. Childish Gambino "Redbone"

Has anyone ever done the actor-to-rapper thing as well as *Community*/*Atlanta* star Donald Glover? This single from his third LP exudes geeky warmth, as he plays helium-soul love all over a rubbery P-Funk groove. But when he sings, "You better believe in something," it's clear there's more going on here than just looped-out fun.



2. The Magnetic Fields "93 Me and Fred and Dave and Ted"

Stephin Merritt is releasing an album of 50 songs, one for every year of his life – including this sweet ode to New York in '93, complete with squalor, sex and gunplay.

3. Saba "Westside Bound 3"

An elegiac image of Chicago from rapper Saba. Poignant details (like leaving for college as your friends go to jail) drive the song home.

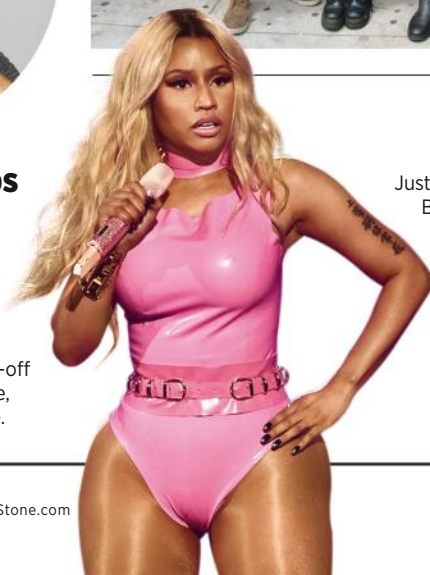
4. Sylvan Esso "Kick Jump Twist"

Amelia Meath, the singer in this North Carolina synth-pop duo, can pull you out on the dance floor with just a murmur, and this crinkly track will keep you there all night.



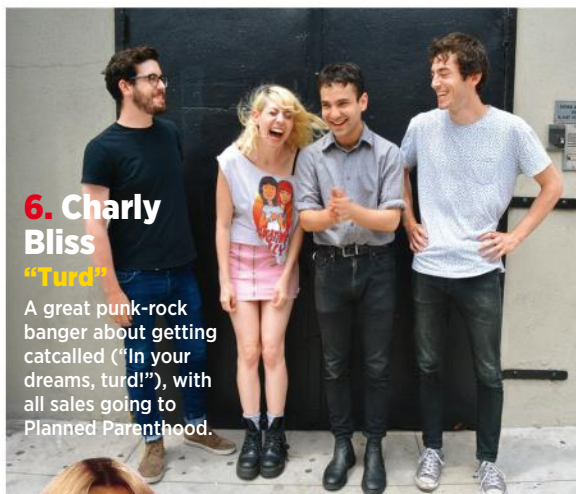
5. The Flaming Lips "How??"

Amiably deranged psych rock that's perfectly poised between wonderment and dread. This darkly hulking song from the Lips' forthcoming album is like viewing an alien craft over a far-off ridge. We're probably gonna die, but, man, does it look awesome.



6. Charly Bliss "Turd"

A great punk-rock banger about getting catcalled ("In your dreams, turd!"), with all sales going to Planned Parenthood.



7. Nicki Minaj "Black Barbies"

Just as Rae Sremmurd's "Black Beatles" went Number One, Nicki Minaj dropped this killer freestyle over that irresistible hit: "Island girl, Donald Trump want me go home/Still pull up with my wrist lookin' like a snow cone," she raps. We're all just lucky to live in her flex zone.

MY LIST



Nick Valensi

Great Songs by Guitarists-Turned-Singers

The Strokes guitarist just released the debut album by his new hard-rock band, CRX. "It's fairly obvious why I chose this category," he says.

New Order "Age of Consent"

A lot of New Order songs are heavy on the electronics. I really like this song because it sounds like a band.

Peter Tosh "Legalize It"

Quitting the Wailers was a ballsy move, but he wanted to be a singer. This song spoke to the hearts and minds of stoners all over the world.

George Harrison "Wah-Wah"

He had to separate himself from the Beatles to find out who he was. It's so dope he wrote a song about a guitar pedal.

The Heartbreakers "Born to Lose"

Johnny Thunders was one of the coolest voices to come out of the New York punk-rock generation. It's clear from his voice he just does not give a fuck.

Keith Richards "Take It So Hard"

I wonder if Keith played this for Mick, because this should have been a Rolling Stones song – it's that good. You can just feel his personality.

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Rock & Roll

ALBUMS OF THE YEAR

Bey's triumph, Bowie's farewell and the gospel according to Chance

1 | Beyoncé *Lemonade*



Beyoncé shut everyone else down this year with a soul-on-fire masterpiece, testifying about love, rage and betrayal that felt all too true in the

America of 2016. The queen delivered a confessional, genre-devouring suite that's larger than life yet still heart-breakingly intimate, because it doubles as her portrait of a nation in flames. She dropped *Lemonade* as a Saturday-night surprise after her HBO special, moving in on every strain of American music from country ("Daddy Lessons") to blues metal ("Don't Hurt Yourself") to post-punk-gone-Vegas dancehall ("Hold Up") to feminist hip-hop windshield-smashing ("Sorry"). Even with "All Night" as an ambiguous resolution, it's a whole album of hurt, which is why it especially hit home after the election. Beyoncé explores what it's like to get sold out by a lover – or a nation – that fooled you into feeling safe. The question of whether she's singing about Jay Z is moot because – unfortunately – it turned out to be about all of us.



HAIL TO THE QUEEN
Beyoncé on the Formation World Tour.

ALBUMS OF THE YEAR



2 David Bowie

Blackstar

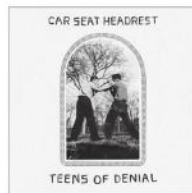
There's never been a musical farewell anything like *Blackstar* – the Cracked Actor saved his bravest and boldest performance for the final curtain. Bowie showed up on his 69th birthday to drop a surprise masterpiece, let an astonished world puzzle over the music for a couple of days and then slipped off into the sky. Nearly a year later, *Blackstar* still gives up fresh mysteries with every listen. This came on as one of the Starman's most dizzyingly adventurous albums, stretching out in jazzy space ballads like "Lazarus," or the 10-minute title epic. (Producer Tony Visconti revealed Bowie was soaking up inspiration from artists like Kendrick Lamar and D'Angelo.) But it took Bowie's death to reveal *Blackstar* as his rumination on mortality – anguished, bittersweet, mournful, refusing to give in to self-pity even as he sings his passionate final word, "I Can't Give Everything Away," a song every bit as moving as "Heroes."



3 Chance the Rapper

Coloring Book

The year's finest hip-hop album had a vision as radiant as its pink-sky cover art. Chance the Rapper's third mixtape combines radical politics and heavenly uplift to create life-affirming music that doesn't shy away from harsh realities. Gospel choirs are the backbone of this ecstatic LP, but everything on *Coloring Book* seems to take a spiritual hue – "I don't make songs for free, I make 'em for freedom," he raps on the soulful "Blessings." The backdrop is a Chicago in crisis, the sound big enough to make room for futurist vocoder soul and bed-rock African-American music. Chance's rhyme style is complex but friendly, reflecting a vision that's resilient, optimistic and irresistible.



4 Car Seat Headrest

Teens of Denial

Here is the year's most surefire guitar alchemy, full of riffs that revolve like strobe lights and lyrics that flash insights, slogans and jokes so quickly they erase any difference between them. After years of low-fi solo records, Will Toledo put together a band that helped take his writing to the next level. "Friends are better with drugs..." Drugs are better with friends," he sings in the one about taking mushrooms and not transcending – his songs are full of girls who offered empathy instead of sex, and medicine cabinets where you could choose a new personality. Yet the sound is anything but depressed. Like Nirvana building from quiet to explosive, Car Seat Headrest know how to be intimate and epic at the same time.



5 Frank Ocean

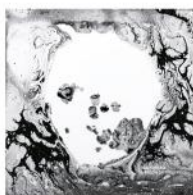
Blonde

It took four years to construct this quietly audacious follow-up to Ocean's breakout R&B game-changer, *Channel Orange*. That care came through in the music. *Blonde* is a tripped-out marvel of smoldering, elusive digital-age psychedelia. Dreamlike and hushed, as influenced by Brian Eno as by Beyoncé, these songs are drowned in memories that keep threatening to slip away: childhood, love, that time you took acid and got your Jagger on. Chasing a freedom that's always temporary – musical, emotional, sexual – was the idea, as on "White Ferrari," where Ocean rewrites the Beatles' "Here, There and Everywhere" to recapture a teenage joyride, or "Pink + White," a fleeting, string-bathed vision of late-summer bliss. Nothing on *Blonde* is easy to pin down. Tracks slip from outer space to church, from thoughts of Trayvon Martin to blunt lover-man brags, from his mind to your desires – opening room for every listener to slip inside.

GOING DEEPER INTO 2016'S BEST MUSIC



To see our top 50 albums and singles of the year, along with lists of the best LPs in pop, hip-hop, R&B, country, dance and more, go to RollingStone.com.



6 Radiohead

A Moon Shaped Pool

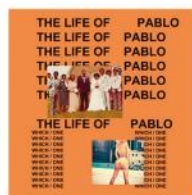
Radiohead's first album in five years is among their most ravishingly beautiful, awash in piano, violin and acoustic-guitar frills. Yet somehow it's never soothing – as Thom Yorke warns here, the truth will mess you up.



7 The Rolling Stones

Blue & Lonesome

The Stones returned to their deepest roots with a raw set of Chicago blues covers. It sounds like 1963, but it's the wisdom of age that helps them connect with these classics.



8 Kanye West

The Life of Pablo

"Guernica"-size sprawl to make Picasso's head spin. Peaks like "Ultralight Beam" and "30 Hours" are West at his summit, adding up to a fractured statement of his life as the "38-year-old eight-year-old."



9 Leonard Cohen

You Want It Darker

Like *Blackstar*, this powerful statement came just before the artist left us. At 82, Cohen offered a stark, haunting meditation on love and death. "I'm ready, my Lord," he sings, his voice rumbling into the eternal.



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ALBUMS OF THE YEAR



10 Young Thug

Jeffery

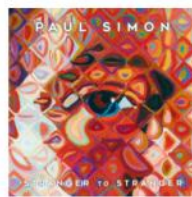
The strongest album yet from hip-hop's most captivating vocalist. Thugger wheezes, howls and grumbles his way through hypnotically tripped-out tracks like "Kanye West," which is just as messed-up brilliant as the man who inspired it.



11 Solange

A Seat at the Table

A neo-soul statement as graceful as it is unsettling. After years of trying different genres, Beyoncé's sis landed on a smooth-flowing minimal R&B that comes with hard-hitting lyrics about pain, power and modern black womanhood.



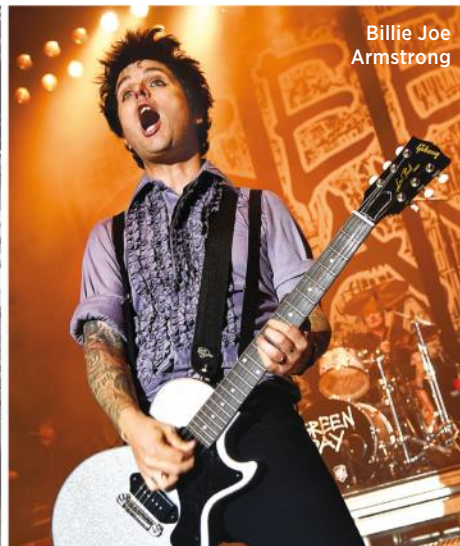
12 Paul Simon

Stranger to Stranger

Simon's 13th LP is packed with genre-bending sonics, blues snap and deep anxieties. The lyrics touch on mass shootings and income inequality. But there is consolation in the music itself – swaying, popping, weird and lovely.



Margo Price



Billie Joe Armstrong



13 Maren Morris

Hero

Morris embodies country's rule-breaking new freedom. She prays at the church of Cash and Hank. But songs like "Rich" and "80s Mercedes" are full of pop charm, R&B swagger and rock-guitar crunch.



14 Green Day

Revolution Radio

Green Day's most explosive set since 1994's *Dookie* is a punk-rock rager steeped in decades of emotional and musical experience – from the ringing call for clarity "Somewhere Now" to the Who-huge "Forever Now."



15 LVL UP

Return to Love

These Brooklynites' neo-Nineties guitar moves aren't just sharper than everyone else's – the songs are packed with a spiritual hunger that doesn't let up even when it seems like life might crush them.

16. Miranda Lambert

The Weight of These Wings

A country queen's post-breakup double-LP binge, full of drinkin', flirtin', movin' on and songs for the ages.

17. Parquet Courts

Human Performance

These guitar-bending adventurers have never sounded so freewheeling, with a New York malaise added to the perfect Bob Dylan/Lou Reed ambience.

18. The 1975

I Like It When You Sleep, for You Are So Beautiful Yet So Unaware of It

This year's breakout U.K. rockers live up to the hype with Duranian flash, INXS throb and dreamy emo beauty.

19. Danny Brown

Atrocity Exhibition

Detroit hip-hop wild card goes scarily deep into the dark side of partying. The result: a thrilling cry for help.

20. Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds

Skeleton Tree

Goth-punk icon responds to the tragic loss of his son with agonized ballads that plunge into the heart of darkness.

21. Margo Price

Midwest Farmer's Daughter

Whip-smart retro-country artist opens up some Loretta Lynn-style whoop-ass on one of the year's most striking debuts.

22. Bon Iver

22, a Million

Alt-folk star Justin Vernon sets down his guitar and leaps into the future for an album of lush, ethereal android-R&B.

23. Mitski

Puberty 2

The Brooklyn indie rocker's fourth LP feels at once artful, unhinged and revelatory. A weird, rewarding listen.

24. Drive-By Truckers

American Band

DBTs mix political dissections, vivid memoir and Stones-Skynyrd guitar fire as they reckon with Trump's America.

25. Rihanna

Anti

Pop's top singles artist shows she's awesome with albums too, exploring psych-funk on her own cloud-blowing terms.

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SINGLES OF THE YEAR

Beyoncé owned our world, Drake lit up the dance floor, and Rae Sremmurd got their John Lennon on

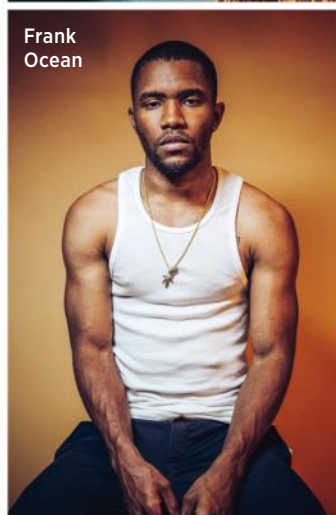
BY ROB SHEFFIELD

1 Beyoncé *Formation*

Beyoncé dropped this battle cry at the Super Bowl, shocking the nation with her Black Panther-inspired imagery. "Formation" was the omnipresent hit that just seemed to get more massive and demanding with time. Even before the rest of *Lemonade* existed, it stood as Bey's most lyrically defiant and musically militant statement about who she is, where she's from and where she's going, declaring, "My daddy Alabama/My ma Louisiana/You mix that Negro with that Creole make a Texas bama." That Mike Will Made It synth hook is the hot sauce in her bag, an ominous warning siren. From an artist who's already spent so long at the center of American culture, it was a statement of blackness and feminism, and a party invitation nobody could resist. "Formation" is a song that has kept hope alive in a bleak year – and it will be essential ammo for the struggle to come. Get in formation.



Beyoncé



Frank Ocean



Drake

2 Frank Ocean *Ivy*

It was worth the wait. Ocean sings an avant-R&B tale of heartbreak over distorted electric guitar, his plaintive voice confessing, "I thought that I was dreaming when you said you loved me." The guitar – from Rostam Batmanglij, late of Vampire Weekend – follows him all through the song, as he revisits memories of lost youth and innocence. It's the most powerful song Ocean has created yet (also co-written with producer Om'Mas Keith and Jamie xx), a highlight of *Blonde* that

mixes up the soul and rock elements of his music with a sensibility that still feels unmistakably hip-hop. In "Ivy," he gives the sense of a diary entry where a long-buried memory surges back into his mind in bits and pieces. Even if his broken romance was sheer misery at the time, he still misses it, right down to the way he mourns, "We'll never be those kids again" – building to a Brian Wilson-worthy wipeout wave of bitter-sweet angst.

3 Drake *One Dance*

Aubrey Graham celebrated the big 3-0 by scoring his first Number One hit as a lead artist: a tropical summer jam with a Caribbean lilt that evokes Lionel Richie in pastel-shirt mode. When Drake mixes in Nigerian singer Wizkid and London diva Kyla, he turns "One Dance" into a Utopian fusion of global styles, by way of Toronto.

4 David Bowie *No Plan*

Recorded during the *Blackstar* sessions, but held back for the *Lazarus* cast recording, "No Plan" is a magnificent coda. The Thin White Duke sings a spectral torch ballad about floating over New York City; he gazes down on Second Avenue with a ghostly sax as his life fades out of sight – one last transmission from the Bowie universe.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: PARKWOOD ENTERTAINMENT; CAITLIN CRONENBERG; FRANK OCEAN

SINGLES OF THE YEAR

5 Kanye West *Ultralight Beam*

Kanye goes to church, with a gospel choir chanting, "This is a God dream." He brings in Kirk Franklin, Kelly Price, the-Dream and Chance the Rapper to help him plant a foot on the devil's neck.

6 PWRBTTM *Projection*

The glitter punks sing about growing up queer and scared and lonesome, staring out the window at the other kids, lamenting, "My skin isn't made for the weather." It gets to the heart of how this year felt.

7 Solange *Cranes in the Sky*

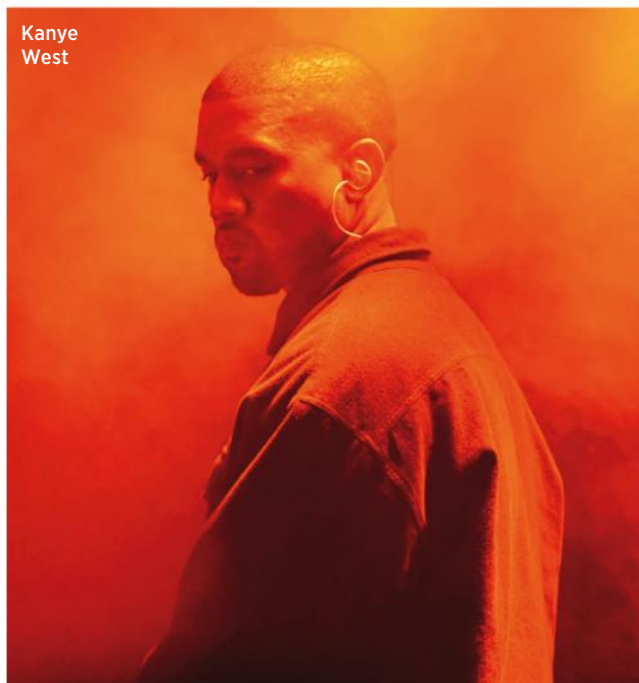
Solange describes the kind of sadness she can't escape by crying, drinking, sexing or shopping it away. The music builds from quiet meditation – that Raphael Saadiq bass – into towering soul.

8 Fifth Harmony, Ty Dolla Sign *Work From Home*

A celebration of the joys of the freelance life, which for them means having insane amounts of sex on the clock. That light-headed beat spiced up the radio all year, as these pop divas keep working overtime.

9 LVL UP *Pain*

The year's most heart-shredding air-guitar jam. The Brooklyn indie upstarts deliver a hate song that feels so real because it's also a love song, rocking out with a climactic guitar outburst that reaches back to Dinosaur Jr. and Neil Young.



10 Rae Sremmurd *Black Beatles*

No wonder Macca himself is a fan. The rap duo come together and rock their John Lennon lenses with a party-and-bullshit anthem so undeniable it hit Number One. A blunted time is guaranteed for all.

11 Young M.A. *OOOUU*

An up-and-coming Brooklyn MC who's definitely got her own voice – she's a bully, a boss, a lesbian and a thug, ruling the radio with a club banger about sipping that drink, smoking that loud, stealing your groupies.

12 Red Hot Chili Peppers *Dark Necessaryties*

Their big comeback-hit collabo with Danger Mouse. Anthony Kiedis gets personal about his darkest, druggiest memories, over a Flea bass line full of blood, sugar, sex and magic.

13 Mannequin Pussy *Romantic*

The Philly punks celebrate modern romance as a hellhole, blasting out shoegaze guitar fuzz. "You would sleep with me if you could do it comfortably" is a valentine to remember.

14 Kendrick Lamar *untitled 05 | 09.21.2014*

K. Dot debuted this as part of his epochal Grammys performance in February, tapping into spiritual doubts with a sax sample from jazz legend Eric Dolphy and a heavenly R&B hook sung by Anna Wise.

15 Wilco *If I Ever Was a Child*

Jeff Tweedy at his most low-key and likable, a three-minute acoustic memory of growing up miserable in the Midwestern suburbs, with a taste of Nels Cline twang to make the pain go down smooth.

16. Chance the Rapper feat. Saba

Angels

Chance gives it up to his native Chicago with this steel-drum funk, spreading juked-up positivity through the streets.

17. Lucy Dacus

I Don't Wanna Be Funny Anymore

Mixed-up identity confusion with some Johnny Ramone in her guitar and a voice that leaps straight to your heart.

18. The Monkees

Me & Magdalena

What a comeback: Mike Nesmith shows off all the mileage on his country-fried pipes in this superb road-weary ballad.

19. Danny Brown

Really Doe

His hard-stomping posse cut, passing the mic to Kendrick Lamar, Ab-Soul and Earl Sweatshirt in a virtuoso battle rhyme.

20. Bob Dylan

That Old Black Magic

Dylan pays his respects to the Chairman of the Board, yet somehow brings his own sense of menace to it.

21. 21 Savage and Metro Boomin feat. Future

X

The Atlanta rappers team up for a creepy thugged-and-drugged banger, boasting, "I spent your rent inside the mall."

22. Ariana Grande feat. Nicki Minaj

Side to Side

The teen-pop princess turns dangerous woman on an ode to having so much sex you can't walk straight the next day.

23. Little Big Town

Better Man

Taylor Swift writes one of 2016's best country hits – a catchy tale of weeping in front of the mirror at four in the morning.

24. Courtney Barnett

Three Packs a Day

The Aussie indie prodigy fesses up to her rock & roll vices, but she's mainlining ramen noodles, not cigarettes.

25. Leonard Cohen

Treaty

The ultimate Zen sage offers a poetic goodbye to the battlefield and the bedroom. Farewell, old friend.

REISSUES OF THE YEAR

2016's best archival sets – from Floyd's early odyssey to Dylan's greatest tour, from deep funk to outlaw country

BY DAVID FRICKE

1 **Pink Floyd** *The Early Years 1965-1972*

Here is the ultimate saucerful of secrets: the definitive alternate history of this band's odyssey from madcap psychedelia to megastardom in more than two dozen hours of rare audio and video, including film scores and unique collaborations. Early TV clips chart Syd Barrett's shocking psychic descent; the next five years with David Gilmour show the Floyd pressing through inner space, soon to land on *The Dark Side of the Moon*. A two-CD set collects 27 highlights.

2 **Bob Dylan** *The 1966 Live Recordings*

The set lists were the same every night. But it was always a different shootout as Dylan took his transformations in singing, writing and electricity on the road – driving audiences to fury and ecstasy, reveling in the amplified power of the future Band. There are sterling acoustic sets too, like Sheffield, England, on May 16th, when Dylan's voice is pure, naked force. There has never been another tour like it. These 36 CDs tell the whole tale.

3 **David Bowie** *Who Can I Be Now? (1974-1976)*

The previously unreleased twist in this set is *The Gouster*, a 1974 white-soul project that evolved into 1975's *Young Americans*. But this box tells a bigger story of impulsive studio and live drive: Bowie's passage out of glam through apocalyptic obsession (1974's *Diamond Dogs*), crafty R&B, and stark futurism (1976's *Station to Station*), on his way to Berlin.



4 **R.E.M.** *Out of Time: Deluxe Edition*

The best new American band of the Eighties took a striking turn into the next decade on 1991's *Out of Time*, a Number One masterpiece of folk-rock modernism and emotional complexity. This forensic examination of the record's genesis and glow, with demos and live-radio action, is a fitting 25th-birthday party.

5 **Betty Davis** *The Columbia Years 1968-1969*

At this '69 session, the R&B singer – then Mrs. Miles Davis – was co-produced by her husband. The marriage ended; the music was shelved. But the funk, featuring *Bitches Brew* sidemen and Jimi Hendrix's rhythm section, still crackles with eros and edge.

6 **Big Star** *Complete Third*

This three-CD set is the last word on one of the greatest – and most harrowing – rock albums ever made: demos, rough

mixes, every final master. This is everything in nerve, sweat and tears that surviving Big Star members Alex Chilton and Jody Stephens and their producer Jim Dickinson gave on the way to this willful fusion of avant-pop exploration, rattling funk and brutally direct, romantic candor.

7 **Kris Kristofferson** *The Complete Monument and Columbia Album Collection*

This Rhodes scholar and Army vet was country songwriting's first modern outlaw, a Dylan who spoke in the Grand Ole Opry vernacular. The 11 studio albums and bonus live and demos discs, covering Kristofferson's first decade on record, are an expansive lesson in acute emotional narrative and gritty melodic charisma.

8 **Led Zeppelin** *The Complete BBC Sessions*

In early 1969, rock's heaviest new band recorded five exclusive sessions for British radio, returning for an epic concert broadcast in 1971. The

result is a thrilling report – almost daily in the 1969 tracks – on Led Zeppelin's ferocious progression toward the panoramic force and finesse with which they would rule throughout the Seventies.

9 **Ian Hunter** *Stranded in Reality*

Ex-Mott the Hoople singer Hunter is a working legend. This British Dylan has steadily cut solo albums of visceral, probing rock since 1975, and is still touring harder than much younger men. These 28 discs are that life in full so far, with plenty from Hunter's Seventies golden age alongside guitarist Mick Ronson.

10 **Terry Reid** *The Other Side of the River*

This English singer's 1973 LP, *River*, was a dusky folk, funk and Brazilian-pop gem that inexplicably died on release. These outtakes are a marvelous window into the making of Reid's original, underrated classic – and a seductive triumph on their own.



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TELEVISION OF THE YEAR

Donald Glover's surreal hit, the season of O.J., tween supernatural sleuths, and John Oliver and Sam Bee's righteous rants

BY ROB SHEFFIELD

1 Atlanta FX

A comedy hero for our times: Donald Glover shines as Earnest "Earn" Marks, a Princeton dropout back in his hometown, trying to start his life over as a hip-hop manager. Glover's *Atlanta* stands as the most ambitious, surreal and riotous thing to hit TV all year. Earn runs wild with his rapper cousin Paper Boi as well as stoner philosopher king Darius, who's always up for a baked debate about whether Malcolm X is still alive ("Ain't nobody seen the body since the funeral"). *Atlanta* digs into sex, money, race and fatherhood with fearless flair.

2 The People v. O.J. Simpson FX

America's favorite football jock turns out to be a psychopath coddled by a star-struck legal system. No matter how well you might think you already knew the story, *The People v. O.J. Simpson* was a whole new experience.

3 Stranger Things Netflix

What initially seemed like an Eighties nostalgia trip ended up a totally original emotional powerhouse. A group of comic-geek kids in small-town Indiana circa 1983 try to solve the mystery of what happened to their missing friend. The plot thickens when they meet a weird, bald girl named Eleven who has dark secrets of her own. With its perfect cast, *Stranger Things* is more than just another supernatural thriller because it gets the details of geek friendship so right.



BEST IN SHOW
Donald Glover
in *Atlanta*

4 Black Mirror Netflix

The British anthology horror series blew up in its third season, focusing on dystopian technology scenarios that seem so terrifying because most of them feel like no more than 10 minutes in the future – especially the "Nosedive" episode, where all your personal interactions get a Yelp-style one-to-five-star rating. (Best line: "I don't know what's up with you, but I cannot have a 2.6 at my wedding!")

5 Full Frontal With Samantha Bee TBS

A year ago, when there were still nine Supreme Court justices and zero presidents who'd hosted reality shows with Meat Loaf, we had no way of knowing how vital a role Samantha Bee would serve in the daily shit-

storm of 2016. But as soon as she debuted *Full Frontal*, Bee came in swinging and never let up: "Let's just have a Supreme Court vacancy for a year because some chinless dildo wants a justice who will use his gavel to plug up your abortion hole."

6 The Americans FX

There's never been a spy thriller anything like *The Americans*, which just keeps tightening the emotional screws. A nice suburban home is haunted by the family secret: Mom and Dad are Soviet spies. Matthew Rhys and Keri Russell are superb as the couple bonded by espionage as part of their sexual chemistry.

7 Game of Thrones HBO

Like Jon Snow himself, *Game of Thrones* rose from the grave.

Now that the TV version has lapped George R.R. Martin's books, it's hitting new heights – the Battle of the Bastards was its most spine-chilling, blood-gushing pageant yet.

8 Fleabag Amazon

"I have a horrible feeling that I'm a greedy, perverted, selfish, apathetic, cynical, depraved, morally bankrupt woman who can't even call herself a feminist." Phoebe Waller-Bridge is this year's most hilariously toxic bachelorette, living the dream in London. She's a self-destructive, kleptomaniac mess hooking up with a clown parade of Britannia's sorriest male specimens, venting about sex and society: "Tits don't get you anywhere these days – trust me."

9 Orange Is the New Black Netflix

Who could have predicted this prison drama would get stronger each season? But *Orange* keeps reinventing itself as new inmates arrive at Litchfield Penitentiary with new stories – there's lots of heartbreak and touching comedy, too.

10 Last Week Tonight With John Oliver HBO

As 2016 brought home the unbelievably chickenshit toadying of the TV-news machine, more than ever John Oliver became an essential renegade voice of outrage. He especially killed in his election post-mortem, summing up Trump's agenda as "the to-do list on Satan's refrigerator – which, incidentally, Satan no longer needs now that hell has frozen over."

T

A

B

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Tom Hardy

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MOVIES OF THE YEAR

In 2016, Hollywood saw a world where black lives matter, a musical had meaning, and no subject was too hot to tackle

BY PETER TRAVERS

1 | *La La Land*

A musical as movie of the year? Bet your ass. Damien Chazelle directs this rapturous song-and-dance romance as if cinema was invented for him to play with and for us to get high on. Emma Stone and Ryan Gosling hit career peaks as lovers who try to make their creative dreams come true on the mean, art-fearing streets of the New Hollywood. *La La Land* swings for the fences. Chazelle puts his heart right out there where hipsters can mock him as tragically untrendy. He's not. He's an innovator, a fresh talent who puts technique in the service of feeling and makes the future of film seem like a bright prospect.

2 | *Manchester by the Sea*

Casey Affleck gives the performance of the year as a Boston janitor faced with unspeakable tragedy. In only his third film, writer-director Kenneth Lonergan cuts to the core of what makes us human and gives us the strength to carry on.

3 | *Moonlight*

Three wonderful actors (Alex Hibbert, Ashton Sanders and Trevante Rhodes) play the same boy at different stages of growing up black, gay and alienated in the Miami projects. Director Barry Jenkins handles every aspect of filmmaking, from dialogue to visuals, like the young master he is.

4 | *Fences*

What a triumph for Denzel Washington, who directs and stars in the film version of the stage success by the late, great August Wilson. Washington is



For Your Consideration

(1) *La La Land*, with Stone and Gosling.
(2) *Fences*, with Washington, Davis.
(3) *Moonlight*, featuring Sanders.



7 | *Sully*

Clint Eastwood's brand of classic, no-bullshit filmmaking finds perfect form as a beautifully understated Tom Hanks plays Capt. Chesley Sullenberger, the hero pilot who ditched his disabled plane on the Hudson River and saved the lives of all on board. Job well done. That goes for the man and the movie.

8 | *Loving*

The young Arkansas director Jeff Nichols may join the ranks of Eastwood and Scorsese if he continues to craft films as stirring as this one. Joel Edgerton and Ruth Negga excel as Richard and Mildred Loving, the mixed-race couple whose 1958 marriage got them arrested in Virginia and whose legal fight became a civil rights landmark.

9 | *Hell or High Water*

David Mackenzie's modern-day Western doesn't do anything new, but it does everything right. Chris Pine and Ben Foster play West Texas brothers who come up against the law in the person of Jeff Bridges at his sly, old-coot best. A B movie raised to the level of rough art.

10 | *Birth of a Nation*

One of the damn shames of this movie year is the way director Nate Parker's incendiary telling of the 1831 slave rebellion led by Nat Turner (a stellar Parker) got lost in the controversy over the charges against Parker for sexually assaulting an 18-year-old woman at Penn State in 1999. He was acquitted at trial, but the court of public opinion has left a flawed yet formidable film struggling for the wide audience it deserves.

monumental as a former Negro League baseball player now collecting garbage in Pittsburgh and roaring against anything that challenges his authority as husband and father. Viola Davis is Oscar material as his wife. The film betrays its origins as a play. But what a play. And you won't see performance fireworks like this anywhere.

5 | *Silence*

Martin Scorsese's passion project (in development since 1990) follows two Portuguese Jesuits (Andrew Garfield and Adam Driver) to 17th-century Japan, where they search for their mentor priest (Liam Neeson) and risk torture and death for preaching Christianity. Matters

of faith and its meaning in a material world have long obsessed Scorsese. *Silence* is alternately brutal and cerebral. Some may balk at grappling with moral ambiguity for two and a half hours. Who needs them. Scorsese has crafted a film of potent provocation and fervent heart.

6 | *Jackie*

Jackie Kennedy has been so microscopically examined in the media that you wonder what else is there to tell. And then you see her in *Jackie*, in the days following JFK's assassination, and you think you hardly knew her. Such is the revelatory vision of Chilean filmmaker Pablo Larraín and the astonishing Natalie Portman in the title role.



As usual, you saw that coming.

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A SONG
FOR YOU
Russell onstage
circa 1970



— 1942-2016 —

Leon Russell

Enigmatic pianist was a master bandleader and songwriter who influenced Elton John and more

BY DAVID FRICKE

ONE AFTERNOON IN THE EARLY NINETIES, SINGER-pianist Bruce Hornsby was visiting his friend and hero Leon Russell at the latter's home near Nashville. The house had a three-car garage and the doors "were wide open," Hornsby recalls, with "things strewn all over: old mixing boards, awards tossed in a box, gold records, all this detritus. I said, 'Leon, what is all this?'" Hornsby affects Russell's slow, gritty drawl. "He said, 'Residue from the fast lane.'"

"That line said it all," Hornsby says. Russell — who died on November 13th at 74 in Nashville after years of ill health, including a heart attack in July — "grew up in an era where pop stardom was an ephemeral notion. If you achieved it, it didn't last long. Maybe he thought his four- or five-year run as a top-drawer touring artist and record seller — as a rock star — was pretty damn good."

That winning streak actually ran longer: from the mid-Sixties — when the Oklahoma-born Russell emerged as a first-call pianist, arranger and producer in Los Angeles, working on sessions for Frank Sinatra, the Beach Boys, Ricky Nelson and the Byrds — until 1977, when jazz guitarist George Benson's Top 10 cover of Russell's ballad "This Masquerade" won a Grammy for Record of the Year. In between, Russell applied a unique, instinctive blend of wheat-

field-country music, down-home rhythm & blues and black Pentecostal-church elation to classic early-Seventies records by Bob Dylan, Dave Mason and the Rolling Stones, while cutting his own solo LPs with Eric Clapton and the Stones as his sidemen.

But Russell was best known for his turn as the musical director of English singer Joe Cocker's 1970 U.S. tour with a cosmic-R&B big band of more than 20 singers and players, dubbed Mad Dogs and Englishmen, after a Noël Coward song. Russell assembled and rehearsed the troupe in just a week, and later co-produced its Top Five live double album. With his firm command of the music and the entourage, set off by his trademark top hat and Jesus-like mane of silver-gray hair, Russell became the breakout star of the 1971 tour documentary *Mad Dogs and Englishmen* — the so-called "Master of Space and Time," after one of his credits on the live LP.

Russell "was a control freak," says Jim Keltner, one of the drummers on that tour. "But the control was about making a potentially chaotic thing into a fantastic revue with great singing, great playing, great grooves." Four decades after the *Mad Dogs* tour, Russell looked back with modest realism at his commercial peak and his packed workload for other rock stars. "I was a jobber, like an air-conditioning installer," the pianist said in 2010. [Cont. on 30]

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— 1956-2016 —

Sharon Jones

The Brooklyn soul diva found success late in life as a commanding, inspiring vocal powerhouse

BY JASON NEWMAN

ALITTLE MORE THAN 20 YEARS ago, when soul singer Sharon Jones was in her thirties, a music producer told her that she was “too short, too fat, too black and too old” to ever find success. “They just looked at me and they didn’t like what they saw,” she told *ROLLING STONE* earlier this year. Jones, who died of cancer on November 18th at age 60 in Cooperstown, New York, spent the rest of her life proving her doubters wrong.

As frontwoman for the Brooklyn funk-soul band the Dap-Kings, she emerged as a ferocious live performer whose power and command recalled her hero James Brown. “Sharon Jones had one of the most magnificent, gut-wrenching voices of anyone in recent times,” tweeted producer Mark Ronson, who worked with the Dap-Kings.

Jones spent years in wedding bands and obscure funk acts. She was working as an armed guard when she recorded her first songs as a solo artist in the mid-Nineties at age 40, arriving to the session for “Damn It’s Hot” with a “gun hanging on my side.”

She made six albums with the Dap-Kings, including 2014’s Grammy-nominated *Give the People What They Want*, released shortly after she was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. (Her battle with the disease is chronicled in the 2016 documentary *Miss Sharon Jones!*) Despite serious physical strain, Jones kept performing between chemotherapy sessions, finding solace on-stage. “When I walk out, whatever pain is gone,” she said. “There is no sickness. You’re just floating, looking in their faces and hearing them scream.”

SOUL FIRE
Sharon Jones
performing
in 2010

LEON RUSSELL

[Cont. from 28] “You need air conditioning? Call this guy. People called me to do what I did.” And Russell was not shocked when his stardom waned in the Eighties: “I was surprised by the success that I had. I was not surprised when it went away.” Until his 2010 comeback, *The Union*, a collaboration with lifelong fan Elton John, Russell had not been on *Billboard*’s album charts in three decades.

“He’s a tough one to place,” says guitarist Derek Trucks, who acknowledges that he and his wife, Susan Tedeschi, were inspired to form their 12-piece Tedeschi Trucks Band after watching the *Mad Dogs* film. “To people of a certain generation, Leon was a star, a total badass. Then he got lost in the mix. But young musicians know him. In the last five, 10 years, he became a cult hero again.”

Russell was born Claude Russell Bridges in Lawton, Oklahoma, on April 2nd, 1942. His father, an oil-company clerk, moved the family to Tulsa when Claude was in the seventh grade. He took classical piano lessons as a boy; in Tulsa, Russell was soon playing in local clubs, often with a friend, guitarist J.J. Cale. By 17, Russell was in Los Angeles, borrowing IDs and musicians-union cards to hustle work. He was using the name Leon Russell but never legally changed it – an early sign of his taste for enigma. “It’s handy,” he confessed. “I can be a different person for a while.”

Keltner first worked with Russell on Gary Lewis and the Playboys’ 1966 hit “She’s Just My Style,” co-written and arranged by Russell. After the playback, “without saying a word,” Keltner says, Russell returned to the studio, grabbed a guitar and replaced a “wonderful, sophisticated” solo with a catchy burst of country-blues twang. “Leon had that thing that all great producers had: They know what they want, and they already hear it.”

In 1968, Russell released an album with guitarist Marc Benno but largely stuck to guiding from the sidelines – appearing on a 1969 album by the white-soul duo Delaney and Bonnie; writing “Delta Lady” for Cocker that year. Russell’s biggest solo single, the dark, funky march “Tight Rope,” which went to Number 11 in 1972, summed up his ambivalence about celebrity: “I’m up in the spotlight/Ooh, does it feel right/Oh, the altitude/Seems to get to me.” Yet Russell leveraged his rush of success – including a show-stopping segment during George Harrison’s 1971 Concert for Bangladesh and the Top 10 LPs *Carney* and *Leon Live*, in 1972 and ’73, respectively – into a series of willfully experimental records, featuring a country project under the pseudonym Hank Wilson.

Hornsby calls Russell “a huge reason I got into the piano.” When he produced Russell’s 1992 LP *Anything Can Happen*, he says, it was clear who was really running things: After one near-perfect vocal take, he asked Russell if he wanted to fix a small glitch. “On a Picasso level, that performance was my art,” Russell said. “Any changes to it would be dishonest.”

Russell continued working despite increasing health problems. In 2010, he underwent brain surgery to repair a spinal-fluid leak. He had trouble walking and “had gained a lot of weight,” says Keltner. But when Russell “sat at the piano, the feeling was all there.”

It was present again at one of Russell’s last major appearances when he joined the Tedeschi Trucks Band in a tribute set to the *Mad Dogs* album at Virginia’s Lockn’ Festival in September 2015. Trucks remembers respectfully offering to hand over leadership duties: “He was like, ‘Nope. I did it the first time. This one’s on you.’” Yet in rehearsals, “Leon was the obvious musical director,” Trucks says, “chiming in on harmonic things here and there, choir stuff in a very subtle way. But when he spoke, everyone listened.”

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RandomNotes



Bruce's Glory Day

President Obama bro'd down with Bruce Springsteen in the White House's Blue Room before awarding him the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the U.S.'s highest civilian award. "I'm the president, he is the Boss," said Obama, who also honored 20 other recipients, including Michael Jordan, Tom Hanks and Ellen DeGeneres. "These are folks who have helped make me who I am."



A giddy Diana Ross was also honored. "[Her] influence is inescapable as ever," Obama said.



CRUISE CONTROL

Joe Jonas rode the zip line on a Royal Caribbean cruise ship. His new band, DNCE, also played a gig onboard to celebrate their new Prince-influenced LP.



ROYAL RAGERS

Lorde says Taylor Swift threw her "the best birthday" — and updated fans about her second album: "The party is about to start."



Check Your Hate!

"This is homegrown terrorism for real," said Adam Horovitz, a.k.a. Ad-Rock, as he led a rally at Brooklyn's Adam Yauch Park (which honors his late Beastie Boys bandmate). The protest was organized after the playground was defaced with racist imagery, and it drew hundreds, with signs like "No Sleep Till 2020."



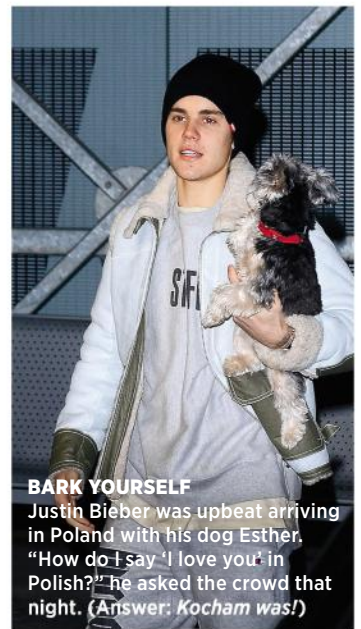
MOVES LIKE KENDRICK
In L.A., Adam Levine caught up with Kendrick Lamar, who guests on Maroon 5's new single "Don't Wanna Know."



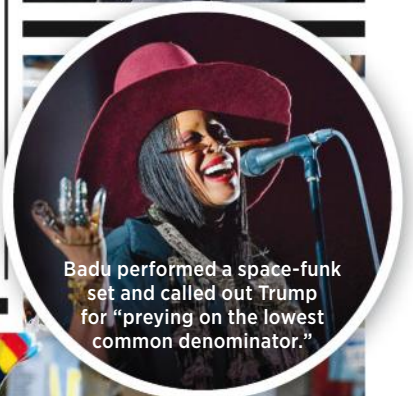
ARIANA GRANDE-MOTHER Ariana Grande was joined by her grandma Marjorie at the American Music Awards. "My Nonna just surprised me in my dressing room!" she said.



COMBAT ROCK
Billie Joe Armstrong turned the AMAs into an anti-Trump rally: "No fascist USA!" he said.



BARK YOURSELF
Justin Bieber was upbeat arriving in Poland with his dog Esther. "How do I say 'I love you' in Polish?" he asked the crowd that night. (Answer: *Kocham was!*)



Badu performed a space-funk set and called out Trump for "preying on the lowest common denominator."

BIRTHDAY BALLERS

Diplo partied extra-hard for his 38th birthday at Vegas' XS club, alongside buddy Michael Phelps and Phelps' wife, Nicole Johnson (right). "[He's] a good swimma," Diplo wrote on Instagram afterward. "Getting older is a privilege."



GARAGE INC. Metallica celebrated new album *Hardwired... to Self-Destruct* with a tiny club show underneath London's Waterloo Station.



Tyler's Odd Festival

Tyler, the Creator's music-and-skating festival Camp Flog Gnaw drew 40,000 rap nerds to L.A.'s Exposition Park to witness raucous sets by Schoolboy Q, Lil Wayne, Erykah Badu, Chance the Rapper and more. The fest, now in its fifth year, included carnival rides, an Action Bronson-run food truck, and minigolf, which Tyler took part in before heading onstage. He performed with A\$AP Rocky, Earl Sweatshirt and YG, who nailed "FDT (Fuck Donald Trump)." "Not to be political," Tyler clarified.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JEFF KRIVITZ/AMA 2016/FILMAGIC; KEVIN MAZUR/AMA 2016/WIREIMAGE; SPLASH NEWS; SCOTT DUDERSON/WIREIMAGE; FRAZER HARRISON/GETTY IMAGES; DANNY MAHONEY; KEVIN MAZUR/AMA 2016/WIREIMAGE

A Conversation *With* President Obama

A day after the election, the commander
in chief reflects on the outcome,
his own legacy and the path forward

BY JANN S. WENNER

MY FINAL INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENT OBAMA IN THE White House had been scheduled for the day after the presidential election. I had hoped to look back on what he had achieved over eight years and the issues that mattered the most to him and to the readers of *ROLLING STONE*, hear his advice for Hillary and about the road ahead. It was to be the “exit interview,” his tenth cover for *ROLLING STONE*, our fourth interview together. Before flying down to Washington, D.C., on the morning after the staggering election results, I called and offered to postpone. This had to be one of the worst days of Obama’s political life, and he hadn’t had a moment to reflect on it, to be angry or to accept it. ¶ But his office called back; Obama wanted to go ahead with the interview as planned. It was a dull, cloudy day, and the White House was nearly empty when I arrived. It had been a long and unhappy night, and now only a skeleton staff remained. It felt like a funeral. ¶ The last time I had interviewed the president, in 2012, it was a lazy afternoon. I had gone over our time limit by a half-hour, and on leaving the Oval Office, I ran into Hillary Clinton, the secretary of state, sitting by the desk of the president’s assistant, waiting to come in. This time it was her ghost. ¶ *ROLLING STONE* has had a wonderful relationship with Obama over the years. I first met him at the beginning of his 2008 campaign,

LAST LOOK
“I couldn’t be prouder of the work that we’ve done.”





when he came up to my office for dinner. We backed him when he was up and when he was down. He viewed *ROLLING STONE* readers as part of his base. A year ago, we went to Alaska with him and toured the melting glaciers. With extraordinary pride, we watched him ride the wave of history.

I had many more questions for him than time allowed: Why had no one responsible for the Wall Street frauds, which cost millions of people their homes, their savings, their jobs, been sent to jail? Likewise, why did the people who misled America into the Iraq War also go scot-free? Would the rise of Donald Trump have been possible had any of them been held accountable? What was his sense of accomplishment in preserving so many millions of acres of national lands? And what did it take to finally put climate change at the top of his agenda....

Alas.

Obama greeted me outside his office and walked me in. He was tired. He skipped the usual small talk, took off his jacket, sat in his customary chair and said, "Let's do this." He spoke slowly and with precision, staying true to his essential nature: controlled, analytical and cool. There are many things a sitting president cannot say, but this was his carefully reasoned message on a difficult and historic day.

I have to start with last night and ask you how you're feeling about the election of Donald Trump. Could you believe what you were seeing? Were you blown away like the rest of us? And how are you feeling now?

Well, I'm disappointed, partly because I think Hillary Clinton would be a very fine president. As I said on the campaign trail, a lot of the work we've done is only partially complete. And we need some continuity in order for us to maximize its benefits.

Did you ever think this was possible? Did this result ever occur to you?

I will tell you, New Hampshire, 2008, I had just won Iowa and had this whirlwind tour of New Hampshire, huge rallies, huge crowds, and our internal pollster had us up by 10. And around 7:30, as I'm putting on my clothes to deliver my victory speech, I get a knock on the door by David Plouffe, David Axelrod and Robert Gibbs. And they've got sheepish looks on their faces [*chuckles*]. And they say, "Barack, we have some interesting news for you. We don't think we're gonna win this thing."

That's the thing about democracy. That's the thing about voting. It doesn't mean polls are irrelevant, but there is always a

human variable involved in this. So I think the odds of Donald Trump winning were always around 20 percent. That [doesn't] seem like a lot, but one out of five is not that unusual. It's not a miracle.

But aren't you feeling chagrined, pissed off, upset, dismayed?

Well, I...no. You know, I don't feel dismayed, because, number one, I couldn't be prouder of the work that we've done over the last eight years. When I turn over the keys to the federal government to the next president of the United States, I can say without any equivocation that the country is a lot better off: The economy is stronger, the federal government works better, and our standing in the world is higher. And so I can take great pride in the work we've

“There’s no benefit that’s derived from pulling into a fetal position. We go out there, and we work. And over time things get better.”

done. I can take great satisfaction in the people we've helped.

I don't want to sugarcoat it. There are consequences to elections. It means that the next Supreme Court justice is going to be somebody who doesn't reflect my understanding of the Constitution. It means that the work we've done internationally and domestically on climate is going to be threatened. It means that the Affordable Care Act, which has provided 20 million people with health insurance, is going to be modified in ways that some people are going to be hurt by. I think it doesn't take us all the way back to the status quo, because, despite the rhetoric, the Republicans are going to conclude that simply throwing millions of people off the rolls with no health insurance isn't smart politics. But probably the main reason that I don't feel dismayed, but do feel disappoint-

ed, is the incredible young people who have worked in my administration, worked on our campaigns. If you look at the data from the election, if it were just young people who were voting, Hillary would have gotten 500 electoral votes. So we have helped, I think, shape a generation to think about being inclusive, being fair, caring about the environment. And they will have growing influence year by year, which means that America over time will continue to get better.

You think it's still a progressive country?

I think that nothing is determined, but that the number of people who have a strong belief in a fair, just, equal, inclusive America is the majority and is growing.

And part of the challenge, though, that we do have, and this is something that I've been chewing on for a while now, is that there is a cohort of working-class white voters that voted for me in sizable numbers, but that we've had trouble getting to vote for Democrats in midterm elections. In this election, [they] turned out in huge numbers for Trump. And I think that part of it has to do with our inability, our failure, to reach those voters effectively. Part of it is Fox News in every bar and restaurant in big chunks of the country, but part of it is also Democrats not working at a grassroots level, being in there, showing up, making arguments. That part of the critique of the Democratic Party is accurate. We spend a lot of time focused on international policy and national policy and less time being on the ground. And when we're on the ground, we do well. This is why I won Iowa.

But how did the Democrats miss the white working class in such great numbers, who clearly had these big economic issues? They have lost their jobs in industrial states....

It's not quite that simple, because this is not simply an economic issue. This is a cultural issue. And a communications issue. It is true that a lot of manufacturing has left or transformed itself because of automation. But during the course of my presidency, we added manufacturing jobs at historic rates, and think about it: In Michigan—

But, I mean—

Hold on. Let me finish. If you look at Michigan, which I won, not just in 2008 but in 2012, by a wide margin, we paid a lot of attention to manufacturing jobs, which is why the auto industry is on double shifts in plants that used to be shut down. If you look at minimum-wage laws or family-leave policy or the investments that we made in community colleges or, for that matter, the Affordable Care Act, these



THE EXIT INTERVIEW

Wenner visits with the president in the Oval Office the day after the election. "Aside from any particular issue, the president needs to recognize that this is not about *you*," Obama says of Trump. "This is about this precious thing that we've inherited and that we want to pass on."

are all big investments for working families, white, black and Hispanic. The challenge we had is not that we've neglected these communities from a policy perspective. That is, I think, an incorrect interpretation. You start reading folks saying, "Oh, you know, working-class families have been neglected," or "Working-class white families have not been paid attention to by Democrats." Actually, they have. What is true, though, is that whatever policy prescriptions that we've been proposing don't reach, are not heard, by the folks in these communities. And what they do hear is Obama or Hillary are trying to take away their guns or they disrespect you.

One of the challenges that we've been talking about now is the way social media and the Internet have changed what people receive as news. I was just talking to my political director, David Simas. He was looking at his Facebook page and some links from high school friends of his, some of whom were now passing around crazy stuff about, you know, Obama has banned the Pledge of Allegiance.

I think it is really important for us, as progressives – set aside the Democratic Party as an institution, but just any-

body who wants to see a more progressive America – to think about how we are operating on the ground and showing up everywhere and fighting for the support of folks and giving them a concrete sense of what it is that we think will make their lives better, rather than depending on coming up with the right technocratic policies and sharing that with the *New York Times* editorial board. If we are not on the ground, and people are not hearing and seeing us face-to-face, then we'll keep on losing, even though I genuinely believe that the Republican prescriptions are not going to be as helpful to these folks.

So what do you think is the future of the Democratic Party? A month ago, everybody was convinced that the GOP was in its final death throes; now you've got three branches of government in the hands of one party. You've got voter suppression, which is guaranteed to continue, you've got redistricting, all these things. Where's the Democratic Party going? This seems to be a hard-right turn.

Well, but there's not a hard-right turn. Take a look at, take a look at—

If you control three branches of government and you've got the Supreme Court...

If you survey the American people, including Trump voters, they're in favor of a higher minimum wage. They're in favor, in large numbers, of decriminalizing marijuana. They, I think, are, increasingly and with shocking speed, accepting of the need to treat the LGBT community with respect. They are hugely suspicious of Wall Street, hugely suspicious of the Establishment. Part of what Trump did, as well as Bernie, was run against that Establishment. Now the irony, of course, is that one would think Trump would be considered part of that Establishment and not a genuine outsider like Bernie was. So this doesn't seem to be a moment in which there is a huge turn to the right.

What is true is that the ability of Republicans to win state elections, congressional elections and Senate elections is going to be a challenge for Democrats for a while, unless they can change perceptions about the Democratic Party and progressive causes in these rural or predominantly white areas, particularly in the Midwest. It's going to be harder to do in the South for a lot of historical reasons.

With respect to the presidency, the Democrats still, actually, are in a better place and will continue to be in a better place than Republicans.

This was always gonna be hard, because people get weary of one party after eight years. It's only happened once in modern history where we had that kind of clear transfer of power – or at least in the last 40, 50 years. I don't think that voter-suppression laws are gonna be the norm or gonna be the main problem that we have to deal with. We are not gonna be in a situation in which Democrats can't win in any of these areas, but we're gonna have to reorganize ourselves more effectively. Look, in North Carolina, a state I won once by one point and a state I lost once by one point, a Democratic governor [appears to have] won in North Carolina despite Trump winning North Carolina. And part of the reason he won was North Carolinians were tired of a hard-right agenda by the sitting Republican governor, and these biased laws that had been passed directed at the LGBT community that people thought went too far. But part of the reason Roy Cooper, that North Carolina governor-elect, won is because he was on the ground in those communities and he was working hard.

So, do Democrats have to re-examine how they approach things? Do progressives have to re-examine how they approach things? Absolutely. When I sat here and

talked to Bernie Sanders, one of the things that he and I both agreed on was that we have to reinvigorate the DNC so that it's not viewed as a Washington entity but rather that it is a grassroots organization that is out all across the country and making a common cause with working people.

What's your plan going to be going forward with this?

You know, I'm gonna sleep for a couple of weeks when I get out of here, take my wife on a well-deserved vacation. And I'll spend time in my first year out of office writing a book, and I'm gonna be organizing my presidential center, which is gonna be focused on precisely this issue of how do we train and empower the next generation of leadership. How do we rethink our storytelling, the messaging and the use of technology and digital media, so that we can make a persuasive case across the country? And not just in San Francisco or Manhattan but everywhere, about why climate change matters or why issues of economic inequality have to be addressed. So I will continue to be very active, and Michelle is going to continue to be very active – and [on] the very thing that brought us here, which is our belief that when you work with people on the ground at a grassroots level, change happens. When people feel disconnected from the institutions of government, they can swing back and forth in all sorts of ways.

Let me ask you about climate change. Trump says he's going to pull out of the Paris Agreements. Is that possible?

Well, historically what happens is that when you have an international agreement, it carries over into the next administration. There were agreements that President Bush made that I respected, because as president of the United States, it was important for me to project a sense of continuity in the U.S. government. There is no doubt that the Republican Party has taken a very hard-line position with respect to climate change. And so some of the progress that we have made, it is going to be tempting for them to roll back.

The good news is that a lot of these initiatives that we've taken work, and don't just work in terms of reducing emissions, they work from an economic perspective. And so over the course of my eight years, when we doubled clean-energy production or we cut [auto emissions] in half, that wasn't just a matter of regulations that can suddenly be erased; that had to do with investors and businesses and utilities and consumers all organizing themselves, figuring out that, you know what, being smart on energy is good for the planet and it's good for my pocketbook. So I think that the ques-

tion for Donald Trump, for the Republicans in Congress [is]: Are they going to want to roll back hundreds of thousands of jobs in the solar industry that have been created? Are they suggesting that somehow the Big Three automakers retool to make more gas-guzzling cars, even though consumers are really happy saving money on gas? When it comes to power plants, contrary to the rhetoric, it hasn't been my regulations that killed coal. More than anything, it's actually been natural gas that's been a lot cheaper, so it hasn't been economical to build new coal mines.

I understand all that, but you have nearly all of the science saying we are past the tipping point, and you've got the Koch brothers financing an absolutely ob-

“The most important constraint on any president is the American people, an informed citizenry that is active and engaged.”

structionist Congress. That's not going to change. Their ideology seems to be set on the subject. The money that's bought these votes is set on the subject....

Yeah, listen. If you want to persuade me that everything is going to be terrible, then we can talk ourselves into that. Or we can act. It is what it is. There's been an election. There's going to be a Trump presidency, and Republicans are going to control Congress. And the question is gonna be, for those like you and I, who care about these issues, do we figure out how to continue to make progress in this environment until we have a chance for the next election. And will we have mobilized ourselves and persuaded enough people that we can get back on a path that we think is going to be helpful for families, helpful for the environment, helpful for our safety and security and rule of law and civil rights and social rights?

And one of the things that I have been telling my younger staff, who in some cases have only known politics through my presidency, is history doesn't travel in a straight line. And it zigs and it zags and sometimes you take two steps forward and then you take a step back. You are absolutely right when it comes to us needing to feel an urgency about climate change, but what I've always said was, for us to get to where we need to go on climate, we got to have the American people [and] public opinion on our side. They've got to feel a sense of urgency about it, and that requires us persuading and winning their votes so that we can implement these policies. And we've made significant progress relative to where we were eight years ago – [but] nowhere near where we need to go. The Paris Agreement envisions us hitting targets a decade from now. I'm confident that America can still hit those targets. And it may be that more of those targets are met on the back end because there are different policies coming out of the Trump administration on this. But I think that we can still achieve what needs to be achieved.

There's no benefit that's derived from pulling into a fetal position. We go out there, and we work. And we slog through challenges, and over time things get better.

Let me ask about immigration reform. Where do we go? What's the path forward on immigration?

Well, look, there are those in the Republican Party who recognize that regardless of how this election played itself out, over time, alienating a big chunk of the Latino voters, the Asian voters, is gonna be a problem. And that gives [Republicans] some self-interest in solving this in a sensible way. It's going to be important for Democrats and immigration-rights activists to recognize that for the majority of the American people, borders mean something. And so there has to be, what I've said before, both rule of law and values that stay true to our immigrant roots. Those things don't have to be contradictory, but there have been times where in our big-heartedness around immigration, we haven't adequately addressed how do we get the orderly and lawful part of it down. And we tend to dismiss people's concerns about making sure that immigration is lawful and orderly. And what that means, I think, is that there will still be an opportunity at some point to do comprehensive immigration reform.

I don't think it's gonna happen over the next two years or maybe even not over the next four years, but what we can do is make smart changes, building on what we've already done around the legal-immigration



system. What we can do is to work along the borders in a cooperative way with Mexico so that the pressure of what are now mostly Central American immigrants into our country is handled in a humane way. And what we can do, and I will share this with President-elect Trump when I see him, is continue to make smart investments in countries like Honduras and El Salvador and Guatemala that can help them deliver some sense of well-being for their people.

You can now buy marijuana legally on the entire West Coast. So why are we still waging the War on Drugs? It is a colossal failure. Why are we still dancing around the subject and making marijuana equivalent to a Schedule I drug?

Look, I've been very clear about my belief that we should try to discourage substance abuse. And I am not somebody who believes that legalization is a panacea. But I do believe that treating this as a public-health issue, the same way we do with cigarettes or alcohol, is the much smarter way to deal with it. Typically how these classifications are changed are not done by presidential edict but are done either legislatively or through the DEA. As you might imagine, the DEA, whose job it is historically to enforce drug laws, is not always

THE CLIMATE FIGHT

"There is no doubt that the Republican Party has taken a very hard-line position with respect to climate change," Obama says.

going to be on the cutting edge about these issues.

[Laughs] What about you? Are you gonna get on the cutting edge?

Look, I am now very much in lame-duck status. And I will have the opportunity as a private citizen to describe where I think we need to go. But in light of these referenda passing, including in California, I've already said, and as I think I mentioned on Bill Maher's show, where he asked me about the same issue, that it is untenable over the long term for the Justice Department or the DEA to be enforcing a patchwork of laws, where something that's legal in one state could get you a 20-year prison sentence in another. So this is a debate that is now ripe, much in the same way that we ended up making progress on same-sex marriage. There's something to this whole states-being-laboratories-of-democracy and an evolutionary approach. You now have about a fifth of the country where this is legal.

You got up there and said legalize same-sex marriage, and you pushed it right over the edge....

Well, you know, no. I don't think that's how it works. If you will recall, what happened was, first, very systematically, I changed laws around hospital visitation for people who were same-sex partners. I then assigned the Pentagon to do a study on getting rid of "don't ask, don't tell," which then got the buy-in of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and we were then able to [repeal] "don't ask, don't tell." We then filed a brief on Proposition 8 out in California. And then, after a lot of groundwork was laid, then I took a position.

So we're in the groundwork stage?

One of the things that I think it's important for progressives to do when we're in a reflective mode after an election like this is, we can't have it both ways. We can't say, "Why aren't you reaching out to the folks who voted against us? And by the way, why aren't you maximizing getting 100 percent for the things that those of us, you know, who are already progressive and living on the coasts think should be done right away?" The point is that politics in a big, diverse country like this requires us to move the ball forward not in one long Hail Mary to the end zone, but to, you know, systematically make progress.

So how do you think we go about stitching the country back together?

Well, the most important thing that I'm focused on is how we create a common set of facts. That sounds kind of abstract. Another way of saying it is, how do we create a common story about where we are. The biggest challenge that I think we have right now in terms of this divide is that the country receives information from completely different sources. And it's getting worse. The whole movement away from curated journalism to Facebook pages, in which an article on climate change by a Nobel Prize-winning scientist looks pretty much as credible as an article written by a guy in his underwear in a basement, or worse. Or something written by the Koch brothers. People are no longer talking to each other; they're just occupying their different spheres. And in an Internet era where we still value a free press and we don't want censorship of the Internet, that's a hard problem to solve. I think it's one that requires those who are controlling these media to think carefully about their responsibilities, and [whether there] are ways to create a better conversation. It requires better civics education among our kids so that we can sort through what's true and what's not. It's gonna require those of us who are interested in progressive causes figuring out how do we attract more eyeballs and make it more interesting and more entertaining and more persuasive.

Maybe the news business and the newspaper industry, which is being destroyed by Facebook, needs a subsidy so we can maintain a free press?

The challenge is, the technology is moving so fast that it's less an issue of traditional media losing money. *The New York Times* is still making money. NPR is doing well. Yeah, it's a nonprofit, but it has a growing audience. The problem is segmentation. We were talking about the issue of a divided country. Good journalism continues to this day. There's great work done in *ROLLING STONE*. The challenge is people are getting a hundred different visions of the world from a hundred different outlets or a thousand different outlets, and that is ramping up divisions. It's making people exaggerate or say what's most controversial or peddling in the most vicious of insults or lies, because that attracts eyeballs. And if we are gonna solve that, it's not going to be simply an issue of subsidizing or propping up traditional media; it's going to be figuring out how do we organize in a virtual world the same way we organize in the physical world. We have to come up with new models.

What kind of private moments have you had that define your last eight years?

Oh, well, you know there have been well-known moments like me walking across the colonnade and hearing the chants of "USA" after we had gotten bin Laden, or being up on the Truman Balcony with my young staff after we got the Affordable Care Act passed. There have been times just sitting in the Treaty Room reading let-



POWER OF THE PRESIDENCY

Obama viewing a White House portrait of JFK. "Once you're in this office, you are part of a legacy dating back to those first Revolutionaries," he says. "And this amazing experiment in democracy has to be tended."

ters from people who have a story to tell, a veteran who's not getting services they need [and] a young DREAM Act kid who describes how he's now gotten a degree and has gone back and is teaching in the school where he went, that move you deeply.

But I think the thing that I will miss the most about this place, the thing that can get me sentimental – and I try not to get too nostalgic, because I still got a bunch of work to do – it's the team we built here. The number of young people in this place who are just amazing. Somebody like a Brian Deese. Nobody outside of the White House necessarily knows Brian, must be

35, 37, something like that. He's our deputy chief of staff for policy. He engineered the Paris Agreement, the [Hydrofluorocarbons] Agreement, the Aviation Agreement, may have helped save the planet, and he's just doing it while he's got two babies at home, and could not be a better person. And there are people like him across this administration. What I will take away from this experience is them: seeing how they work together, seeing the commitments they have made toward the issues that we care about.

Do you think Michelle should run for office?

Michelle will never run for office. She is as talented a person as I know. You can see the incredible resonance she has with the American people. But I joke that she's too sensible to want to be in politics.

What advice do you have for Trump?

Well, I'll have a chance to talk to him tomorrow, and I think the main thing that I will say to him is, number one, however you campaigned, once you're in this office, you are part of a legacy dating back to those first Revolutionaries. And this amazing experiment in democracy has to be tended. So aside from any particular issue, the president needs to recognize that this is not about *you*. This is not about your power, your position or the perks, the Marine band. This is about this precious thing that we've inherited and that we want to pass on. And for me at least, that means you surround yourself with really good people, that you spend time learning and understanding what these issues are because they really actually have an impact on people. They're not games that we're playing. And that to the best of your ability, you're making the decisions that you think are right for the American people – even when they're not popular, even when they're not expedient. And the satisfaction you get from that is that when you leave this place, you can feel like you've been true to this immense privilege and responsibility that's been given to you.

Do you think the weight of history will constrain him to some extent?

I think sitting behind that desk is sobering, and that it will have an impact on him as it has on every president. But I think the most important constraint on any president is the American people themselves, of an informed citizenry that is active and participating and engaged. And that is going to be something that I will, in my own modest ways, continue to try to encourage for the rest of my life.

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The onetime insurgent candidate is now in a position to reshape the Democratic Party and take on Trump. An interview with Bernie Sanders

Where We Go From Here

BY MATT TAIBBI

IT FEELS LIKE A BOMB went off in Washington. In less than a year, the leaders of both major parties have been crushed, fundamentally reshaping a political culture that for generations had seemed unalterable. The new order has belligerent outsider Donald Trump heading to the White House, ostensibly backed in Congress by a tamed and repentant majority of establishment Republicans. Hillary Clinton's devastating loss, meanwhile, has left the minority Democrats in disarray. A pitched battle for the soul of the opposition party has already been enjoined behind the scenes.

Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, who won overwhelming youth support and 13 million votes during primary season, now sits on one side of that battle, in a position of enormous influence. The party has named him "outreach chair," and Minnesota congressman and Sanders political ally Keith Ellison is the favorite to be named head of the Democratic National Committee. This is a huge change from earlier this year, when the Sanders campaign was completely on the outs with the DNC, but many see Sanders' brand of politics as the Democrats' best shot at returning to prominence.

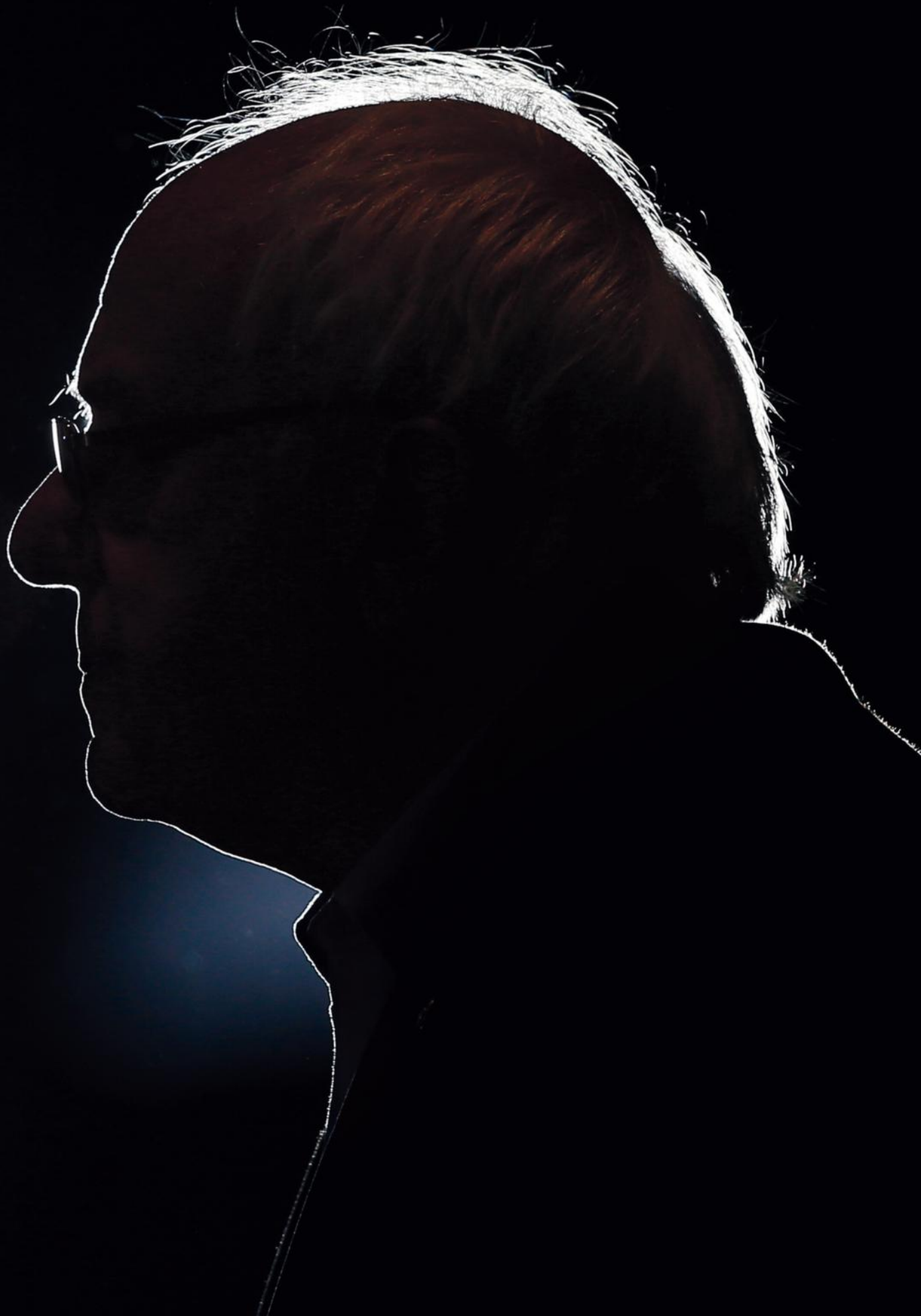
Sanders' rise is a remarkable story, obscured by the catastrophe of Trump's win. When I first visited with Sanders for *ROLLING STONE*, 11 years ago, for a tour of the ins and outs of congressional procedure, he was a little-known Independent in the House from a tiny agrarian state, an eccentric toiler pushing arcane and unsexy amendments through Congress, usually on behalf of the working poor: expanded access to heating oil in the winter, more regional community health centers, prohibitions against regressive "cash-balance pension plans," etc.

His colleagues gently described Sanders as a hardworking quack, the root of his quackery apparently being that he was too earnest and never off-message, even in private. He had fans among Republicans (some called him an "honest liberal") and many detractors among Democrats, who often grew weary of his lectures about the perils of over-reliance on donations from big business and Wall Street.

DARK HORSE

After Trump, "Timidity is no longer a path to success."

MIKE BLAKE/REUTERS



Bernie Sanders

In other words, Sanders was a political loner, making his recent journey to the top of the Democratic Party even more remarkable. He has been put in this position not by internal patronage but by voters who are using him to demand that Democrats change their priorities.

At his Washington office a week after the election, I sat down with Sanders and his wife, Jane, just after the release of his new book, *Our Revolution: A Future to Believe In*. When he offered to get me a copy, I told him I'd already read the e-book, at which he frowned. "Does that have the pictures?" he asked. He was relieved when I told him it did, including black-and-whites from his youth in Brooklyn.

Sanders' experiences growing up in the hardscrabble Flatbush neighborhood still seem central to the way he looks at the world. All the adults in his neighborhood voted Democratic. The loss of the support of those kinds of people still eats at Sanders, like a childhood wrong not yet corrected. Thus the opportunity he has now to push the Democrats back in that direction is something he doesn't take lightly. He's spent his whole life getting to this point.

The senator and his staffers were obviously sorting through a variety of emotions, and it was hard not to wonder what might have been. But Sanders admonished himself once or twice not to look back. "It's not worth speculating about," he said.

Instead, Sanders laid out the dilemma facing the Democratic Party. The Democrats must find their way back to a connection with ordinary people, and this will require a complete change in the way they do business. He's convinced that the huge expenditure of time and mental effort the Democrats put in to raise more than \$1 billion for the Clinton campaign in the past year ended up having enormous invisible costs. "Our future is not raising money from wealthy people, but mobilizing millions of working people and young people and people of color," he says.

On other issues, he was more careful. The senator's sweet spot as a politician has always been talking about the problems of the working poor: the economic struggles, the anomalous-across-the-industrialized-world story of a decline in life expectancy among rural Americans. But those same voters just lost any sympathy many Democrats might have had by electing the race-baiting lunatic Trump. Exactly how much courting of such a population is permis-

sible? Is trying to recapture voters who've made a racist choice in itself racist?

Sanders believes it is a mistake to dismiss the Trump movement as a monolithic expression of racism and xenophobia. Trump's populist appeals, sincere or not, carried the day, and Democrats need to answer them. Trump pledged not to cut Medicare or Social Security, promised to support re-importation of prescription drugs from other countries, and said he'd reinstate the Glass-Steagall Act. Sanders insists he and

and turn the tide, Sanders says, he needs help. "You don't have to run for president," he says. "Just get people involved."

After the election, you called the anger Trump connected with "justified." When did you first recognize that sense of discontent and alienation was big enough to have the impact it did this past year?

I've seen it for years. I've seen a media, which has basically ignored the declining middle class, that doesn't talk about poverty at all, and has no sense of what is going on in the minds of millions of ordinary Americans. They live in a bubble, talk about their world, worry about who's going to be running 18 years from now for office. Meanwhile, people can't feed their kids. That's something I knew.

Talking about those issues, seeing that they resonated, that did not surprise me. How quickly they resonated did surprise me. How weak the Democratic establishment was, and how removed they were from the needs of ordinary people, that also surprised me.

President Obama talked after the election about winning Iowa by going into counties even if the demographics didn't "dictate" success there. This seemed to be a criticism that the party had decided to ignore big parts of the country.

I talked about that in the book. That's exactly what we did. We had 101 rallies in that small state. That's grassroots democracy. You speak to three-quarters of the people who end up voting for you. In New Hampshire, we had just a zillion meetings – far more people came out to our meetings. If you had the time to do that around the country, the world becomes different. The assessment has got to be that not only did we lose the White House to the least-popular candidate in perhaps the history of America, certainly in modern history, but we've lost the Senate, we've lost the House, we've lost two-thirds of the governors' chairs in this country. We've lost 900 seats in state legislatures throughout the country in the last eight years. Maybe it might be time to reassess?

Is there any way to read that except as a massive repudiation of Democrats?

No. I can't see how any objective person can. It speaks to what I just mentioned; we cannot spend our entire life – I didn't, but others do – raising money from wealthy people, listening to their needs. We've got to be out in union halls, we've got to be out in veterans' halls, and we've got to be talk-



POLITICAL REVOLUTION

Top: Sanders at a November rally on Capitol Hill for economic and social justice. Above: With Rep. Keith Ellison, a front-runner to become the next chair of the DNC.

his staff are going to try to hold him to all of these promises. How they'll manage that is only a guess, but as ranking member of the Senate Budget Committee, Sanders could easily force the Republicans into votes on all of these issues by introducing amendments during the budget resolution process, which begins in January. "Were those 100 percent lies that [Trump] was telling people in order to gain support?" he asks. "We'll find out soon enough."

Sanders seems anxious to communicate a sense of urgency to young people. No more being content with think-tank-generated 14-point plans that become 87-point plans in bipartisan negotiation, and end up scheduled to take effect in 2040. People want change right now. To survive Trump



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ing to working people, and we've got to stand up and fight for them.

This is how screwed up we are now. When you have a Republican Party that wants to give huge tax breaks to billionaires, when many of their members want to cut Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, when they don't believe in climate change, when they've been fierce advocates of unfettered free trade – I'm talking about pre-Trump – why would any working person, when they want to cut programs for working people, support them?

I think we know the answer. We know what the Karl Roves of the world have been successful in doing. They're playing off working-class people against the gay community, or African-Americans, or Latinos. But that only works when you have not laid the foundation by making it clear to those workers that you are on their side on economic issues.

Look, you may not be pro-choice. But if you know that your congressman is fighting for you and delivering the goods in terms of education, health care and jobs, what you'll say is, "I disagree with him on that, but I'm going to vote for him." We've seen this in Vermont. We have seen the conservative parts of the state where there are many people who have disagreed with me. But they vote for me, because they know I'm fighting for their rights.

In your book, there are a lot of moments where you say things like, "Look at products like the iPhone. These are American inventions, but they're not made in America anymore." Some people will say, "This is nationalism. Why shouldn't liberal-minded people care about raising the standard of living for poor people in China, in India?"

I heard them. We ran into that big-time from corporate liberals. Two things here. I would say there are very few people in the United States Congress who have a more progressive outlook than I do in terms of global politics and international politics. I am deeply concerned about poverty in countries around the world, and I believe that the United States and other major countries have got to work to address those issues. But you do not have to sacrifice the American middle class in order to do that. I find it ironic that the billionaire class says, "We're worried about the poor people in Vietnam, and that's why we're sending your job to Vietnam." That's the billionaire class talking.

Clearly we know what that is about. And you have some "liberals" who echo that

point of view. I would like to see the United States government and the rest of the industrialized world work harder, with sensible policy to improve the standard of living, to help people create jobs, and sustainable jobs, not wipe out agricultural sectors. In Mexico, for example, NAFTA devastated, as you know, family farms when people could not grow corn to compete with American corn manufacturers.

How you create a sustainable global economy that protects the poorest people in the world is a very important issue for me. But you surely do not have to do that by wiping out the middle class of this country. I think we have a right in this country to hold corporate America accountable for gaining the benefits of being an American corporation, while at the same time turning their backs on the

planet we're leaving our kids is going to be a healthy planet.

They have a right to do that, and the only way you do that is to think big, not small. But implicit in that, thinking big, is [recognizing] that the brakes on all of this, the things that are holding us back, are the power of corporate America and Wall Street, the insurance companies and so on. If you're not prepared to challenge them, then you can't think big.

This is the word that I will use over and over and over again: economic and political *oligarchy*. It's where we're headed rapidly if we do not have a political revolution in this country.

You write, "You cannot take on the establishment when you take their money." Is the Democratic Party going to have to eschew those funding sources?

Two things. First, from a political point of view, *Citizens United* has been an unmitigated disaster in terms of undermining American democracy, and what we have to understand is that Mitch McConnell and the Koch brothers think *Citizens United* did not go far enough. Their view is that right now, if you're a billionaire, the only thing you

can do is spend as much as you want into independent expenditures. They don't want that. They want you to be able to say, "OK, you're our guy, you're going to run for president, here's your check for a billion dollars, there's your speechwriter and consultant. You work for us." We are moving, if Mitch McConnell and the Koch brothers get their way, to a place where presidents and senators and congresspeople will be paid employees of the billionaire class, because they will literally give them a check to run their campaign.

That is just a huge problem. How do you address that problem? We fight it as hard as we can, and one of the things that I applauded Clinton about, we were in agreement, was that she was not going to appoint anybody to the Supreme Court who would not vote to overturn *Citizens United*, and she's right. But given the fact that we have Mr. Trump in power, how you deal with that issue is very, very tough.

The issue that you're raising is, how do you raise the money that you need in order to deal with the unlimited sums of money that your opponents will have? At the end of the day, I think for a variety of reasons, the way to do it is to primarily rely on small donors as we did, because if you contribute \$27 to me, it's not just that 27 bucks – you are now part of [Cont. on 66]

“One of the reasons for Trump's success is that he campaigned on his understanding that millions of working people are in pain.”

American working class and the consumers who helped create their profits and their wealth.

What about the criticism you got a lot last year, including from former President Clinton, that this idea that we can do anything about these globalist trends is unrealistic, that all we can do is "harness the energy" of the change?

Donald Trump has rewritten the rules of politics. Let's give the guy credit where credit is due. No one thought...he started off as a joke, right?

Yes.

He took on the leadership of the Republican Party, absolutely took on, obviously, the Democratic Party, took on the corporate media, took on everybody, and he became the president of the United States. I think if there's a lesson to be learned from Trump's success, it is that timidity is no longer the path to success. The Democrats have got to start thinking big. During my campaign, that was one of our slogans: Think big, not small.

We have got to get the American people to understand that as citizens in a democratic society, they have rights. They have a right to make sure that their little children have decent care, and that their older kids can go to college. They have a right to breathe clean air, and to make sure that the

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**ENGLISHMAN
IN NEW YORK**
Sting in October

A photograph of a bookshelf with a trumpet and books, a dark textured surface, and a hand holding a book.

Sting's Rock & Roll Salvation

He's got a charmed life and a loud, hard-hitting new album. So why can't he stop thinking about dying?

By **STEPHEN RODRICK**

PHOTOGRAPH BY DANNY CLINCH

STING SITS ON A STOOL IN A REHEARSAL space on Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles. He cradles his bass and waits for drummer Vinnie Colaiuta to count in “50,000,” a rocking lament to Bowie, Prince, Lemmy and others lost recently. It’s from *57th & 9th*, his first rock album in 13 years. His Springsteen-esque biceps pop out of a gray T-shirt. (Those muscles made middle-aged women gasp and fan themselves at a downtown acoustic show the night before.) Muffled, ungodly sounds leak through the walls. It’s Kiss mucking about next door. “Do you know Gene Simmons?” asked Sting later. “An interesting guy.”

Colaiuta starts the count, and an Australian camera crew filming the proceedings moves in for a close-up. Sting halts his band for a moment. He sends his fingers on a not-so-secret journey.

“OK, no boogers.”

A publicist titters, but Sting gives a naughty grin and shrugs: “It’s always good to check.”

In the three days I spent with him, Sting played against the cliché of him as a dour rock god with an overly earnest sense of self-importance. Sometimes he failed: He humble-bragged that he received an award from BMI for “Every Breath You Take” being played 13 million times in the United States. “That’s quite a lot,” he said with arched eyebrows. This was shortly after he marveled about Bob Dylan’s I’m-not-there attitude toward winning the Nobel Prize.

Still, Sting now seems in on the joke that he is a tantric-sex-practicing, lute-playing semi-egomaniac. He sends up his own exalted image with comic timing. During a break in rehearsal, he does an extended riff on his much-maligned lute album from a decade ago, *Songs From the Labrynth*, which he takes pains to point out sold a million copies. “People had a go at me,” he says. “People were like, ‘I don’t want to listen to the fucking lute.’ I’d say, ‘What’s wrong with the lute?’” He pauses and smiles. “I think the instrument suffers from the Monty Pythonization of the lute.”

Granted, Sting is never gonna be the rock & roll equivalent of the office clown blowing beer out of his nose at the Christmas party. “I think death is the most interesting subject in any art form, whether it’s literature or poetry or opera,” Sting told me a month earlier while talking about “50,000” in his Central Park West home. He’d shown me a 1962 photo of the street he grew up on in Newcastle, England, with

a looming shipyard at the end of the block. Everything in that photo has turned to dust: his house, his parents, the shipyard. Staring at it had put him in a melancholy mood, an emotional state that he admits he revels in a little too much.

“Pop music is supposed to be about girlfriends and cars and the color of your shoes,” he says. The banality of pop music is a familiar Sting trope that has led him to be accused of taking himself way, way, way

“People said,
‘I don’t want to
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with the lute?’”

too seriously since his “King of Pain” days. He pets his dog, a pointer named Compass. “I’m 64. Most of my life has been lived already, and then, like most of us when a cultural icon dies, we’re children.” He stretches his palms outward. “Because you think, ‘How could he or she die?’”

He cheerily admits to being a workaholic; he notoriously slept through the birth of his first child. I ask him if he thought he’d made enough time for his six children – two of whom are musicians – in between his touring and recording. “That’s a good question,” he says. “If my kids would ever complain about that, I would say to them, only half serious or half not serious, ‘For some reason, you chose me as a parent.’ Not ‘I chose you’; you chose me. Because that makes them less of a victim. They’ve all turned out beautifully. I give all credit

to their mothers.” He pauses for a moment. “Was I a perfect parent? No. I wasn’t parented terribly well myself, so I didn’t really have an idea.”

We agree to pick up the conversation in a few weeks. On the way out of a living room lined with books, I point at a painting I like, an abstract with a lightbulb in the middle. “Oh, that’s a Basquiat,” says Sting offhandedly as he sips a cup of tea. “Andy [Warhol] did the lightbulb.” He whispers the next bit. “My grandchildren like to come in and put their hands all over it. They don’t know what it is.” He grins. “It’s great.”

STING NAMED “57TH & 9TH” after a Manhattan corner he would cross every morning on the way to the studio. He’d stop and meditate for a moment about his day to come and days past before crossing the street. He spends much of his time in New York with his wife, Trudie Styler, a film producer. His kids are grown, and he and Styler are empty-nesters. He appreciates the relative anonymity Manhattan provides. “People here are all in their own TV show,” he says. “They might stop and say, ‘Hey, Sting, I like your music,’ or ‘Hey, Sting, you suck,’ but then you just go on.”

Over the past decade, Sting has done everything but make a rock record. Besides that lute album, there was an orchestral version of his greatest hits, a Police reunion and the passion project of *The Last Ship*, a musical set in the Newcastle of his childhood. Unlike on his previous solo albums, where songs and arrangements would be painstakingly laid out beforehand, Sting entered the studio for *57th & 9th* with nothing – no lyrics, no melodies and no concept. “We would ping-pong lines back and forth,” he says. “A bass line or something until we had a riff or a tune we liked.”

Sting is a prodigious walker – you can often see him strolling through Central Park – and he’d think about the songs while moving about. But he still had to write the words. So he would get home from a walk, pour himself a cup of coffee, put on his heavy coat, grab his guitar, and sit on his frigid balcony with gorgeous views of the Manhattan skyline. He didn’t allow himself into the house until he’d written a set of lyrics. “I wrote four songs in two days,” says Sting. “It was fucking cold.”

Sting then brought the songs inside, usually playing them for Styler, who he claims is his toughest critic. “She won’t say something is awful,” he says with a long-married smile. “But I can tell.”

He has been writing covert protest songs since the Police’s “Driven to Tears,” so it is not a surprise that there’s a passel of slightly disguised political songs on the record. “One Fine Day” humorously deals with the quixotic hope that climate change is in

Contributing editor STEPHEN RODRICK wrote about James Corden in September.



All This Time

(1) With Andy Summers and Stewart Copeland of the Police in 1978. The band's 2007 reunion is unlikely to be repeated. "It closed the circle," Sting says.

(2) As a three-year-old in Newcastle, England. (3) With his wife of 24 years, Trudie Styler.

fact a myth as the world melts around us. "Ishallah" deals with the refugee crisis from a humanitarian perspective; "Empty Chair" is an ode to foreign correspondent James Foley, executed by ISIS in 2014. A recent interviewer linked Sting to Woody Guthrie, a comparison that baffles him. "Woody Guthrie, that I've never heard," says Sting with a smirk. "Woody Woodpecker, yes."

Sting has been an activist for more than 30 years, but he keeps a lower profile about it these days, content to run his Rainforest Foundation Fund with Styler and a board of experts, working on smaller projects that help people in 21 countries in the sub-equatorial parts of the world.

The politics of his songs have evolved as well. We talk about "We Work the Black Seam," a 1985 lament about Thatcherism,

the danger of nuclear power and the loss of coal jobs in Newcastle and other areas that were dear in Sting's childhood. Now, he is more versed in the downside of dirty coal and the necessity of nuclear power. "What we know about power, I would say my position has shifted," he says. "I think if we're going to tackle global warming, nuclear power is the only way you can create massive amounts of power."

Inside, the band is waiting. He wants to make one thing perfectly clear: "But, hey, I'm not a scientist."

BETWEEN OUR TWO VISITS, I TURNED 50 while Sting hit 65. He was keen to talk about the mileposts, even if, when we first met, he professed not knowing exactly how old he was. Now a senior citizen, Sting

still looks, annoyingly, 38. It's not by accident. Every morning he swims laps for an hour while listening to Bach cello concertos played by Yo-Yo Ma. He then does a Pilates class. He describes himself as "vain and disciplined." I ask if there was ever a point where he'd let himself go and put on 20 or 30 pounds post-tour. He looks at me as if I were mad: "Fuck, no! I'd kill myself. I'd just die of shame. I'm a fattist when it comes to myself."

With all the talk of self-preservation, you could get the idea that Sting is one of those famous persons who has convinced himself that his exalted state in the people food chain means, just possibly, he'll never die. Not so. The day before he turned 65, he played before a crowd of 100,000 at half-time of Australian-rules football's version of the Super Bowl, in Melbourne. He then spent most of his birthday alone at his hotel thinking about having more days behind him than in front of him.

He spends an inordinate amount of time thinking and writing about death. His parents died young, and Sting skipped their funerals, blaming touring responsibilities, but now knows it was a mistake. Still, he hasn't exactly made his peace with the end. "I have been thinking about death since I was a kid," says Sting, who was raised Catholic. "I get a kind of spiritual vertigo. I was brought up in a religious background with ideas of eternity, eternal torment or eternal heaven, which sounded just as tormented to me. I became obsessed with it, maybe morbid about it."

One of Sting's attempts to parse mortality has been through multiple experiences taking the drug ayahuasca, a psychedelic popular in South American spiritual ceremonies. "I think it's a way of rehearsing the feeling of being dead," he says, stressing it's not a pleasure drug. "Every time, I have to work up the courage to do it. You basically face your mortality, and it's as if you're dead, out of time. Your whole life passes in front of you in this other realm. I can only sound vague about it. Most people die in total panic. Terror. I think there's another way. We're supposed to die. There must be a way to die peacefully and welcoming."

LISTENING TO STING AND his band play songs from *57th & 9th*, one of the first things I notice is that there is clear space between the instruments. Love him or hate him, Sting's songs are rarely cluttered with a cacophony of sound to disguise the lack of an idea. There's a touch of audio aloofness to them, as if Sting has a secret that he's not quite letting you in on. That aloofness is present in his personality as well. You get a [Cont. on 67]

1934-2016

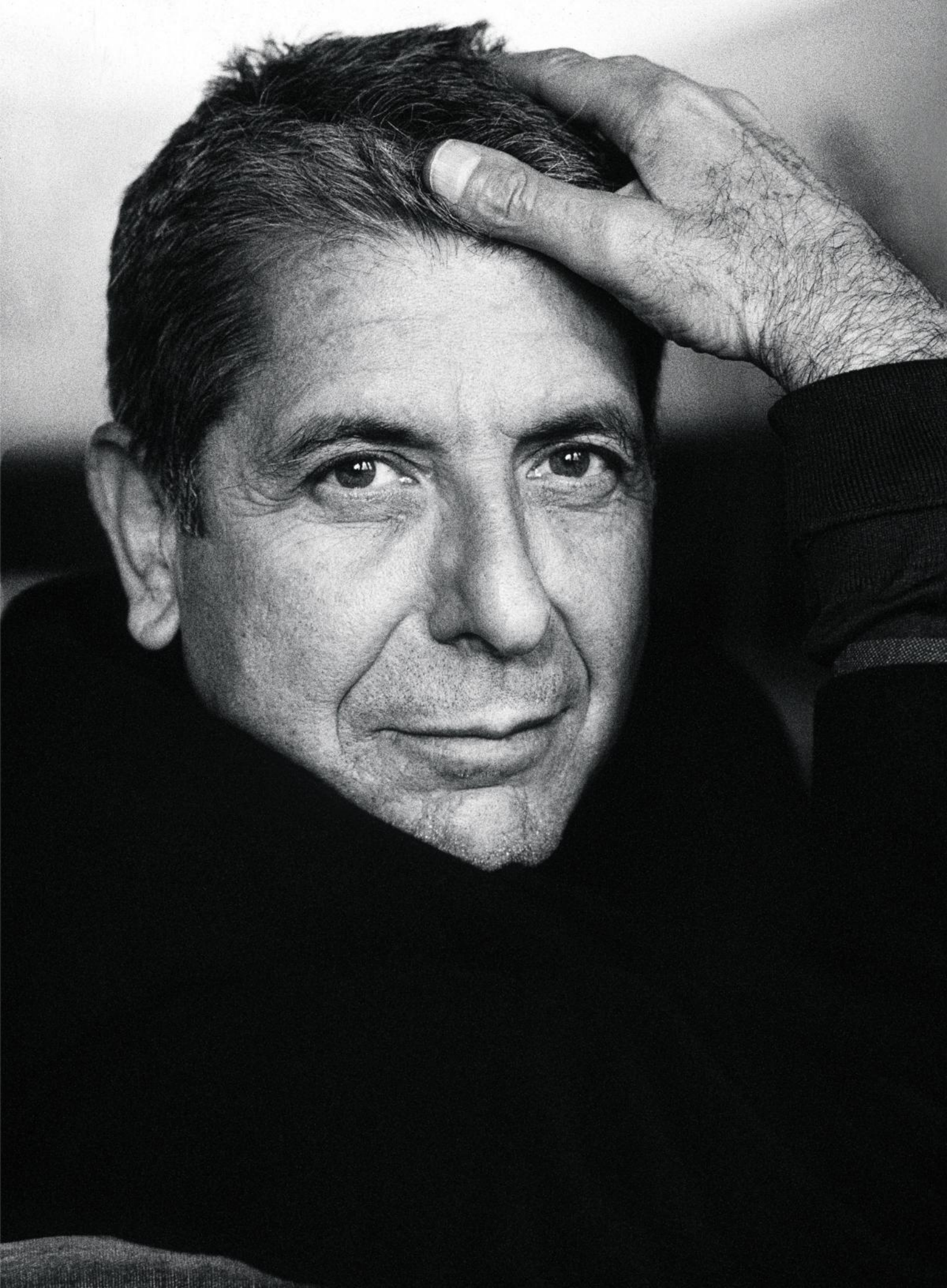
LEONARD COHEN

He was a poet, a novelist, a ladies' man and a Buddhist monk. For nearly half a century, he built a tower of song – even though darkness was never far off

By Mikal Gilmore

LEONARD COHEN WAS THE POET OF BROKENNESS. THE KNOWLEDGE HAUNTED the first song that drew attention to him, “Suzanne”: “Jesus was a sailor when he walked upon the water/And he spent a long time watching from his lonely wooden tower.../ But he himself was broken, long before the sky would open/Forsaken, almost human, he sank beneath your wisdom like a stone.” • That brokenness was always there. It proved central to his music and to his body of poetry and literature (nobody else ever mastered all three disciplines as well as Cohen), and it marked “Hallelujah,” his most famous vision of transcendence: “It’s not a cry that you hear at night/It’s not somebody who’s seen the light/It’s a cold and it’s a broken hallelujah.” It followed Cohen into a Zen monastery, where years of contemplation and prayer were sometimes as agonizing as the horror that had driven him there. It even appeared among the final lines of the final song on his final record, released weeks before he died: “It’s over now, the water and the wine/We were broken then, but now we’re borderline.” • But Cohen

SO LONG
Cohen in 1992.
“One of the things
that art does is
that it heals,”
he once said.



LEONARD COHEN 1934-2016

– who died on November 7th at age 82 – never submitted to the darkness. In a 1992 song, “Anthem,” he sang, “There is a crack in everything/That’s how the light gets in.” “Depression has often been the general background of my daily life,” Cohen told me. “My feeling is that whatever I did was in spite of that, not because of it. It wasn’t the depression that was the engine of my work.... That was just the sea I swam in.”

The work wasn’t always dour. Cohen had a wry humor that made its way into conversation and into the way he sometimes juxtaposed his tombstone voice with arch music. In “Tower of Song,” he sang, “I was born like this, I had no choice/I was born with the gift of a golden voice.”

But the combination of his voice and his songs’ dark themes kept some at a distance. Label head Walter Yetnikoff, explaining why he wouldn’t release 1984’s *Various Positions* (the album with “Hallelujah”) in America, reportedly said, “Leonard, we know you’re great, but we don’t know if you’re any good.” Others did, though. For

even Cohen complained about its ubiquity. “I think it’s a good song,” he said in 2009. “But I think too many people sing it.”

“Hallelujah” was a liturgy of rejoicing that was also honest about God’s deceits, and it had emerged at the most broken point in Leonard Cohen’s career. “I wanted to stand with those who clearly see G-d’s holy broken world for what it is, and still find the courage or the heart to praise it,” he once wrote. “You don’t always get what you want. You’re not always up for the challenge. But in this case – it was given to me.”

The challenge, though, got much worse before the light got in.

L EONARD COHEN WAS YEARS older than the folk and rock & roll artists whose ranks he eventually joined, even if they got there first. He was born September 21st, 1934, in Westmount, Quebec, an English-speaking city on the island of Montreal, into a middle-class Jewish family. His mother, Masha, was the daughter of an au-

Montreal’s Catholic sensibility would inform Cohen’s works as affectingly as his Jewish background. “The figure of Jesus always touched me, and still does,” he told me in 2001. “Love your enemy. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the Earth. These views were not foreign to the Jewish education I’d had, but I felt they were a radical refinement of certain principles.”

Long before mystery junctions between spirit and flesh made their way into Cohen’s songs, he had already established himself as an unorthodox and powerful poet and author. His mother had encouraged him in those ways. His early influences included metaphysical poets – Andrew Marvell, John Donne, W.B. Yeats – and W.H. Auden, who mixed cultural and religious themes. Nobody affected him so much as surrealist Spanish poet Federico García Lorca, who collected Spain’s folk songs, turning them into poetry, before he was executed by Spanish nationalist forces in 1936. Cohen also heard socialist folk songs from a director at summer camp. “The lyrics of these songs,” he said, “touched me: ‘To you, beloved comrade, we make this solemn vow/The fight will go on..../We pledge our bodies down/The fight will go on.’ A very passionate and heroic position.” Around the same time, Cohen started a country band called the Buckskin Boys.

When he was 17, Cohen entered McGill University as an English major. Aspirations to mythology and possibility – along with an appetite for women – came early and forcibly. Looking back on his early writing, Cohen believed that Montreal’s lack of any recognized centrality to the world of art, literature and ideas may have turned out to be a boon for him and his Canadian compatriots. “It was completely open-ended,” he said. “The atmosphere of our meetings and gatherings in Montreal cafes and private houses was that this was the most important thing that was going on in Canada – that we were the legislators of mankind, that we had a redemptive function in some way.... But you couldn’t even stand up on the campus and say you were a poet and expect to get a date. There was no prestige attached to the thing.”

That began to change for Cohen in 1956, when he published his first book, *Let Us Compare Mythologies*. “Those were the poems I wrote between the ages of 15 and 20,” Cohen told me in 1988. “They were as good as anything I ever did.” Cohen’s next book, *The Spice-Box of Earth*, increased his audience beyond Montreal, and won him critical acclaim as an important new poet; his debut novel, *The Favourite Game*, followed in 1963. Cohen had moved to London in 1959, then to the Greek island of Hydra the next year, where he paid \$1,500 for a three-story house.

“DEPRESSION HAS OFTEN been the general background of both my work and my daily life – it was the sea I swam in.”

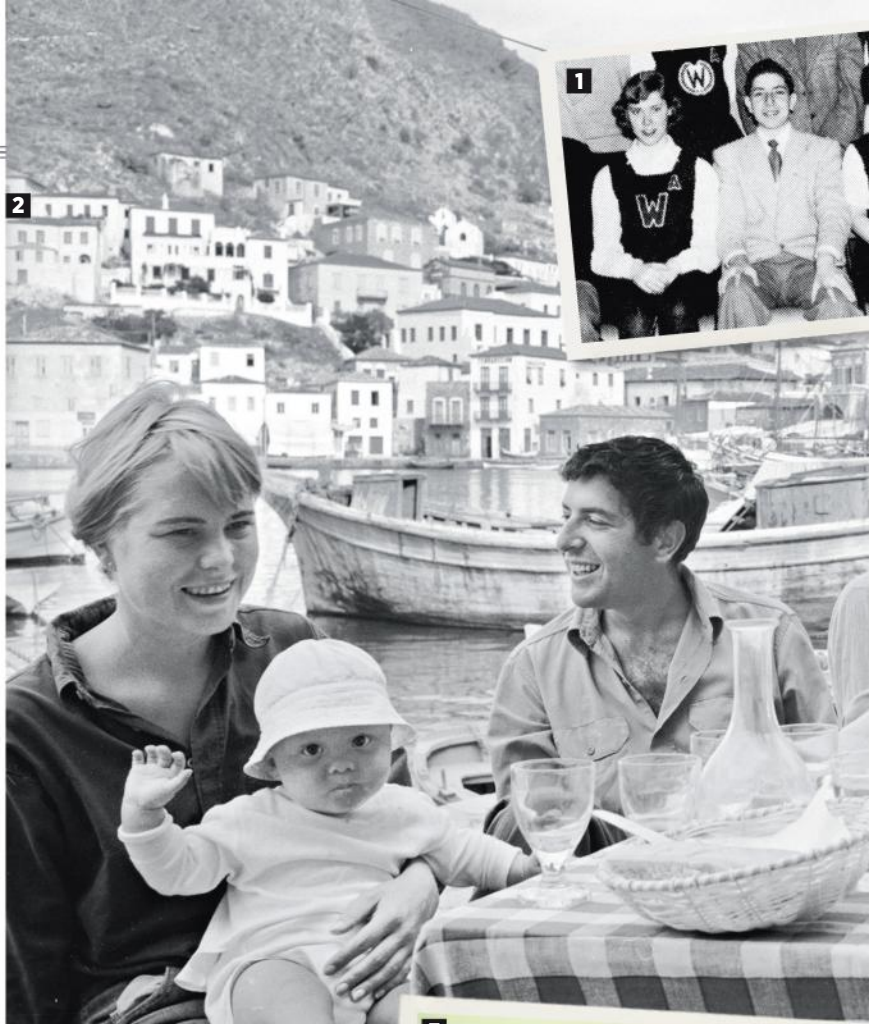
nearly 50 years, artists who followed Cohen – Patti Smith and Kurt Cobain among them – found a brave nerve and sympathetic mind. (In “Pennyroyal Tea,” Cobain sang, “Give me a Leonard Cohen afterworld/So I can sigh eternally.”) “There are very, very few people who occupy the ground that Leonard Cohen walks on,” Bono said. “This is our Shelley, this is our Byron.”

Many more sang his music – particularly “Hallelujah,” the song Columbia once wouldn’t release. It took Cohen five years to write, and he pared down dozens of verses to four. The song might have languished in obscurity, had not John Cale recorded it for a 1991 Cohen tribute album. That recording found its way to Jeff Buckley, who reworked the song into the incandescent version that would be used, over and over, in movies, TV shows, 9/11 tributes. There are more than 300 versions, including a famous one by Rufus Wainwright (who fathered one of Cohen’s grandchildren) – so many that

thor and Talmudic scholar. It was the family of his father, Nathan, though, who had been intrinsic in Montreal’s Jewish history. Leonard’s grandfather had established organizations that aided Russian Jews. Nathan himself wasn’t a religious figure in the city’s Jewish community. He’d served in the Canadian army during World War I, but afterward his health declined, and he ran a high-end clothing business (Leonard, as biographer Sylvie Simmons wrote in *I’m Your Man*, “was raised in a house of suits”).

Both Masha’s temperament and Nathan’s death – when Leonard was nine – had a great effect on Cohen. “My mother was a refugee and witnessed the destruction of her own milieu in Russia,” he told me in 2001. “I think she was justifiably melancholy about something, in the sense of a Chekhovian character. It was both comic and self-aware. But I would not describe her as morbidly melancholy, as I was.... The death of my father was significant, and the death of my dog were the two, I would say, major events of my childhood and my adolescence.”

Contributing editor MIKAL GILMORE wrote about the Beatles in September.



Various Positions

(1) Cohen in high school, 1951. (2) With Marianne Ihlen and her son on Hydra, 1960. She would be the first of his famous love affairs, inspiring "So Long, Marianne." (3) With son Adam, mid-Seventies. (4) With Joni Mitchell in 1967.

On Hydra, he lived with the first of his legendary romances, Marianne Ihlen, from Oslo. Years later, Ihlen told an interviewer that Cohen showed "enormous compassion for me and my child. I felt it throughout my body." The relationship with Ihlen began an archetype of sorts for Cohen: He would be drawn by an ideal of romantic meaning and passion, but in close quarters it could prove difficult – even in a setting as outlying as Hydra. Things turned tempestuous. David Rem-

nick of *The New Yorker* noted that Ihlen could become enraged when she drank, and that neither she nor Cohen proved faithful. "All the girls were panting for him," Ihlen later said. "I would dare go as far as to say that I was on the verge of killing myself due to it."

Cohen worked on a second novel, *Beautiful Losers*, while living on Hydra. It just about cost him his mind. In 2001, he told me, "I think I was slightly demented and frenzied during the whole creation of the

thing. I knew that it was a living work. I wrote it outside in the Greek sun, on a little folding table in the back of my house. I knew that something was unfolding, and there was a joyous activity behind it – but, as I say, slightly crazed, which freed the writing tremendously. I was smoking grass and taking acid from time to time.

"At a certain point, I went into the room and I got up on a chair and started writing around the wall in gold paint: 'I change I am the same, I change I am the same, I change I am the same, I change I am the same....' That's the only thing I ever wrote on acid, and it appears in the book." Eventually, he collapsed from exhaustion and had to be hospitalized. Marianne tended to him. "I would like to say that it made me saintly," he said.

Beautiful Losers was published in 1966. It is a genuinely daring, groundbreaking and startlingly sexual work about a man's search for identity, memory, purpose and transcendence amid a dizzying weave of romantic, religious and historical betrayals – and the book's unexpected and bewildering end can genuinely lift the top of your head off. Just as Allen Ginsberg's "Howl" opened up new territories in American literature in 1956, *Beautiful Losers* opened up new perspectives about form and time in modern fiction. Cohen had the imagination and facility to achieve the sort of literary reputé bestowed on authors like Thomas Pynchon and Henry Miller. But he had something entirely different in mind.

COHEN RETURNED TO Montreal from Hydra in 1966 to find *Beautiful Losers* reaping attention. Some reviews compared

him to James Joyce, for the book's stream-of-consciousness style, though Cohen took it far beyond, into phantasmagoria. One newspaper deemed it "verbal masturbation." The *Toronto Daily Star* called it "the most revolting book ever written in Canada" but also the "Canadian book of the year." Yet it was plain that the story he had almost demolished himself for might push his fate but not his fortunes. Despite his success, he couldn't pay his rent. "I'd published two novels and two or three books of poems," he told me in 2001. "I didn't expect to make a living out of the poetry, but I thought that I could make one writing novels. But there were only maybe 3,000 copies of *Beautiful Losers* worldwide."

Cohen, though, began to sense a new possibility for himself. "Living in Greece

most of the time, I had been completely unaware of the whole renaissance in music that was taking place in the early and middle 1960s. Still, I was playing a lot of guitar and I thought, 'It's all right being a writer – I always want to be a writer – but I think I'd like to go to Nashville and make some country-western records.... I decided, 'That's going to build me up.' I had some songs sketched out."

On his way, Cohen stopped off in New York and found his work had preceded him. He met songwriters like Bob Dylan and Phil Ochs, and at Max's Kansas City he ran into Lou Reed, who would later induct him into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. "All these guys knew what I had written," he told me. "Romantic figures, these troubadours. They were me; that's what I was, drifting around the world, speaking from the heart and occupying a certain mythological life. I felt very close to them."

the hugely influential *Anthology of American Folk Music* – ran into Cohen one day at the hotel and said, "Leonard, I know a lot of people are congratulating you on the lyrics, but I want you to know, the tunes are really good." Talking to me in 2001, Cohen smiled at the memory. "It's true," he says, "nobody was mentioning the tunes; it was all about the lyrics and my 'seriousness.'"

That seriousness was no act. Cohen found himself increasingly forlorn in New York. Marianne and her son had followed him to the city, but the relationship between her and Cohen was coming toward its end. "People talk about loneliness," Cohen told me, "but I really passed days without speaking to anybody. Sometimes weeks where the only contact I would have was with the woman I bought cigarettes from, and a day could be redeemed by her smile.... It was a difficult period, and it didn't stop being difficult for a long

counter with Janis Joplin: "I remember you well in the Chelsea Hotel/You were talking so brave and so sweet/Giving me head on the unmade bed/While the limousines wait in the street..../I remember you well in the Chelsea Hotel/You were famous, your heart was a legend."

In 1977, Cohen collaborated with producer Phil Spector on *Death of a Ladies' Man*. It is the only wreck in Cohen's body of work, though the disaster owed more to Spector, whose megalomania had already turned paranoid. "He would enter into a kind of Wagnerian mood when he was in the studio," Cohen told me, "and was quite mad at the time. But I also had some kind of trust in his method – I respected his work so much. I hoped that somehow at some stage in the production it would've coalesced into something that I found more appealing. It didn't." Spector was fond of guns and sometimes locked people into the studio. At one point, he absconded with the masters of Cohen's album. "I was kind of stuck with what we got," Cohen said in 2001. "I suppose I could have vetoed the whole project. I'm not even sure about that. But that would've been the only weapon I'd had in the situation."

I met Leonard Cohen for the first time in 1979, at a Mexican restaurant in Hollywood called El Compadre. ROLLING STONE's Paul Nelson had called and asked me to write a preview of Cohen's new album. I hesitated. This was out of the blue, no chance to prepare, and I found Cohen's work daunting. "Go," Nelson said. "You'll love him. He's a complete gentleman." When I arrived at El Compadre, a Mexicali band was serenading. Cohen sat in a red leather booth; elegant, dark-haired women on either side of him, fixed by his charm. It was like the cover of *Death of a Ladies' Man*.

We talked for a couple of hours, and as Nelson had prepared me, Cohen was the best-mannered person – interview subject or not – I'd ever encountered. We talked a little about the debacle with Spector. He admitted he didn't expect his new record, *Recent Songs*, to provide any long-overdue breakthrough (his first album, *Songs of Leonard Cohen*, was his bestseller until 1988). He didn't have an American label at the moment. "My music is considered kind of eccentric in America," he said. "Record companies don't promote me with the same fervor they would someone with Top 20 potential."

The conversation went well, and we talked some more, including one or two trans-Atlantic telephone interviews, while Cohen was in Europe. During one post-midnight discussion, I asked him about "The Guests," which opens *Recent Songs*. It reminded me of a Chekhovian tale, or James

IN NEW YORK, COHEN WAS welcomed by Dylan and Lou Reed: "Romantic figures, these troubadours. I felt close to them."

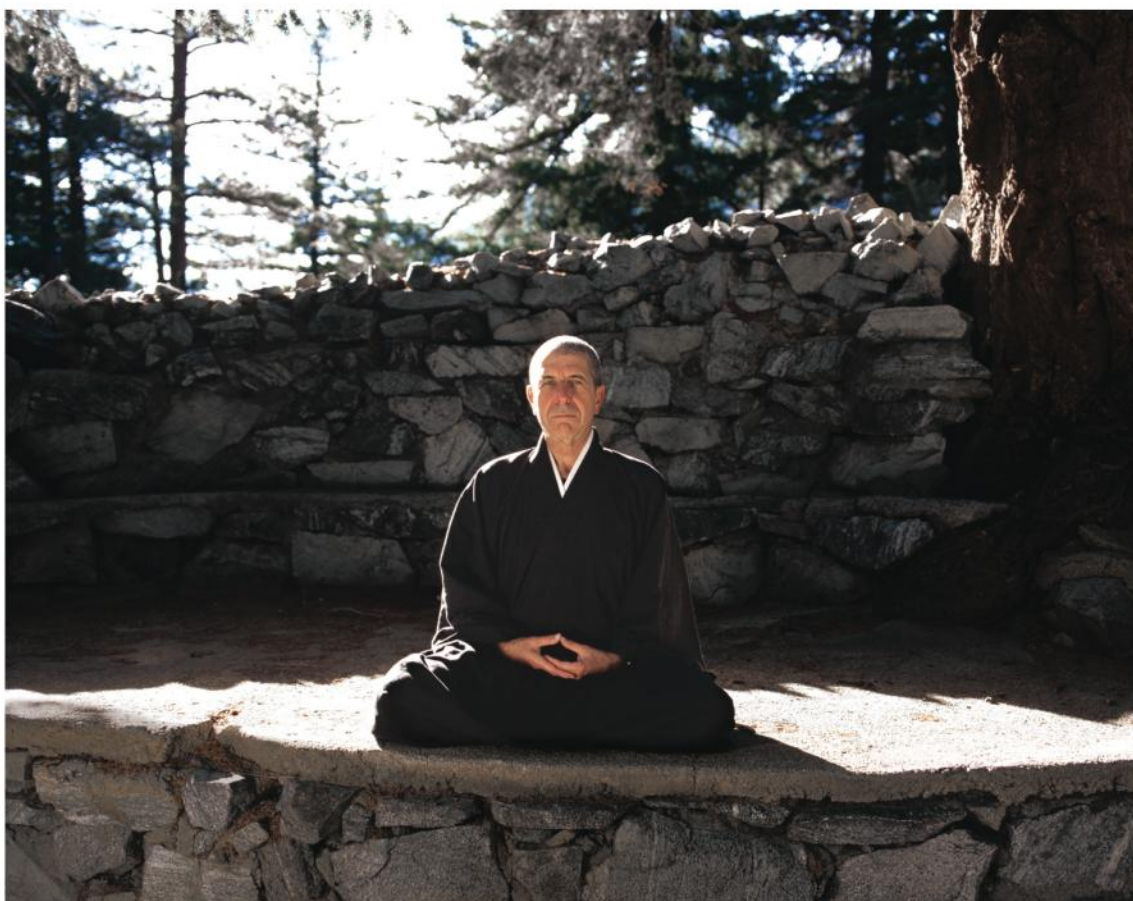
In 1966, Judy Collins recorded "Suzanne," and the tune enjoyed widespread fame. Collins also recorded "Dress Rehearsal Rag," an early example of what some saw as Cohen's morbid streak. "Talk about dark," Collins later told Sylvie Simmons. "A song about suicide. I attempted suicide myself at 14, before I found folk music, so of course I loved it." Collins prevailed on Cohen to begin performing live in 1967; he was scared and reluctant, but the crowd took to him, and he played a number of successful festival dates that year.

Around that same time, Columbia Records producer and A&R person John Hammond (who had signed and/or produced artists such as Count Basie, Billie Holiday, Bob Dylan and Aretha Franklin, among others) visited Cohen's single-room residence at the Chelsea Hotel to hear the writer's material. He signed Cohen to Columbia, which released his debut, *Songs of Leonard Cohen*, in 1968. The record clearly established a reputation for Cohen as somebody who spoke for those who feel lost and are in search of any saving grace, whether it be religion or sex. A fellow tenant of Cohen's at the Chelsea Hotel – legendary archivist Harry Everett Smith, who compiled

time.... I understood that a lot of other people must be in this predicament, because I have these biblical metaphors circling around in my mind. I began to develop this idea that some catastrophe was taking place. I couldn't see why I couldn't make contact."

Cohen and Marianne Ihlen separated during this time. In 1969, he met 19-year-old Suzanne Elrod, kicking off a rocky relationship that lasted nearly a decade. Elrod would become Cohen's common-law wife and the mother to his son, Adam, and his daughter, Lorca. But Cohen sometimes resented how Elrod forced bonds on him ("She outwitted me at every turn," he once said).

Cohen recorded his next few albums in Nashville with producer Bob Johnston, who also worked with Johnny Cash, Marty Robbins, the Byrds, Simon and Garfunkel, and Dylan. Cohen's tunes and vocals often had a narrow range during these years that fit his dour image. But with 1974's *New Skin for the Old Ceremony*, produced by John Lissauer, Cohen's darkness took on greater vibrancy and melliflence; it was his best album to that date, and his saddest, and included the portrait of an en-



FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE

Cohen spent years on California's Mount Baldy, studying Zen Buddhism with his teacher, Kyozan Joshu Sasaki Roshi, and becoming an ordained monk.

Joyce's "The Dead," which implied a sense of warmth or community, but the more the guests gathered, the more isolated they seemed from one another, and it eventually turns into a meditation on death that embraces humanity beyond the gathering.

Cohen – who drank a fine bottle of something as we talked – enlightened me: "Its sensibility is sponsored by the poems of Rumi and Attar, who are Persian poets of the 12th and 13th centuries. I guess it's a religious song, just about our strangerhood on the Earth and how it's resolved. 'One by one, the guests arrive/Guests are coming through/The openhearted many/The brokenhearted few.'" From there, Cohen launched into a line-by-line exegesis of the song. The guests, he suggested, ask, "Where is God? Where is truth? Where is life?"

Many songwriters would never bare such background thought: It's too much commitment to their own meanings, or an admission that they might be uncertain of those meanings. Cohen knew every inch of what any of his songs signified – he

explained others that night, meticulously – and if some of his phrases or images seemed ambiguous, he was not. As we kept talking, I heard the clink of a bottleneck on a glass. Cohen chuckled. "Drunk," he said. "Drunk again."

Columbia Records released *Recent Songs* a short time later, and maybe regretted it. The album's solemn themes didn't connect with a wide audience. The same went for *Various Positions*, in 1984. This time, Columbia didn't bother with a release in the U.S. Years later, receiving a Grammy Award for Lifetime Achievement, Cohen said of the music industry, "In fact, I was always touched by the modesty of their interest as to my work." In our 1979 conversation, he'd said, "When I look back and examine my work, it's no mystery to me that it hasn't made a big splash yet. But I never thought, 'I will create this kind of art song.' Everything I wrote, I wrote for everybody."

For Cohen's next album, *I'm Your Man* (1988), he turned to electronic instrumentation – sometimes menacing, sometimes glimmering – on tracks like the haunting

"Tower of Song," and most memorably on the opening track, "First We Take Manhattan." It was danceable, but it was also menacing, a sinister and tense depiction of social collapse and a terrorist's revenge.

At his Carnegie Hall appearance in July 1988, it was as if the song were a call to battle. I met with Cohen at his hotel, just off Central Park. It was a sweltering afternoon, but Cohen was in a chalk-striped double-breasted suit. We talked for hours. He addressed the foreboding in his new music – scarier, more outward-directed than anything he'd done before, but also full of dark humor. He talked of an apocalyptic scenario that had befallen humanity – a plague, a bomb, the decline of our political systems – even if humanity had not yet realized it. At one point he stood up, slipped off his pants and folded them neatly over the back of another chair. It was a sensible thing to do. It was such a hot day; why wrinkle the slacks to a nice suit? Cohen kept on his jacket and tie, his socks, shoes and blue-and-white-lined boxer shorts as he sat back down.

There was a knock. "Excuse me," said Cohen. He rose and pulled his slacks back on, opened the door and signed for a cold soda he'd ordered for me. He handed me the drink, took his slacks off and folded them again. He flashed a warm smile. I realized I had just been given an example of how one behaves with poise, even while contemplating the end of days.

Though much of what Cohen had to say that day was portentous, I failed to understand that he wasn't speaking simply from an interesting philosophical or political perspective. On his next collection, 1992's *The Future* (actress Rebecca De Mornay, who was his girlfriend then, has a co-producer credit), it seemed that sense of sociopolitical foreboding and apprehension might be prophetic, that his new songs were also revealing – maybe more clearly than ever before – a distress that lay deep inside his own mind, heart and history.

ing me quite the contrary. But he saw that I hadn't gone where I could go, with my voice, with my trip. It was like the deepest, and at the same time the most pragmatic, advice. He saw that my voice could go low, that I could get deep into the material consciously – that I could explore things."

Then, just as unassumingly as he took leave of his life, Cohen also took leave of the monastery, and returned to his family and friends. In the fall of 2001, he released an album, *Ten New Songs*. In contrast to the often-acerbic themes that dominated *I'm Your Man* and *The Future*, Cohen's new LP was about the sad-eyed acceptance and full-hearted love that come after the fires of suffering and the advent of age. It was not about a fearsome future but rather about a tolerant present. Deep in the folds of the album there were hints about the mysteries that had surrounded Cohen in the 1990s: Why did he leave the world be-

Just maintenance took the whole day just to keep the thing going. Pipes would burst in the winter. You get up at 2:30 or 3 in the morning, depending on your duties. I ended up as one of Roshi's personal assistants, and I was cooking for him." After a year, Cohen was ordained as a Buddhist monk. "None of this represented the solution to a crisis of faith," Cohen told me. "I looked at it as a demonstration of solidarity with the community. I was never looking for a new religion. I was perfectly satisfied with my old religion."

Other times, the Zen life wasn't enough. "I was sitting in the meditation hall one afternoon," said Cohen, "and I thought, 'This sucks. This whole scene sucks.' And I moved from that into cataloging the various negative feelings I had for the mother of my children. I found myself descending into a bonfire of hatred, you know – that bitch, what she'd done to me, what she left me with, how she wrecked the whole fucking scene. I was in there, I was in my robes, and the furthest thing from my mind was spiritual advancement. The furthest. I mean, I was consumed with rage."

That day, Cohen's rage gave way to a moment of unexpected grace, a kind of temporary epiphany. "There was sunlight on the floor of the cabin, where we were waiting to go see Roshi," he said. "There were leaves outside and the shadow of these leaves was on the floor. The wind moved, something moved, and I disappeared into this movement.... The whole scene blew up. A dog started barking, and I was barking. And everything that arose was the content of my being. Everything that moved was me.... In certain blessed moments, we experience ourselves as the reality that is manifesting as everything. There's no 'I am one with the universe,' which is the cheapest mystical slogan." Cohen paused. "There is that moment," he continued, "and it decides that life is worth living. I was barking with the dog, but there really was no dog."

But dread still arose, and it could obliterate the self. After several years at the camp, Cohen had decided it was time to leave. He was driving to the airport, and, he said, "the bottom dropped out. This floor that was supposed to be there wasn't there. It was dreadful. I pulled my car over to the side of the road. I reached back and I got my shaving kit, and I took out all the medication and threw it out the window and I said, 'Fuck this. If I'm going to go down, I want to go down cleareyed.' So, I went back to the camp and I did those next few weeks, which were pure hell, and during that time, I picked up a book by an Indian writer by the name of Balsekar."

Ramesh Balsekar was a Hindu mentor who lived in Mumbai and wrote about

"I WAS SITTING IN THE meditation hall one day, and I thought, 'This scene sucks.' I was consumed with rage."

I'm Your Man and *The Future* were another pair of masterpieces – this time, though, they got attention. The songs were played at clubs and used in movies, and their combination of tones and images fit the times. They were the biggest hits of the artist's career. At age 58, Leonard Cohen seemed – improbably – on top of the world. Then he walked away from everything in his life.

AS IT TURNED OUT, COHEN had in 1994 taken up residence at a Zen monastery on Mount Baldy, an hour northeast of Los Angeles. The site was previously a Boy Scout camp, 6,500 feet up the mountain, run by Cohen's longtime Zen master, Kyozan Joshu Sasaki Roshi. Cohen studied periodically with him for 40 years, and saw him as a friend, sage and kind of father. During the recording of *Various Positions*, Cohen took the Zen master to a session in New York. "This was a time when all the news about me was bad and depressing," he said, "razor blades and all that stuff. The next morning, I said to him, 'What did you think, Roshi?' He said, 'Leonard, you should sing more sad.' Everybody was tell-

hind when the world finally seemed ready for him?

"There was no sense of dissatisfaction with my career," he told me one afternoon in 2001. We were sitting in his recording studio, built above the garage behind his modest house in Los Angeles' Mid-Wilshire district. "On the contrary," he continued, "if anything, it was, well, this is what it's like to succeed. But the predicament, the daily predicament, was such that there wasn't much nourishment from that kind of retrospection."

"By the time I finished my tour in 1993, I was in some condition of anguish that deepened and deepened. Prozac didn't work. Paxil didn't work. Zoloft didn't work. Wellbutrin didn't work. In fact, the only comic element in the whole thing was when I was taking Prozac, I came to believe that I had overcome my [sexual] desires. I didn't know that it has that side effect. I thought it was a spiritual achievement."

The daily regimen of life at the Zen center was sometimes preoccupation enough. "Think of a Boy Scout camp," Cohen said. "There are a lot of small cabins, a mess hall and some kind of recreation hall that had been converted into a Zen meditation hall."

a concept called “non-dualism,” developed in Hindu and Buddhist traditions. In 1999, Cohen departed Mount Baldy and headed to Mumbai. He spent a year studying with Balsekar. “The model I finally understood,” he recalled, “suggested that there really is no fixed self. The conventional therapeutic wisdom today encourages the sufferer to get in touch with his inner feelings – as if there were an inner self, a true self, the real self that we have glimmerings of in dreams and insights.... There is no real inner self to command your loyalty and the tyranny of your investigation. What happened to me was not that I got any answers, but that the questions dissolved. As one of Balsekar’s students said, ‘I believe in cause and effect, but I don’t know which is which.’”

Slowly, the depression eased. “By imperceptible degrees, something happened, and it lifted,” Cohen continued. “It lifted, and it hasn’t come back for two and a half years. That’s my real story. I don’t feel like saying, ‘I’ve been saved,’ throwing my crutches up in the air. But I have been. Since that depression has lifted – and I don’t know whether it’s permanent or temporary – I still have the same appetite to write.” *Ten New Songs* was perhaps the loveliest and most gracious album Cohen had made. “*The Future* came out of suffering,” he said. “This came out of celebration.”

The evening had come. It was time to wind up. Cohen told me, “I like what Tennessee Williams said. He said, ‘Life is a fairly well-written play except for the third act. It’s a badly written third act.’ I feel I’m at the beginning of the third act. By the end of the third act, which nobody can predict, it can be pretty hairy. I just know that life is worth living.”

COHEN’S THIRD ACT PROVED more eventful than he – or anyone – could have anticipated. It maybe even included a fourth act. Cohen followed *Ten New Songs* with *Dear Heather* (2004), and in 2006 he co-wrote and produced *Blue Alert*, by Anjani Thomas, a backup singer and touring keyboardist in Cohen’s band. The two were also romantic partners during this period, though Cohen spoke of the relationship with a characteristic uncertainty, describing them as “impossibly solitudinous people.... I like to wake up alone, and she likes to be alone.” In 2006, Cohen

also put out *Book of Longing* – a collection of 167 previously unpublished poems and drawings, mostly written at the Zen monastery.

In 2004, a new devastation hit. His daughter, Lorca, was tipped off that his longtime manager Kelley Lynch (“not simply his manager but a close friend, almost part of the family,” Sylvie Simmons wrote) had been stealing from the singer. Lynch

ders of discovery. She attacked Cohen online and wrote long, disparaging e-mails to him, his family, the IRS and even the Buddhist community. (They settled that suit, and Lynch was ordered to pay Cohen more than \$5 million.)

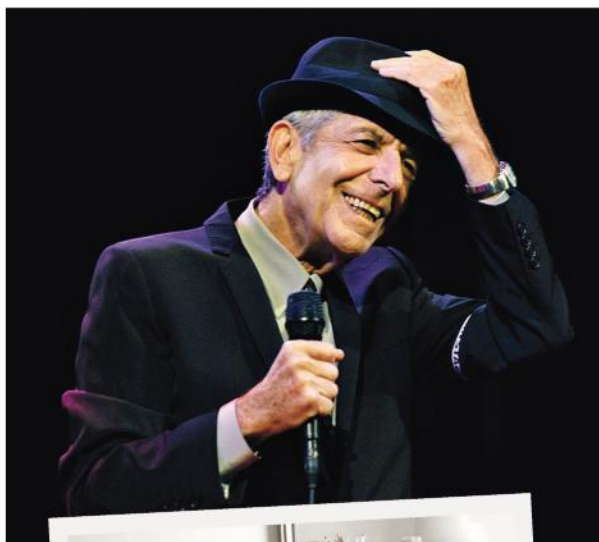
With local sheriffs’ help, Cohen reclaimed notebooks and correspondence with Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell and Allen Ginsberg. In March 2012, Lynch was arrested for violating a permanent protective order that forbade her from contacting Cohen. “It makes me feel very conscious about my surroundings,” he told the court. “Every time I see a car slow down, I get worried.” Lynch was found guilty on all charges and sentenced to 18 months in prison. Cohen never recovered most of the money that Lynch had embezzled. Essentially, he found himself back in the position he had known in 1966, when he accepted that *Beautiful Losers* wouldn’t sustain him financially.

And so, in the summer of 2008, at age 73, Leonard Cohen launched an astounding concert tour that would last, off and on, for five years. He played songs from all phases of his career backed by a meticulously rehearsed band; he played for three hours, and sometimes longer, most nights; he skipped on- and offstage. Reviewers routinely said the shows were among the best they’d ever seen.

“I never thought I’d tour again,” he told *ROLLING STONE* in 2012, “although I did have dreams. Sometimes my dreams would entail me being up onstage and not remembering the words or the chords. It had a nightmarish quality, which did not invite me to pursue the enterprise.” And yet his bandmates noted how much he came alive, night after night. “There’s a certain fatigue I guess you could locate,” Cohen said about the hundreds of shows, “but when the response is warm and tangible, one is invigorated rather than depleted.”

Touring, it turned out, was just the start of Cohen’s remarkable comeback. He recorded a new album in 2012, *Old Songs*. He followed it with *Popular Problems* in 2014, and then, just weeks before his death, *You Want It Darker*. These records took the ambience of *Ten New Songs* and *Dear Heather* and deepened it into R&B-derived electronic furrows of beat and beauty.

During the final year or so of his life, Cohen moved into the second floor of Lorca’s home in suburban Los Angeles. He had been battling can- [Cont. on 67]



TWILIGHT YEARS

Top: Onstage in 2009. Above: With his son and fellow songwriter Adam and grandson Cassius, earlier this year.

had misappropriated more than \$5 million from Cohen’s bank accounts, retirement funds and charitable trust funds. It had begun as early as 1996. Cohen had granted Lynch power of attorney over his finances, and she had persuaded him to sell many of his publishing rights.

Cohen fired Lynch and tried to come to terms with her. Lynch’s lawyers insisted, wrote Simmons, that she “had been given the authority to do what she did.” Cohen had to sue Lynch, or else he would’ve been accountable for the debts she’d incurred for him. She ignored the suit, including or-

ROLLING STONES BLUE & LONESOME



THE NEW ALBUM
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Reviews

"I picked up the pen like Hamilton,
Street analyst. Now I write words
That try to channel them.
No political power, just lyrical power."
—Nas, "Wrote My Way Out"

Making 'Hamilton' Even Greater Again

Sia, Miguel and Nas
lead a band of pop
patriots as they
re-imagine 'Hamilton'



Various Artists

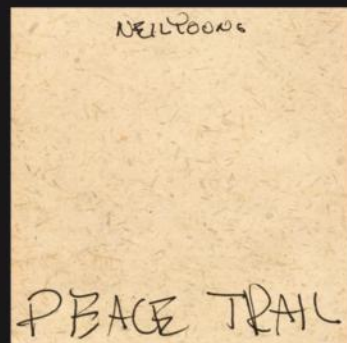
The Hamilton Mixtape Atlantic
★★★★½

BY JON DOLAN

Mike Pence is right about one thing: The *Hamilton* experience is "what freedom sounds like." The instant-classic musical is a miracle of living history and artistic ingenuity, reaffirming our sense of America's renegade ambition and inclusive against-the-odds promise. As a musical triumph, it is just as amazing. Creator-composer-star Lin-Manuel Miranda's songs tap hip-hop's nearly lost traditions of sing-song storytelling and giddy battle-rap brio. More astonishingly, *Hamilton* is full of show tunes that feel as vital as anything in contemporary pop, something Broadway hasn't done since back when it actually *was* contemporary pop.

So it's no big shock that the long-awaited *Hamilton Mixtape* is so well done. Miranda executive-produced the project along with Black Thought and Questlove of the Roots, enlisting a cast of pop heavy





NEIL YOUNG PEACE TRAIL

THE NEW ALBUM

“One of the most gripping outings of his long career.”

—LA Times



Reviews

hitters (Sia, Kelly Clarkson), R&B titans (John Legend, Alicia Keys) and hip-hop worthies (Nas, Chance the Rapper, Common) to offer illuminating cover versions and re-imaginings of the original cast recordings. Miranda himself goes verse for verse with rap god Nas on “Wrote My Way Out,” an ode to words-as-weapons built off a reference to the show’s “Hurricane,” which recounts Alexander Hamilton’s rise from storm-born Caribbean orphan to Founding Father with the sharpest pen. The album is full of cute juxtapositions: There are two versions of the plaintive song “Dear Theodosia,” one a parlor-piano jaunt by Regina Spektor and Ben Folds, the other ragged vocoder-soul from Chance and Francis and the Lights. Both are gorgeous.

The inclusion of two of Miranda’s early demo recordings for the show will be a boon to *Hamilton* superfans. But you don’t need to know Aaron Burr’s backstory to enjoy Usher’s ascending glide through “Wait for It,” or be able to tell a Schuyler sister from a Pointer Sister to get the drama behind Sia, Miguel and Queen Latifah’s take on the lover’s prayer “Satisfied.” And if your knowledge of American history extends to the radio playlists of 2002, Ashanti and Ja Rule’s “Helpless” will be an airy joy.

When it first blew up, *Hamilton* immediately resonated as the peak of patriotic culture in the Obama era; POTUS’ vision was so present he should’ve been listed as a co-producer. Now, after all this knucklehead Trump Twitter bullshit, it comes with a sense of embattled resilience. “Every city, every hood, we need to rise up/All my soldiers, what’s good? We need to rise up,” Busta Rhymes tells us during the Roots’ amped version of “My Shot,” the show’s signature anthem. In other words: Let freedom ring. **C**

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Brothers in crime: Jagger and Richards

The Stones’ Trip to Sweet Home Chicago

Their first-ever all-blues album is raw, dirty and full of wisdom

The Rolling Stones *Blue & Lonesome*

Interscope ★★★★★½



As the Stones formed in London in early 1962, Mick Jagger was gigging with Alexis Korner and singing Chicago grit like “Ride ‘Em on Down,” a 1955 single by Jimmy Reed’s guitarist Eddie Taylor. On the Stones’ first all-blues LP, Jagger tears into Taylor’s stomp again, chewing on the lyrics like a favorite meal against Keith Richards’ and Ron Wood’s sniping guitars and Charlie Watts’ rifle-volley snare fills. It is the world’s biggest blues band doing what comes naturally in a dozen covers mostly associated with sweet home Chicago.

The Stones first heard these songs as foreign language, the lust and trials of older, hardened men. That rough weather now fits the Stones like a suit off a rack at the Maxwell Street Market. The guitars are huddles of chug and bark; Jagger echoes his exuberant howls in blazing peals of harp. The Stones were already big-time when Howlin’ Wolf recorded his 1966 rarity “Commit a Crime,” treated here with raw ardor. But the younger Stones couldn’t have tackled Reed’s 1957 lament “Little Rain” like the slow, advancing storm here – a reflection of the grip and wisdom that only comes with miles and age. **DAVID FRICKE**

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LIVE NATION

DEEP EDDY
VODKA



By Peter Travers

A Musical Triumph

La La Land

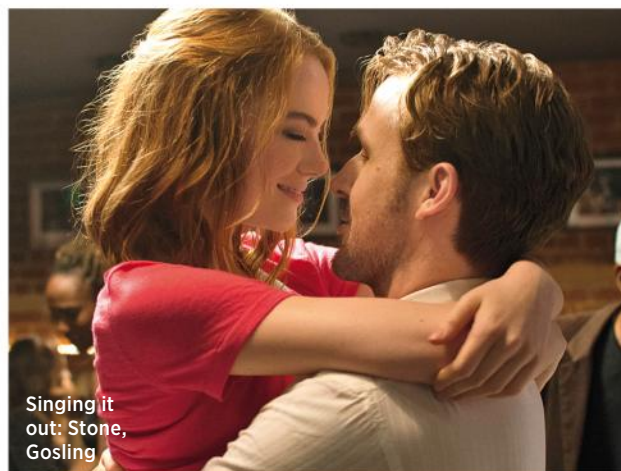
Emma Stone, Ryan Gosling

Directed by Damien Chazelle

★★★★

FOR THE YOUTH MARKET, whose patience with song and dance is usually limited to videos about getting into formation with Beyoncé or doing it to death with the Kills, *La La Land* is predicted to be a tough sell. Not so fast. Brilliantly written and directed by 31-year-old Damien Chazelle (yup, the dude behind *Whiplash*), *La La Land* does nothing less than jolt the movie musical to life for the 21st century. You'll be high on Chazelle's inventiveness, dazzled by Emma Stone and Ryan Gosling as star-crossed lovers wary of happy endings, and thrilled to see a musical that doesn't go shiny and gooey on us.

Stone plays Mia Dolan, a wanna-be actress in Hollywood doing the barista thing. Gosling is Sebastian Wilder, a jazz man doing the piano-bar thing. These underemployed dreamers meet on a clogged Los Angeles freeway, flipping each other the bird as their cars pass. That smashing opener, in



Singing it out: Stone, Gosling

which more than 100 frazzled drivers bolt from their rides to sing and dance to the beat of "Another Day of Sun" – the first song in a dynamite score by Justin Hurwitz and lyricists Benj Pasek and Justin Paul – is one for the cinema time capsule.

As Mia and Sebastian whirl around town, Chazelle and cinematographer Linus Sandgren cut loose with soaring musical interludes, including a gem at the Griffith Observatory that lets the lovers dance into the stars.

The bottom falls out when reality intrudes. As Mia and Sebastian grow apart, the film's tone changes from *Singin' in the Rain* buoyant to *Umbrellas of Cherbourg* bittersweet. Stone and Gosling are all kinds of terrific. OK, they're not Fred and Ginger. They're intuitive actors who make Mia and Sebastian's yearning refreshingly real. The Oscars should lay on the love for this hot miracle of a musical. If the haters resist, screw them. They're missing out on sheer perfection. **B**

First Lady in Crisis

Jackie

Natalie Portman

Directed by Pablo Larraín

★★★★½

THERE'S NOT A CONVENTIONAL-biopic minute in this spellbinding look at Jacqueline Kennedy in the days after her husband is assassinated in Dallas in 1963. Natalie Portman, in a performance that tops her Oscar-winning work in *Black Swan*, will floor you as the former first lady. If you ever wondered about the steel that Jackie forged through unspeakable tragedy, it's here in Portman's electrifying portrayal.



Portman as Jackie

Directed by the Chilean filmmaker Pablo Larraín (*Neruda*; *No*), from a risky, riveting script by Noah Oppenheim, this mesmeric conjecture takes us into the inner circle as Jackie sheds her now-iconic pink dress to shower away her husband's blood. Soon after, she stalls new president Lyndon Johnson's plan to hustle her and her children out of the White House and organizes a funeral march on the streets of D.C. to rival Lincoln's. There's a legacy to protect, which Jackie does with the help of her brother-in-law Robert Kennedy (Peter Sarsgaard, very fine) and a press interview with an unnamed journalist (Billy Crudup) that she controls in every detail. In giving us impressions carved out of Jackie's grief, brushstrokes that prize feeling over fact, Larraín and Portman offer a fuller picture than any standard biographical drama ever could. **B**

A Lost Boy's Search for Home

Lion

Dev Patel, Nicole Kidman

Directed by Garth Davis

★★★★

DEV PATEL DOESN'T APPEAR until nearly an hour into *Lion*, but when he does, his soulful performance cuts deep. The film is based on Saroo Brierley's bestselling memoir about a five-year-old Indian boy, raised in poverty, who falls asleep on a train and ends up nearly 1,000 miles away in Calcutta with only a child's memory of his home. Adopt-



Patel in search of his past

ed by an Australian couple, Sue and John Brierley (Nicole Kidman and David Wenham), Saroo – played by ador-

able Sunny Pawar as a boy and by Patel as an adult – labors to locate his birth mother (Priyanka Bose) using Google Earth. First-time director Garth Davis keeps sentiment (mostly) at bay. And Kidman, ungroomed and unglam, is emotionally powerful and true. Her scenes with Patel provide just the right blend of grit and grace. *Lion* is one from the heart. **B**

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BERNIE SANDERS

[Cont. from 46] our movement, in a sense. You have committed, and you're going to do other things as well.

I have to ask: Would you have won?

The answer I would give is "Who knows?" The argument is that polls before had me ahead of him. More recent polls have me ahead of him, too, but people who disagree with that analysis would say, "Oh, yeah, that's before three months with hundreds of millions of dollars in [negative] advertising. That might have had some impact on the race."

So the answer is, nobody knows. I think it is fair to say that in many of the states where I competed we did very, very well among working-class people, and we did well among young people. That was the level of enthusiasm that was very, very hot. But I'm not going to look back.

In a weird way, does the collapse of belief in traditional legacy media, and the absolute rage a lot of people feel toward us reporters, maybe facilitate change, since people are more open to alternative ideas?

The corporate media, if you read the last chapter of the book, they don't see it as their job to educate the American people. I just came from the *Christian Science Monitor* Breakfast, and more than one question – they're literally worried today, before Trump is even inaugurated, who is going to be running in 2020. Literally!

Because those are easy things. It's a little bit harder to write about why the middle class is collapsing, the threat that climate change poses for the planet, and all the other important issues. They're not going to do it. It's not their job. CNN had a great campaign, right?

And CBS, according to Les Moonves.

They got great ratings. Thank you, Donald Trump. The American people hear virtually nothing about climate change, income and wealth inequality, why we're the only major country not to have health care. That's not what their thing is, so they're not going to do it. We have got to do it. We've got to be smart about it, and the Internet will play a very important role in that.

Was Trump's campaign really a genuine revolt against the system? Or will it turn out in the end to be exactly the opposite?

We will see. The answer is, I don't know. This man is totally unpredictable. The people surrounding him are trying to get him to be more predictable.

One of the reasons for Trump's success is that he campaigned on his understanding that millions of working people are in pain, are hurting, and that he, Donald Trump, is prepared to take on the Establishment.

Now, to what degree those were just totally, absolutely hollow lies remains to be seen, but if you look at the things he said,

this guy talked about ending our disastrous trade policies, something I've been fighting for 30 years. He talked about taking on the drug companies, taking on Wall Street, taking on the overall political establishment – "draining the swamp." We will see to what degree there was any honesty in what he was saying, whether there was any sincerity in what he was saying.

I think what has to be recognized is there are millions of working people in this country who are in an enormous amount of pain and despair. These are 60-year-old workers, today, half of whom have nothing in the bank as they are approaching retirement. You're 60 years old and you've got nothing in the bank? You're going to live on \$13,000 a year of Social Security? This is what you have to look forward to?

Trump voters in Wisconsin lectured me at one event: "Did you see that 65-year-old guy working at McDonald's up the road? What the hell kind of America is this?"

They're absolutely right! The thing is, it's not just the weakness of the Democratic Party and their dependency on the upper middle class, the wealthy, and living in a bubble. It is a media where people turn on the television, they do not see a reflection of their lives. When they do, it is a caricature. Some idiot. Or maybe some criminal, some white working-class guy who has just stabbed three people. Or some lunatic.

Then Trump comes along and says, "I don't believe the media. The media are all goddamned liars anyhow." He distorts, and the problem is he lies all the time. Media occasionally does its job and catches him lying. But people say, "Yeah, he's right. I watch the media. I don't believe the media."

Wasn't that theme of anger toward the intellectual class huge in this campaign?

What I would say to people who are feeling, as I am, frightened and unhappy about this situation: Do not believe that the vast majority of the people who voted for Trump are racist, sexist or homophobes. I don't believe that. Some are. I don't believe they all are. They have turned to Trump out of desperation and pain because the Democratic Party has not even acknowledged their reality, let alone addressed it.

You talked about giving Trump a chance to earn your support. What did you mean?

There are areas where people like me could work with him: rebuilding the infrastructure, lowering the cost of prescription drugs, re-establishing Glass-Steagall, raising the minimum wage. Those are ideas that we can work on. Now, was he being totally hypocritical and just saying whatever came to his mind that he thought could attract votes? Or does he believe that?

Where there will not be any compromise is in the areas of racism or sexism or xenophobia or Islamophobia. This country has struggled for too many centuries

to try to become a less discriminatory society. We've made progress that we should be proud of, and we're not going back to an era of racism and sexism and discrimination. On that there will not be any compromise. But you're really asking, are there areas that we can perhaps work together? If he remains consistent with what he said on the campaign trail, we'll see.

With Trump, was there a moment during the past year when you went from thinking "This is a joke" to "This is real!" Or did you realize right away that it was serious?

I didn't realize right away. I didn't know much about him. What I believed and he believed is that the central part of your campaign should be rallies. Why is that? Because it's not only the ability to communicate with large numbers of people and get media attention as a result of that, but when 20,000 people sit in an arena or stadium and they look around and they say, "We're all on the same team together," that creates a kind of energy.

He understood that. When I started seeing him bring these large turnouts of working-class people, I knew that that was real, you know? What politics passes for now is somebody goes on *Meet the Press* and they do well: "Oh, this guy is brilliant, wonderful." No one cares about *Meet the Press*. But that you can go out and bring out many, many thousands of people who are supporting your campaign – that is real stuff. When I began to see that, I said, "This guy is a real candidate." Who could do it? Jeb Bush couldn't do that. Marco Rubio couldn't do it. [Trump] was clearly striking a nerve and a chord that other candidates weren't.

So did you, though.

That is absolutely right. Surely did.

In your book, there is clearly a longing to recapture lost Democratic voters. How do you do that?

What I'd say to readers of *ROLLING STONE* is: We have to understand that Trump, in a sense, revolutionized politics, and we have to respond to that. What does that mean? You start with 46 percent of the American people not even voting in this election. Of the 54 percent who do vote, how many are really engaged in politics, or just voting once every two years or four years? How many people really go to meetings? How many are involved in unions? Are involved in environmental works? Or anti-racism? Or anti-poverty work?

I think you're talking about, certainly, far less than five percent. A good chunk of those could be right-wing people, so you're down to maybe one or two percent of people in this country who are actively involved in progressive movements and ideas. If we can bring the number up to six or seven percent, you can transform America. Irrespective of Trump. Irrespective of Republicans.

STING

[Cont. from 51] sense that he's throwing a jab that keeps the rest of the world from grabbing him in a clinch. "I've been with him for 27 years, but I wouldn't say we are very close," says Dominic Miller, his longtime guitarist. "But what I can do is get very close to him on a musical level."

The loner part of Sting is largely responsible for the Police breaking up after only nine years. "A band is a democracy," says Sting. "Or the semblance of democracy. You have to pretend more in a band." While he claimed to have enjoyed the Police's 2007 reunion, Sting might have been fibbing. "It was a return back to that forced democracy and reminded me just why I'm not in the band," he says. "It was Stewart's band. He started it, he named it, and it was his concept." I ask if the band was still a democracy by 1983, the time of *Synchronicity* and Policeman. He slyly smiles and shrugs. "No."

Sting is still friendly with ex-bandmates Andy Summers and Copeland, whom he saw before a Hollywood Bowl show last year. He said the reunion tour shan't be repeated: "For me, it closed the circle. We'd never officially broke up. It was perfect timing. For me, it feels complete."

Listening in on his rehearsal with his current band, Sting seems more relaxed

and forgiving. "One of us can make a mistake and he just goes with it or it opens a new avenue," says Miller. That is real growth for Sting from his earlier days. Asked about his long reputation for being a not-so-benevolent dictator, he readily nods his head. "I used to be an arrogant, feisty old fucker. I'm a better bandleader. I'm a more calm person." He pauses a second and gives a Cheshire grin. "I think."


The calmer Sting was present the night after the presidential election in New York. While the citizens of Manhattan freaked out and binge-drunk before a show at Irving Plaza, Sting appeared and acknowledged that many in the crowd had been "traumatized." Instead of a lecture, he led the crowd in chanting a very British slogan: "Keep calm and carry on." Perhaps not coincidentally, he launched into "Message in a Bottle," and the well-healed crowd sang a little louder at the chorus: "Sending out an S.O.S. Sending out an S.O.S...."

There was more healing to do a few days later in Paris. Sting reopened the Bataclan, where, last November, 89 concertgoers were murdered by Islamic terrorists. He addressed the crowd in French. "We will not forget them," Sting said. "Tonight we have two tasks to settle. First, to remember and honor those who lost their life in the attacks. Then, to celebrate life and music."

AMBITION IN THE YOUNG AND beautiful can leave a sour taste. Ambition in the old and beautiful can be endearing. The night before his band rehearsal, Sting did an acoustic sing-and-talk show at the Grammy Museum in L.A. Sting was busy being Sting, questioning why he had to hold a mic, barely not rolling his eyes at questions he thought banal and asking his host to guess how many years it would take to listen to all of his music on Spotify – just his solo work, mind you, no Police work. When the host shrugged, Sting told him, "Twenty-seven years. Imagine that."

He also reported that "I Can't Stop Thinking About You" had entered at Number Four on something called the Adult Alternative airplay chart. Sting hadn't made any chart for a decade, and you could tell it meant a lot. But there was more to the story. His musician daughter, Eliot Sumner, was on the same chart, right ahead of her father.

He had told me the story earlier: "It was fantastic. She was thrilled and said, 'Ah, Dad, we're in the same chart.'" He paused for a second, and the mask Sting sometimes wears fell over his chiseled face. "She actually had one more play than me."

I couldn't tell if he was serious or not. And then he broke into a toothy smile. For a moment, Sting wasn't Sting, just a proud father. It was a good look on him. 

LEONARD COHEN

[Cont. from 59] cer for some time. Other health problems, including multiple fractures of the spine, kept him from traveling. Still, he saw his kids and grandkids often. Adam served as producer on *You Want It Darker*, turning Leonard's home into a makeshift studio. Seated in a medical chair and using medical marijuana to numb his pain, his father merely had to sing. "Now, at the end of his career," Adam told ROLLING STONE weeks before his father's death, "perhaps at the end of his life, he's at the summit of his powers."


In July, Cohen learned that Marianne Ihlen was dying of cancer in Norway. They had remained friendly – which Cohen had managed with most of his former lovers. It's hard to say whether romantic love ever truly fulfilled him. It often seemed inseparable from his quest for God or relief. "I had a strong sexual drive that overpowered every other consideration," he said in 2001. "My appetite for intimacy, and not just physical intimacy, was so intense that I was just interested in the essence of things.... It was unavoidably intense, the hunt, the gratification. It wasn't particularly enjoyable. It was just an appetite.... And consequently, misunderstandings and suffering from both parties arose. When that

aspect dissolved, the friendship became clearer. I tend not to lose people in my life."

Cohen wrote to his lover: "Well Marianne, it's come to this time when we are really so old and our bodies are falling apart and I think I will follow you very soon. Know that I am so close behind you that if you stretch out your hand, I think you can reach mine. And you know that I've always loved you for your beauty and your wisdom, but I don't need to say anything more about that because you know all about that. But now, I just want to wish you a very good journey. Goodbye old friend. Endless love, see you down the road." Remnick reports that Cohen soon heard back from a friend of Marianne's in Norway: "She lifted her hand, when you said you were right behind, close enough to reach her. It gave her deep peace of mind that you knew her condition."

Cohen was right: He wasn't far behind. According to *The New York Times*, he was working on a new book of poetry and two more musical projects: string arrangements of his songs and a set of R&B-inspired tunes. Then: "Leonard Cohen died during his sleep following a fall in the middle of the night on Nov. 7," the singer's manager, Robert B. Kory, said in a statement. "The death was sudden, unexpected and peaceful."

Cohen simply got better at the end, creating a trilogy of albums about mortality, apprehension and poise. They were full of entreaty and peril, and were driven by a sepulchral voice (owned by "just me and Johnny Cash," he'd said with a laugh) that sounded like truth beyond question. He always aspired to better angels, but he also admitted to – in fact, took a certain relief and pride in – an honest assessment of his less merciful side. On the late albums, he wasn't simply proclaiming prayers but also saw a duty for penance, in himself and all around him, in the broken hearts and spirits of a broken world.

"This sounds like the most hackneyed 19th-century platitude," Cohen once told me, "but in the midst of my own tiny personal troubles, I turned to the thing I knew how to do and I made songs out of it, and in the making of those songs, much of the pain was dissolved. That is one of the things that art does, is that it heals. A man who makes those choices in his own life is often more beautiful than his works. Any artist who remains true to himself becomes a work of art himself, because that is one of the most difficult things to do. If someone does have that vocation, and diligently applies himself to the exigencies that arise, he will lose a great deal but he will have created his own character." 

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Carrie Fisher

The actress on struggling with drugs, fame and anxiety, her marriage to Paul Simon, and finally finding happiness

What's the best part of success and the worst part of success?

The best part is money, traveling and the people you meet. The worst part is money, traveling and the people you meet. That's something Dorothy Parker would say. But I'll answer it straight: The worst part is being criticized. Things are taken out of context. Now, with the Internet, you're your own worst enemy. I'm not someone that can just not look.

You're lucky you got famous before Twitter and TMZ.

I'm so happy about that. Even though I was never a private person, I always controlled what was out there. Compared to now, I had a lot more secrets.

You're from Beverly Hills. What's the most Beverly Hills thing about you?

I drive a Tesla. I shop a lot. I like to think of myself as a collector of things, but it's more compulsive than that. So it's shopping. And collagen.

What was your favorite book as a child, and what does it say about you?

I was a freaky kid. I liked Truman Capote, and I was obsessed with Dorothy Parker. I wanted to be her. I was in love with words, and they saved me from a lot of stuff. Books were my first drug. They took me away from everything.

How do you relax?

Badly. I watch old movies, but I'm too high-strung and agitated. I really have to concentrate to relax. I literally have to do things like watch my breathing and tell myself what I'm looking at.

You were married to Paul Simon. Are you able to enjoy his music and dissociate it from your relationship with him?

Absolutely, though I do like the songs he wrote about our relationship. Even when he's insulting me, I like it very much. If you're gonna be insulted, that's the way to go. "Grace-land" has part of us in it.

What's the most important lesson you got out of that marriage?

I'm not good at relationships. I'm not cooperative enough. I couldn't give him the peace that he needed. Also, it's interesting when you're with another celebrity. The issue of celebrity becomes neutralized and you can get on to your bigger problems. We had very interesting fights. It's a shame, because he and I were very good together in the ways that we were good.

Do you ever speak with him?

"The Princess Diarist," Fisher's behind-the-scenes account of the first "Star Wars" movie, is in bookstores now.

No, I don't talk to him now. I miss him, but I have the best of him in his music.

What advice do you wish you'd gotten when you were younger?

Don't get loaded your whole fucking life. And I did get loaded my whole fucking life. You have to learn, and unfortunately it takes a lot of lessons for some of us to get it right.

Are there any upsides to doing drugs?

Absolutely. I don't think I was ever suicidal, and that's probably because of drugs. I have this mood disorder, so [drugs] probably saved me from the most intense feelings. And I loved LSD.

Describe your best trip.

I had lots of good ones. I had one where I was with Paul and my coat caught fire. We laughed at the flames.

Are there drugs you wish you'd never touched?

The stronger of the opiate class. I snorted heroin. I never did it the full-on way, which is basically what you do when you're trying to kill yourself.

How different do you think your life would have turned out had you never been cast in *Star Wars*?

Utterly. It's sort of the engine that pushed everything else through. I would have been a writer, though. I didn't really mean to be an actress.

Your new book is based on diaries you wrote while filming the first *Star Wars* movie. You admit to an affair with Harrison Ford on the set. Did you warn him that was going to be in the book?

I told him I found the diaries and that I was gonna publish them. He just said, "Lawyer." I sent it to him, and I told him he could take out anything he didn't like, but he never commented. I know the whole thing embarrasses him. That's what it's for, to embarrass all of us again. **Do you feel a sense of relief now that the secret is out?**

No. It's just some big overgrown cat out of a bag that could have stayed closed. To this day, I feel nervous around Harrison. He just doesn't engender relaxation. Maybe it's just me.

You've undergone electroshock therapy for years. What are the biggest misconceptions about that?

Probably that you have convulsions, or that it's used as punishment in a mental hospital, which is how it's depicted in every movie. It's very easy and effective. At the time I did it, I was depressed, and it ended the depression. Medication couldn't fix it. Therapy couldn't fix it. That did.

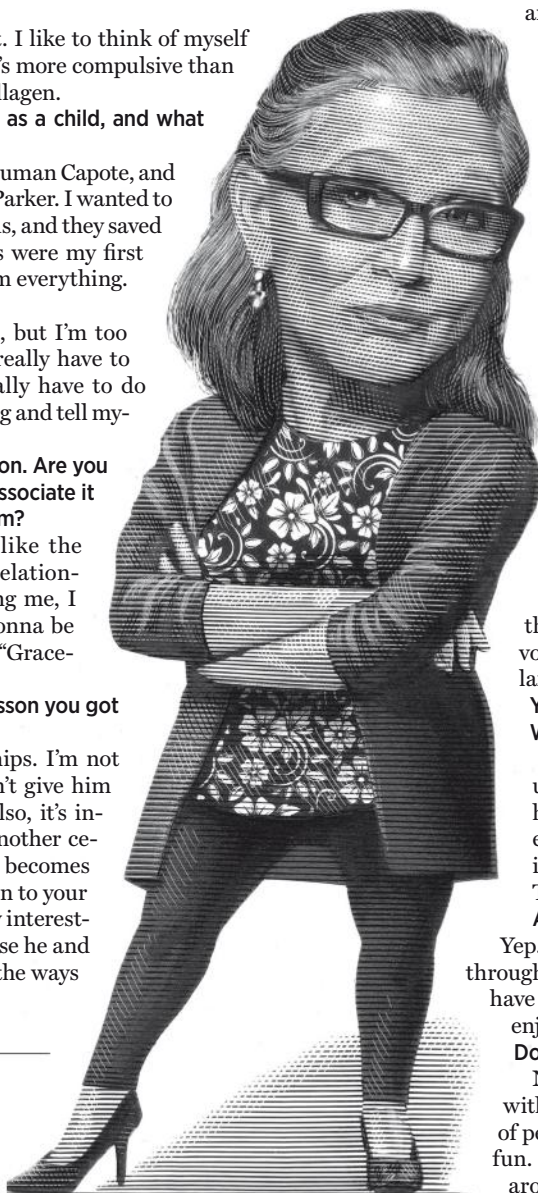
Are you happier now than you've ever been?

Yep. I've learned a lot. I trust my instincts. I've been through a lot, and I could go through more. I hope I don't have to, but if I did, I'd be able to do it. I'm not going to enjoy dying. There's not much prep for that.

Do you fear death?

No. I fear dying. Anything with pain associated with it, I don't like. And I've been there for a couple of people when they were dying, and it didn't look like fun. But if I was gonna do it, I'd want someone like me around. And I will be there!

INTERVIEW BY ANDY GREENE



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The new Schick Hydro[®] is designed like no other razor to knock out irritation. Its protective gel reservoir delivers 40% less friction than a lube strip.* So leave your face undefeated with Schick Hydro.

*Average vs. Quattro Titanium lube strip





55

400T



► 5



23A

24



SUCCESS IS WHAT YOU MAKE IT. BLACK IS HOW YOU DRINK IT.

JIM BEAM BLACK® — WORLD'S HIGHEST RATED BOURBON.



20A

21



23A

24



400T

22



drink smart®

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