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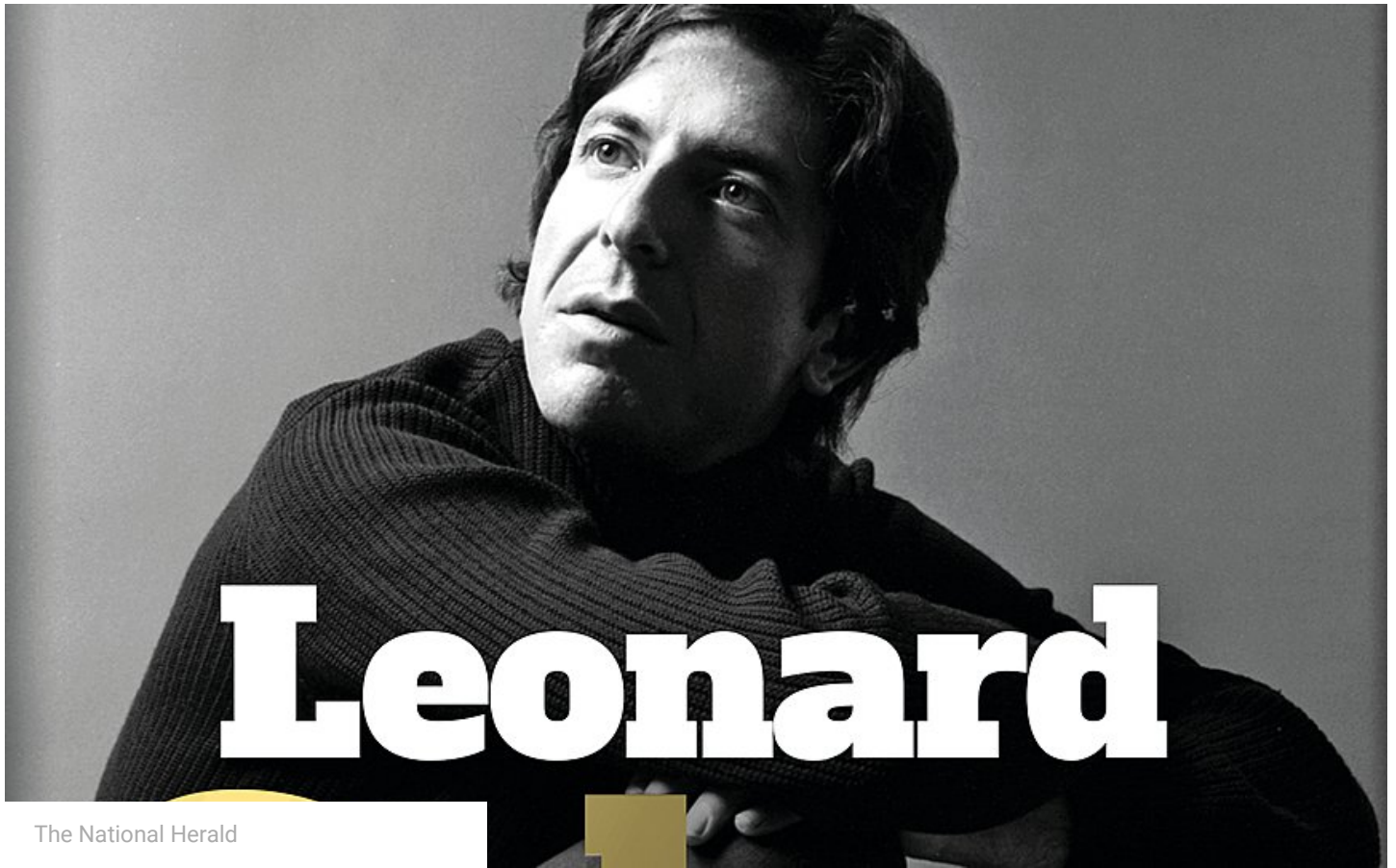
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CULTURE & ARTS - LITERATURE

New Book on Leonard Cohen Explores "Mystical Roots of Genius"



The National Herald

Leonard Cohen: The Mystical Roots of Genius by Harry Freedman. (Photo: Bloomsbury)

5/31/2021

By Eleni Sakellis

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When we listen to music, especially popular music, we are often moved by the universality of the feelings and emotions behind a song and its lyrics. We may be aware of how the songwriter's life and experience influenced them and inspired a particular song or even their whole career. How spirituality guides artists and their work is not often the focus of our interest, but it undoubtedly plays a key role for many.

Leonard Cohen: The Mystical Roots of Genius by Harry Freedman is set to be released this fall to coincide with the 5th anniversary of Cohen's death. Cohen was deeply learned in Judaism and Christianity, the spiritual traditions that underpinned his self-identity and the way he made sense of the world. His music is studded with

allusions to Jewish and Christian tradition, to stories and ideas drawn from the Bible, Talmud, and Kabbalah. From his 1967 classic *Suzanne*, through masterpieces like *Hallelujah* and *Who by Fire*, to his final challenge to the divinity, *You Want It Darker*, he drew on spirituality for inspiration and as a tool to create understanding, clarity, and beauty. In *Leonard Cohen*, Harry Freedman, a leading author of cultural and religious history, explores the mystical and spiritual sources Cohen drew upon, discusses their original context and the stories and ideas behind them.

The book delves into the imagination of one of the greatest singers and lyricists of our time, providing a window on the landscape of his soul. This book goes beyond traditional biography to provide an insight into the spiritual traditions behind Cohen's powerful lyrics. Freedman explores, song by song, how Cohen reworked myths and prayers, legends and allegories. Readers, and certainly fans of Cohen's work, will enjoy this fascinating book that deepens our understanding of Cohen's story, and offers a whole new insight into the man he was, and his music.

Cohen's connection to Greece, his love for the Greek island of Hydra where he lived for 20 years is also mentioned in the book. Just after his 26th birthday in 1960, Cohen purchased, with an inheritance from his late grandmother, a house in Hydra for \$1500. He planned to write novels while living on the sun-drenched island. Freedman writes that "life in Hydra was cheap and idyllic, but it didn't pay the bills," adding that Cohen would return to his native Canada, work at various jobs, then return to Greece to live for as long as he could with the money he had earned.

Cohen's house on Hydra was a three-story, whitewashed structure with five rooms and no electricity, plumbing, or running water. In these Spartan conditions, Cohen could work without distractions in private on the quiet island which then, as now, has no cars. Donkeys were, and still are, the main mode of transportation. As countless artists have observed, the light in Greece also offered a kind of inspiration like nowhere else in the world. Cohen told a journalist in 1963 that there was "something in the light that is honest and philosophical."

Cohen passed away in 2016 at the age 82, but his music continues to inspire and impress us with his unique artistry. Freedman's book highlights even further layers of meaning to the songs which speak so profoundly to so many of us, regardless of faith or spiritual background.

Leonard Cohen: The Mystical Roots of Genius by Harry Freedman, published by Bloomsbury, will be released on November 2. More information is available online:

<https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/>.