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Hallelujah! Côte St-Luc tribute to Leonard Cohen

JANICE ARNOLD

jarnold@thecjn.ca

Leonard Cohen never lived in Côte St-Luc, but its residents' were touched by the late singer-songwriter – often directly.

“A lot of people knew him along the way,” said Mayor Mitchell Brownstein at the inauguration of Sentier Leonard Cohen Lane on Aug. 27.

“My mom [Irma] remembers him at Hillel as that cool guy wearing a turtleneck playing the guitar in the corner. She never knew he would go so far.”

Leonard Cohen Lane is the new name of the pathway that runs from Marc Chagall Avenue – another artist – through a green space to the Bernard Lang Civic Centre parking lot.

“We are honouring Leonard Cohen because of the influence he had through his words and music,” said Brownstein. “Arts and culture are important to Côte St-Lucers and adding his name to the landscape here is another way to recognize that fact.”

The guest speaker was Raphael Fleming, a childhood friend of Cohen's, who grew up with him in Westmount. They attended school and Congregation Shaar Hashomayim together and, in fact, were in the same bar mitzvah class in 1947.

Fleming brought a photo of his 1949 religious school graduating class at the synagogue. Cohen is in the front on the far right; Fleming is just behind him.

A touching moment of the ceremony was the singing of Cohen's signature *Hallelujah* by Cantor Daniel Benlolo of Shaare Zedek Congregation with his 27-year-old nephew Joshua Benlolo, who has developmental and physical challenges. They sang both the English and Hebrew versions.

“Leonard Cohen's music transcends generations,” said Cantor Benlolo. The crowd of young and old joined in on the chorus.

D'Arcy McGee MNA David Birnbaum agreed, and observed that Cohen – the music and the man – crossed cultural divides as well.

“He deeply touched all people,” said Birnbaum. “I remember my colleagues in the National Assembly, even those from the regions of Quebec, weeping [after his death in November 2016]. He belonged to all of us.”

“His sometimes painful message was universally real and human. He had a poignant understanding of humanity and all its challenges.”



Mayor Mitchell Brownstein, Fleming and Coun. Mike Cohen at the unveiling. JANICE ARNOLD PHOTO

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Leonard Cohen's music transcends generations

Cantor Daniel Benlolo

Cohen in his home on the Hydra in July 1969.

Then 18, she was travelling who knew Cohen. “We went and some musicians for Athens. Maybe I sang, too. It was great; he was a talent.”

Councillor Mike Cohen, who proposed the idea of the pathway, credited the suggestion to student Tamar Hertz. He said he would like to invite the singer's children to the ceremony, but they live in Los Angeles. He said he will visit Côte St-Luc the next time they are in town.

Veteran impresario Russell Cohen was present, said he will be a guest of honor at the dedication to the Cohen family. He is the co-promoter of the star of the Song tribute concert at the Bernard Lang Civic Centre on the first anniversary of Cohen's death.

Many Côte St-Luc residents were temporary friends of Cohen and shared their experiences in their youth. “He was a great friend,” she pointed out.

“He loved books and was a great reader. He combined the analytical mind with the artistic side.”