

# 'Last Date': Is it live or is it Emmylou?

**Last Date**  
Emmylou Harris  
Warner Bros.

Perhaps the most succinct appraisal of live albums was made by singer Jimmy Buffett when he entitled his concert opus "You Had to be There." Generally, live albums are not the most satisfying of recordings. The "In-person" spontaneity is lost when the stage show is transferred to vinyl. Artists often make live albums to fulfill contractual obligations, rather than out of a compelling pride in their stage shows. Additionally, the live album often is nothing more than a greatest hits collection, and a poor one at that, since the live versions are usually slower and less thorough than their studio counterparts.

However, Emmylou Harris' latest album *Last Date*, is a remarkable exception to the live album stereotype. Harris is not changing recording labels, she sings all first-time material and her band's live sound is as polished and

## Review

professional as its studio efforts.

Most notable on *Last Date* is the song selection. No title on this 12-song album has ever appeared on an Emmylou Harris album. Harris' sources for material have always been quite eclectic, which, in previous efforts made her albums seem occasionally disjointed. However, *Last Date* is a collection of mostly country standards that you've heard 100 times before, but never this well. It all fits together perfectly.

The album opens with Hank Snow's "I'm Movin' On," which serves as an excellent showcase for the Hot Band, Harris' group. Other country standards such as "So Sad (To Watch Good Love Go Bad)," "(Lost His Love) On Our Last Date," "Restless," and "It's Not Love (But It's Not Bad)" are given a certain sort of vibrance and energy other country music artists have somehow

overlooked.

Not content to be merely a "country singer," Harris branches out to unlikely sources, delivering compelling versions of "country boy" Bruce Springsteen's "Racing in the Streets"

and Neil Young's "Long May You Run."

The album's only shortcoming, if it can be called that, is an over-use of songs originally recorded by Harris' mentor, the late Gram Parsons. While Harris' ver-

sions are good, they do not surpass the originals. However, for those unfamiliar with Parsons' music (unfortunately, the numbers are legion), *Last Date* offers more than adequate introduction to such Parsons standards as "Devil in Disguise," "Juanita" and "Grievous Angel."

Except for this minor flaw, *Last Date* is a nearly perfect venture. As impressive as Harris' repertoire is the virtuosity of Hot Band. Guitarist Frank Reckard's solos are as fine as any on vinyl and Steve Fishell's steel guitar and dobro arrangements brilliantly punctuate each selection. And Harris demonstrates

she is no instrumental lightweight with her electric guitar solo on Buck Owen's "Buckaroo."

In short, Emmylou Harris' *Last Date* offers a thoroughly pleasing glimpse at one of today's most

consistent singers, live and in person. More importantly, it proves that a live album can be more than just live - it can be a real album as well.

Mike Frost



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