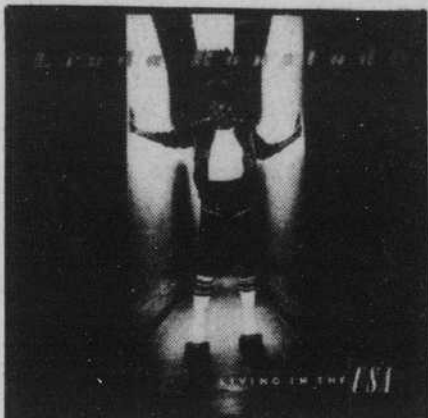


LPs

Living in the USA
By Linda Ronstadt
© 1978 Asylum Records
6E-155



Linda Ronstadt's latest, *Living in the USA*, is neither outstanding nor offensive — it's mediocre, which isn't surprising since Ronstadt generally aims for middle-of-the-road radio play.

Even real Ronstadt fans can't consider this album close to her best. Members of that group are probably safe in getting the album to keep their collections current and in being content with it; the rest of use are destined to be bored by it.

What the album lacks is smack. It begins with "Back in the USA," a Chuck Berry oldie. The most lively song on the album, its pulse drags. The tempo is too slow, and without the strong lead guitar licks Berry put into his version, Ronstadt's back-up musicians can't seem to pull it off. The result is a let-down similar to the you get from drinking weak tea.

It's mostly downhill from there. At best, the album delivers "Alison," an Elvis Costello song with lyrics that reach for something substantial to grab onto; at worst, it drones out "Ooh Baby Baby." The title alone is embarrassing enough, but Ronstadt's crooning-whining rendition of the "as-long-as-they-rhyme" lyrics make the track intolerable.

The soulful, down-and-out poetry and strong music in "Mohammed's Radio" is balanced out by Ronstadt's version of "Love Me Tender." When Elvis Presley recorded this in the Fifties, it was okay because the song was in step with the times. Elvis' version is only acceptable today because he didn't know any better back then. Ronstadt's attempt to sing it seriously comes on like a tear-jerking parody of itself. Just hope she was joking.

Ronstadt's strongest vocal effort on the album is "All That You Dream." Here, her voice varies from powerful to raunchy, and that's really where she excels. Her decision to drop the vocal vibrato technique used on most of the other tracks gives her a chance to show what she can do.

"Blowing Away" might not be too bad were it not for the attempt by Ronstadt's producer to imitate Pink Floyd in the song's refrain. The lead and background vocals are rich between choruses, but the misfit Floyd-like arrangement is insistent.

For a cheap trick, Ronstadt offers "White Rhythm and Blues." The title leads the listener to believe the song might just be a rhythm and blues number, but — trick! — all it turns out to be is soft country-rock, complete with tacky pedal steel guitar.

For those who enjoy trite, standard love songs, "Just One Look" fills the bill nicely. It could be just average enough to end up as the second Top 40 hit off the album. Hit or not, the piano part sounds like something from Romper Room.

"When I Grow Too Old to Dream" is a 1934 Oscar Hammerstein and Sig Romberg song that seems tailor-made for Bing Crosby to croon. Unfortunately, Bing can't do it anymore, but

that's no excuse for Ronstadt to try to take over for him. Like "Love Me Tender," this track just sounds silly and over-sentimental.

Still, people who have bought this album and been disappointed really have no room to complain. Ronstadt's previous record was, frankly, a tough act to follow. Like *Living in the USA*, it was geared toward AM radio. But it showed something more than standard quality. *Living in the USA* shows only standard Top 40 quality — no more and no less. **By Steve Rodgers**

Comes A Time
By Neil Young
©1978 Reprise Records
MSK 2266

Neil Young's *Comes A Time* has all the freshness of a first album. The music is subtle and temperamental. Listening to Young's voice, lyrics that seem sentimental are intoned into clearly etched phrases of ambivalence.

Does the rock star feel pain? In "Look Out For My Love," Young bitingly retorts, "Can I show you the break of day?" The melancholy message from Young is that the natural state of an earthling is pain.

On side two, Young stalks out his paranoias and finds their cause to be partly the fault of radio. Have you ever wondered why AM radio never plays Young's *In "Human Highway"* music? Young alludes to a conspiratorial front the radio industry has formed by not giving him airplay. "Already One" is another



poke at the industry, but at the same time it can be taken for a love song.

"Field of Opportunity" is a cynical song about creating self-righteous love songs and it acts as a flimsy excuse for the two weakest cuts of the album, "Motorcycle Mama" and "Four Winds"

The vocal harmonies of bois-

terous Nicolette Larson are a perfect complement to the softer-voiced Young. Many of the album's fully-orchestrated breaks were arranged by Young. Tension is increased gradually adding one instrument to the sound until the poet's voice comes in over the combined instruments to spin a mesmerizing verse of images.

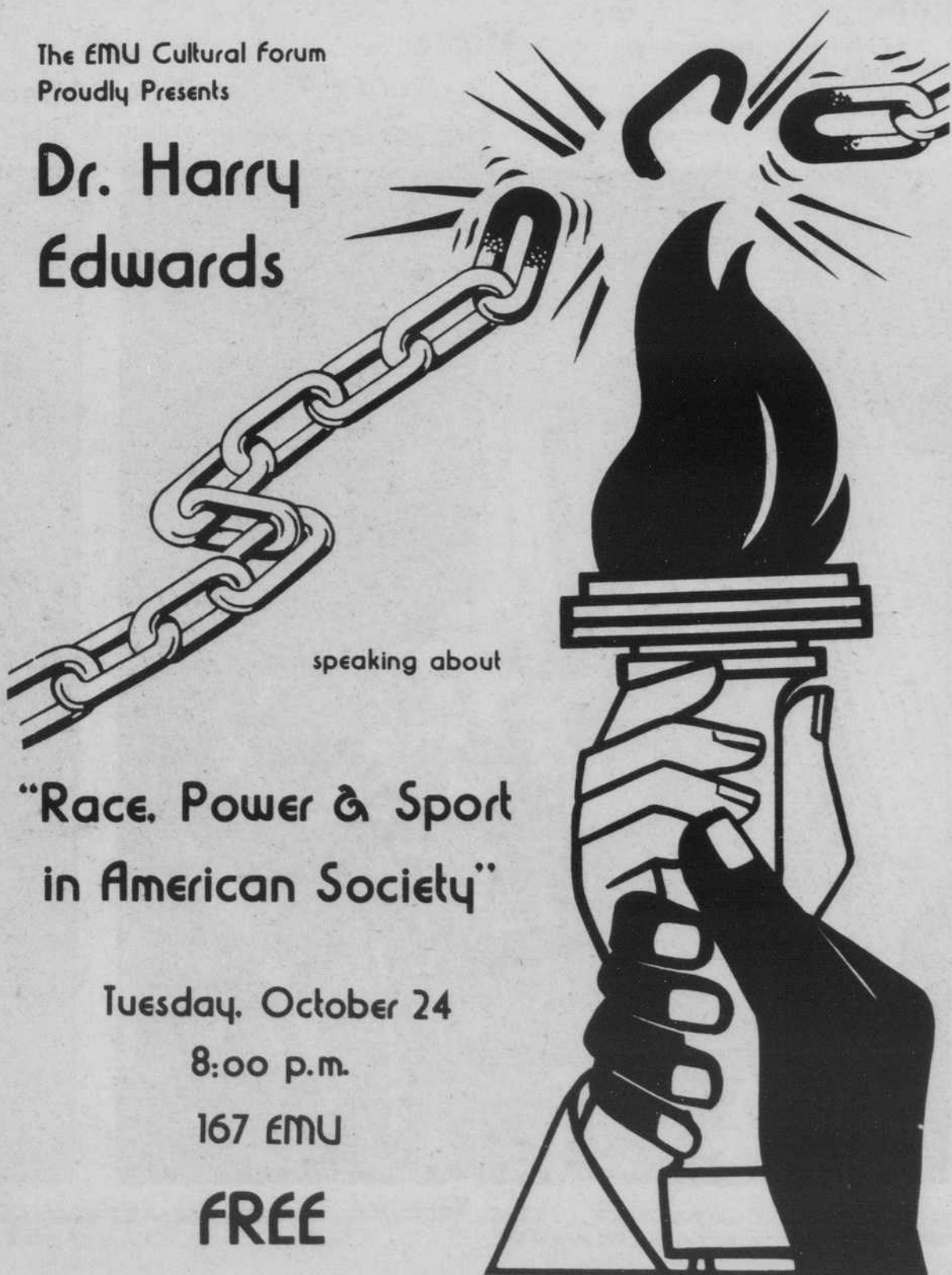
Comes A Time is a highly emotive album. It is a total experience in subtleties of feeling and thought that usually escape conscious detection without the aid of prompts such as albums like this one. Neil Young is an illusionist and a wearer of disguises. His poetry is original in its outlook on the world and rich in meaning. Everything a listener needs to know about Young is in his music and *Comes A Time* will deepen Young fans' understanding of this musician.

Young is one of few rock'n'roll heavyweights to have risen to the level of rock star/poet. While *Comes A Time* is not the best Neil Young album to emerge in the last few years — *American Stars N'Bars* with the two out and out rockers, "Carolina Queen" and "Hurricane" has the rock punch that this nocturnal, dreamy album misses — it is far better than 99.999 percent of the albums the rock industry has currently made available. **By Dave Steinman**

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