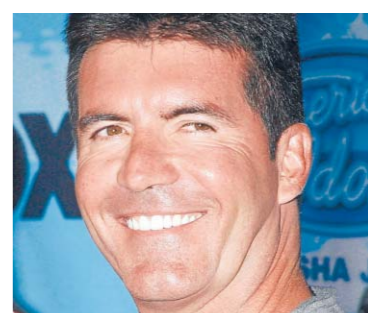


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The holy or the

broken



Leonard Cohen's hurt and healing *Hallelujah* will thicken the throats of his audience when he plays Wellington and Auckland next week.

IT'S resistible. Any song is. But it's looking more and more as if Leonard Cohen's *Hallelujah* is ascending into a pantheon of songs of our age.

He released it in 1984 and it wasn't especially a hit. His background singers made the chorus quite striking, but although Cohen is by common consent a majestic writer, if he was changed for being a singer he'd die innocent.

This song had a rare capacity to move people, even so.

Nearly a quarter-century after its release, it appeared in the UK singles chart a few weeks ago. Remarkably, different versions took both first and second place.

British *X-Factor* winner Alexandra Burke's gossypily rendition became the fastest-selling single by a British female to make No 1.

But if mumsy audiences embraced that incarnation, a hipper-than-thou countermovement erupted, partly against that the commercialism of the TV talent quest format, and partly because there was another *Hallelujah* they keenly felt was so very much more deserving.

The protesters bought up the single most acclaimed version of the song, which the exquisitely talented and ill-fated Jeff Buckley recorded three years before he drowned in 1997.

They sought to deny Burke the No 1 slot, and they came close.

A separate group of Cohen devotees, meanwhile, determined that his original release shouldn't be neglected, and they got that one into the lower reaches of the charts.

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The stag party

CHEERS
 MARK WILSON



THE banter around the change in one's relationship that occurs at marriage ricochets around society like gerbil in a pinball machine.

Often humorous, especially for the slightly male chauvinistically inclined among us, it sometimes seems to be a little exaggerated by those involved.

However, I've never been married and having bared witness to many lads being roped in, hog tied and subdued well and truly prior to marriage, I stand to be corrected.

The stigma of a loss of freedom, being forced to settle down, mow lawns and breed the next generation has given rise to a traditional last hurrah we have come to know as the Stag Do.

These epic nights, weekends and sometimes weeks have evolved over the years to become what I consider to be an attempt to show the prospective Stag what he will be giving up for the rest of his days, as well as to have one last ripper of a night with your mate before you have to take a back seat to the wife in the pecking order.

Of course, as well as some often alcohol-induced shenanigans, reminiscing over past glories and a good night out with the lads, you have the customary antics that take place to ensure the Stag has earned his right to escape the law of the lads and live for supposedly the rest of his days under the law of his wife.

One of the classics has to be a poor, dehydrated and disillusioned Stag tied naked to a pole in a backwater somewhere in desperate need of rescue, or scantily clad in female attire. There is also being tied to a chair while the erotic visitor the lads have chipped in for does things with beads and other implements to both themselves and the red-faced, but secretly loving it, Stag.

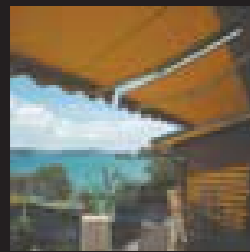
One of the more innovative I have come across was having two hot beauty therapists remove, in front of a crowd of chanting lads, the handcuffed Stag's entire stock of bodily hair below the neck. I don't know who felt more violated from that experience - the Stag, who endured the pain of the waxing and embarrassment of what a dip in lake Wakatipu can do to your manhood while on display for waxing, or the poor therapists who had to endure multiple offers of assistance and many a proposition to remove articles of clothing.

Today, I will be engaged in yet another of these Stag marathons - a three-day event in Te Anau to say goodbye and good luck to one Tim Muzz Acker.

Don't worry Sally, if we were to wax Tim he wouldn't make it on time to the wedding next weekend so we will think of another way for him to earn his passage.

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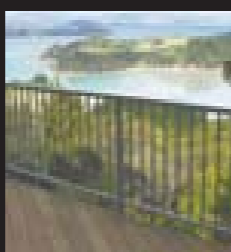
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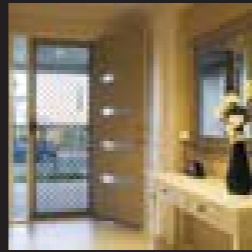
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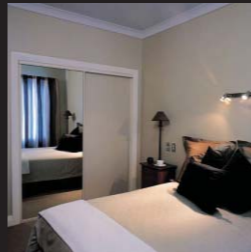
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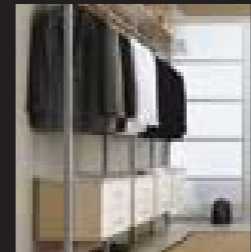
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