



SANJOY Narayan

download central

MUSIC WOMEN
Singer-songwriter Regina Spektor (far right) and blues legend Koko Taylor, who died early this month

The Lyrics KING

If you like Leonard Cohen, you are likely a lyrics person and must get his *Live In London* album

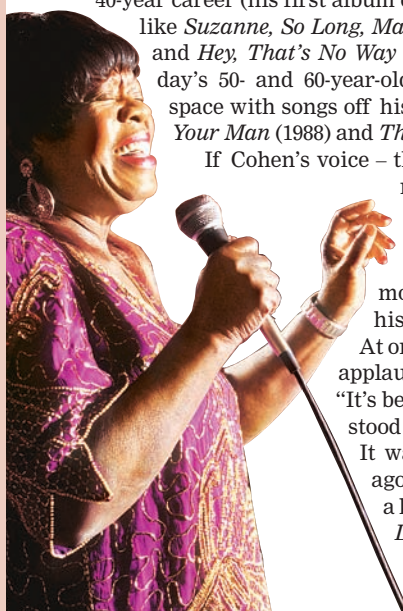


GOING STRONG
Canadian singer-songwriter Leonard Cohen performed at the 42nd Montreux Jazz Festival last July

WHEN A friend sent me a disc loaded with Leonard Cohen's much-acclaimed *Live In London* album in mp3 format, I immediately knew the provenance of those 25 tracks (26 if you count the one track by Cohen's long-time collaborators, the Webb sisters – Charley and Hattie). They were probably not legal. After all, *Live In London*, an over two-and-half-hour two-disc album, was still not available in Indian music stores at the time of writing. And legal downloads are not accessible from here either. Yet, given what those mp3 tracks were – the legendary singer's first concert in 15 years – I must confess I didn't feel any remorse in quickly popping that disc in and cranking up the volume.

And gosh, what I heard was gobsmacking. In a few months from now, Cohen will turn 75. And four years ago, he lost much of his retirement fund as well as publishing rights to his songs, leaving the then 70-year-old singer with just \$150,000. Cohen had alleged that his former manager, Kelley Lynch, had swindled him of his savings and more. To date, he hasn't been able to recover any of that. It's remarkable that Cohen bounced back from what is nothing less than financial ruin. *Live In London* was recorded at O2 in July 2008, two months into a 60-concert tour that the Canadian singer embarked upon.

Live In London's 26 songs cover compositions from every phase in Cohen's amazing 40-year career (his first album came out in 1968). Songs like *Suzanne*, *So Long*, *Marianne*, *Sisters of Mercy* and *Hey, That's No Way to Say Goodbye* that today's 50- and 60-year-olds grew up with share space with songs off his later albums – like *I'm Your Man* (1988) and *The Future* (1992).



If Cohen's voice – the familiar baritone remains largely unaffected by age – and the lyrics do it in an instant for you, there's more. Cohen intersperses his songs with his dry wit. At one point, he waits for the applause to die and then says: "It's been a long time since I've stood on the stage in London. It was about 14 or 15 years ago, I was 60 years old, just a kid with a crazy dream." *Download Central*, as you know, doesn't espouse the cause of mu-

sic pirates, but if anyone hands you a disc bearing *Live In London*, I'd suggest you pop it into your player without a thought.

If you like Leonard Cohen, then you are likely a lyrics person. I am too, sometimes. It depends on whether I can make out what the singer is saying, though. Never had that problem with Cohen but some singers take great lyrics and make sure you can't make out a thing they're saying. Like Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder who frustratingly mush-mouths through otherwise good lyrics, particularly in the band's later albums. He's not alone; mumblers abound in rock music. Yet, there are many more bands today whose songs have great, thoughtful lyrics. Today's indie singer-songwriters, whether it is an M Ward or Bon Iver (real name: Justin Vernon) or Samuel Beam (who records as Iron & Wine), to mention some of my favourites, create songs where lyrics are as important or more than the music.

SOME SINGERS TAKE GREAT LYRICS AND ENSURE YOU CAN'T MAKE OUT A THING

Regina Spektor is one such singer-songwriter who writes quirky music with personal but interesting lyrics. A Russian Jew, Spektor was raised in Moscow before moving to New York when she was nine (she's 29 now). Trained in classical piano and exposed to her father's collection of bootlegged western pop and rock as a kid in Russia, Spektor's music has an eclectic quality that embraces wide-ranging influences. Her first major album was called *Soviet Kitsch* and came out in 2004. A new album,

Far, is expected by the end of this month. I got a sneak preview of one song, called *Laughing With* and the lyrics really blew me away. Now, I wait in anticipation of that album.

Early this month, blues legend Koko Taylor died. Taylor, who was 80, is often called the Queen of the Chicago Blues. Taylor influenced legions of women blues singers and the gutsy sound of her music has been imitated by many. If you want to look back at Koko Taylor and her legacy and check out several of her songs go, like I did, to the NPR website (www.npr.org). Alternatively, go the web version of *Download Central* where there is a more direct link.

(To stream or download the music mentioned in this column, go to www.hindustantimes.com.

And send feedback to downloadctrl@gmail.com)

