

arts/entertainment

Professional Ronstadt show thrills Omaha crowd

By Casey McCabe

Belting out song after song from a repertoire that includes many Top 10 songs, Linda Ronstadt gave the sell out crowd in Omaha's Civic auditorium everything it paid for Wednesday night.

And, considering the \$12.50 ticket price, that's driving a pretty hard bargain.

Much of the enthusiastic crowd was made up of dyed-in-the-wool Ronstadt fans, and the wild ovations she consistently received often left the smiling Linda standing sheepishly behind the mike waiting for things to die down to go into her next song.

Sporting a colorful string-held top, baggy black culottes, red spiked-heels, and a new short-cropped hairdo, she was a distinct audio-visual attraction and caused a

good many of the more devout to spend their time viewing the show blissfully through the viewfinder of their camera, out-maneuvering the security guards for a better shot.

If there were many worries about the so-called "new Linda Ronstadt," she dispelled them with her tame, easy-going stage presence and her selection of some 25 songs, which covered all the bases of her ever-changing image. She has excellent taste when deciding on whose songs to cover, and her Wednesday night fare included some of the ones she's made most famous. Such greatest hits ranged from pure country with Hank Williams' "I'm Still In Love With You" to pure rock with Chuck Berry's "Livin' In The U.S.A."

More familiar songs

Sandwiched in, and performed with impeccable precision, was almost all of her new album *Mad Love* (not quite as "mad" as some seem to think), plus back-to-back songs that were familiar to most all ears, including "It's So Easy", "Just One Look", "Blue Bayou", "Poor, Poor, Pitiful Me", "You're No Good", "Willin'", and "Heat Wave".

concert review

While many artists avoid tricky high notes, and stylizations in concert, Ronstadt excels in them. There was barely a crack in her gifted voice all night, and for that reason alone, she seemed to receive the loudest appreciation from the crowd. Few were left unimpressed as she held out notes for all they were worth.

Augmenting Ronstadt were noted L. A. session men Russ Kunkel on drums and Danny Kortchmer on guitar. And standing up on his own little tier was Peter Asher playing tambourine and providing occasional vocals. This wouldn't be notable except that Asher is Ronstadt's producer, manager, and image-maker, and if he wants to join in the fun on stage, nobody seems concerned in questioning his musical abilities.

Also touring with Ronstadt is Wendy Waldman, a respected female vocalist in her own right. A more emotional singer than Linda, she was handed the spotlight for two of her own songs and received a supportive response from the crowd.

Standing ovation

The highlights of the evening came on several different levels. "Silver Threads and Golden Needles", the furthest she went back in her repertoire, brought a roaring ovation, while the bluesy, hypnotic "You're No Good" eventually turned into a heavy spotlight guitar jam, for the night's hardest rock output. But it was her most recent single "How Do I Make You", that finally brought the appreciative, though complacent, crowd to its feet.

Perhaps it is as a romantic balladeer that Ronstadt created her largest following, and the crowd was not disappointed as she slid with the utmost smoothness into the especially pretty "Faithless Love", Neil Young's "Look Out For My Love," and her second encore of the Eagles "Desperado."

Linda Ronstadt is a seasoned professional who knows how to live up to an audience's expectations. For that reason her show is not particularly daring, different or ambitious. And the crowd loved every minute of it.



Photo courtesy Adantic Releasing Corporation

Picnic at Hanging Rock, a suspense film directed by Peter Weir, will show Sunday and Monday at Sheldon Film Theatre.

Sheldon to show Weir horror film

Picnic at Hanging Rock, directed by Peter Weir (*The Last Wave*) will show at Sheldon Film Theatre Sunday and Monday. Screenings will be at 7 and 9:15 p.m. with a Sunday matinee at 3 p.m.

"*Picnic at Hanging Rock* has run in New York City for a long time. It is set on St. Valentine's Day of 1900, in a snobbish Australian school for girls which is intent on keeping its dinner jacket on in the jungle. It is a world of giggling, tight-corseted schoolgirls in straw boaters and white dresses, of unspoken sexuality between employers and employees, school mistresses and pupils; of school mahogany doors solidly closed on far from solid mysteries in the bush," according to reviewer

Penelope Gilliatt in the April 23, 1979 edition of *The New Yorker*.

"The story, based on a novel by Joan Lindsay, with a screenplay by Cliff Green, is about the disappearance of some of the girls and of Miss McCraw, who is later reported to have been glimpsed vanishing in her pantaloons," Gilliatt said.

"This is not a Hammer horror film or a Boris Karloff film. Its terror does not rest on frightening makeup or on the sight of brains coddled in some lunatic scientist's laboratory. . . . The picture is eventually about the impropriety of imposing one culture upon another," the reviewer added.

Rundgren's songs prove his electronic wizardry

By Casey McCabe

Todd Rundgren once told a reporter that he planned to become more famous than Elvis Presley. A pretty brash statement from the young man who certainly had his work cut out for him when he made the remark some nine years ago.

album review

Even as a teenager, Rundgren was making a name for himself as an electronic wizard. By his early 20s, he was already a much sought-after engineer and songwriter, impressing George Harrison enough that he signed him to produce Badfinger. Nobody told Rundgren he couldn't be the 70s answer to Elvis, he showed considerable savvy. An eclectic genius, but a genius nonetheless.

Still, in the highs and lows of his career this last decade, even the best highs have not come near his lofty prediction. Apparently he never became tangible enough

for the masses he so painstakingly sought. He divided himself between two very different musical visions.

Rundgren was aware of this enough to dedicate an album to that very point. 1973's *A Wizard, A True Star* had one side featuring Todd Rundgren, the studio wiz-kid, ambitious electronic rock genius. The other featured Todd Rundgren, the hopelessly mellow romantic pop idol. What invariably happened is that the budding Rundgren fan chose sides both literally and figuratively and used that as a base for future expectations.

Alter egos

In the past six years, Rundgren has made attempts to separate these alter egos. For his ambitious hard rock phases, he acquired the group Utopia. For his insatiable romantic idol urges, he has chosen to remain solo. His latest effort is with Utopia, but seems to be aimed at synthesizing his two musical styles for that ever important mass appeal.

Last year's *Hermit of Mink Hollow* was a surprising solo success for Rundgren. Meanwhile, *Adventures In Utopia* has quickly peaked before hitting the top 20,

and made a rapid slide downward from there. Ah, but the fans can be fickle. It's strange too, because *Adventures In Utopia* may well be the most accessible album Rundgren's fronted since *Something/Anything*.

Though Rundgren's assessments of his own talent have not always been the most humble, when he joins Utopia it becomes a team effort. His name appears in the ~~album~~ type and his picture on the back is no bigger than the other three members of the group. The song credits are attributed simple to "Utopia," but Rundgren's vocals and composing abilities surface without much trouble.

The hardest rock on the album, "Last Of The New Wave Riders" and "Rock Love" are the tight, almost squeaky-clean examples of Rundgren's heavier visions. His music assaults the senses, but is not abrasive. The rest of the album treads on even tamer ground, though often not as appealing.

Limited success

Other members of Utopia take control with limited success. Keyboardist Roger Powell's "Love Alone" is cute, but has

trouble under the weight of its own schmaltz. Drummer John Willie Wilcox's jumpy new wave-inspired vocals on "You Make Me Crazy"—are mercifully saved by a much more pleasant chorus. The team efforts on compromised groundwork the best.

"Set Me Free" and "Caravan" have that smooth flow that is attributed to Rundgren's main asset of putting together amazingly-tight vocals. The album's best piece comes on "The Very Last Time" with a typically-Rundgren romantic melody, dissected with a hard, vengeful chorus and outstanding vocals.

Adventures In Utopia suffers from redundancy, some questionable lyrics and perhaps too much ambition. But it is a good album, that is easy to listen to for any lover of studio rock. Its high points show those flashes of brilliance Rundgren is capable of and Utopia is an individually-talented band which serves as an effective vehicle for him.

While that quest for the popular connection continues for Rundgren, it often seems he just might be trying too hard.