

DVD set doesn't miss a Beat

BY MICHAEL HIBBLEN

mhibblen@MiamiHerald.com

For those who missed the documentary chronicling the life of Beat Generation poet Allen Ginsberg, you can now catch it on DVD.

The two-DVD set, which went on sale Tuesday, also includes more than six hours of new footage not included in the original 1993 documentary.

Filmmaker Jerry Aronson presents a compelling decade-by-decade telling of Ginsberg's life. The interviews, old photos and film footage weave a rich narrative starting with his childhood, which was typical enough until at a young age he witnessed the nervous breakdown and institutionalization of his mother.

During his freshman year at Columbia University in 1943 he met Jack Kerouac and William S. Burroughs, who, along with Ginsberg, formed the core of the 1950s literary-political movement known as the Beat Generation.



AP FILE

ALLEN GINSBERG: The Beat Generation poet posed for a photo in Jack Kerouac Alley next to the City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco in 1994.

The DVD set includes a long conversation between Ginsberg and Burroughs at a kitchen table in 1983, reflecting on much of their experiences. Ginsberg guides viewers through an exhibition of his photographs, which chronicled the early years of the Beats. The film also touches on the indecency charges brought over the sexual language in Ginsberg's landmark

1955 poem *Howl*.

I interviewed Ginsberg in 1994 when he was performing at a film festival in Arkansas. Ginsberg said the charges proved to be a big help.

"The police made the mistake of advertising the book by trying to seize it and therefore what would have been a sort of esoteric, charming lavender volume of poetry printed in a couple hundred copies then began selling like hotcakes," Ginsberg said. "So I have to thank the police for advertising the book."

A judge later ruled the poem was not obscene, saying it had "redeeming social importance."

The DVD set also includes Ginsberg and Bob Dylan at Kerouac's grave in Lowell, Mass., in 1975. Ginsberg toured with the singer that year as part of Dylan's Rolling Thunder Revue.

The DVD features more recent interviews with the likes of Bono, Paul McCartney and Beck, showing the

GINSBERG AT A GLANCE

Poet Allen Ginsberg was born in Newark, N.J., in 1926.

His best known poem is *Howl*, which includes the opening line: *I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked, dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix, angel-headed hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night...*

Ginsberg openly discussed his links to communism, homosexuality, drugs and actively opposed the Vietnam War. He died in 1997 at age 70.

influence Ginsberg continues to exert on today's culture, a decade after his death in 1997 at age 70. While a little thin on his later years, the DVDs provide a rich insight into his life and appeal.

The DVD set went on sale Tuesday. Suggested retail price: \$34.95.