

# Records

**QUARTER MOON IN A TEN CENT TOWN**  
Emmylou Harris  
(Warner Bros.)

Emmylou Harris is, with Linda Ronstadt, one of the reigning queens of country rock. But while Ronstadt has become a veritable superstar through her kittenish sensuality and her powerful vocals, Harris' following continues to grow solely on the strength of her performance. Her fourth album, *Quarter Moon in a Ten Cent Town*, is a genuine pleasure.

It is a smorgasbord of country rock styles, each cut reminiscent of successful tunes from earlier releases. Harris is an interpreter of other people's songs, not a singer/songwriter. But she has always chosen her material well and *Quarter Moon* is no exception.

The opening song, "Easy From Now On," written for her by Susanna Clark and Carlene Routh, is a slow, acoustic-electric blend that gives Harris full play for her exceptional voice. She is gutsier on the country bar rocker, "Two More Bottles of Wine" and then slips easily into Dolly Parton's "To Daddy." This is a haunting ballad about her housewife mother's pain and isolation, and the vocals are so smooth that the song has almost slipped by before the power of the lyrics hits. When Mama leaves, "she never meant to come back home/If she did, she never did say so/to Daddy."

Two slower songs by Jesse Winchester ("Songbird" and "Defying Gravity") are rendered sweetly, but without much punch. The band's acoustic guitarist Rodney Crowell also provides two songs. "Ain't Livin' Long Like This" is a honky-tonk rock tune, suitable for Jerry Lee Lewis. The bayou flavor of "Leavin' Louisiana in the Broad Daylight" is enhanced by ex-Band members Garth Hudson on accordion and Rick Danko on fiddle and harmony vocals, and this song is one of the highlights of the record.

Willie Nelson provides a wonderfully gruff harmony for the ballad "One Paper Kid." And Harris also sings Utah Phillips'



Emmylou Harris, country rock queen

Dan Reeder

"Green Rolling Hills of West Virginia," a powerful song about leaving home for work in a northern city.

In the past, Harris has recorded with excellent studio musicians. On *Quarter Moon* she combines them with her own newly-organized Hot Band: Rodney Crowell (guitar), Glen Hardin (piano), Emory Gordy (bass), John Ware (drums), Hank DeVito (pedal steel) and the inimitable Albert Lee (lead electric guitar). Assisted by outstanding sidemen, the band produces tight, driving musical backdrops for Harris' exciting vocals.

There's something for everyone in *Quarter Moon*, yet it remains consistently interesting. Harris' voice ranges widely over different kinds of materials, and the result is a mixed bag of country-rock delights.

—Michael S. Kimmel

Michael S. Kimmel is a free-lance writer in Berkeley who reviews records for *IN THESE TIMES*.

these problems through self-parody, writing with the passionate frustration of a talented stylist confined to a position in the design department of Checker Cabs.

Despite a brief flirtation with fame a few years back stemming from a top-ten hit, "Dead Skunk," and a three-show stint as a troubadour on the TV show *M\*A\*S\*H*, Wainwright has never fulfilled the expectations of Clive Davis when he cleared out his Columbia stable to form Arista Records. His seven albums, spanning three labels, have garnered disappointing sales, averaging 70,000 copies each. A seasoned artist, he still can't crack the markets that his peers, the McGarrigles, Warren Zevon, Jackson Browne and Randy Newman, sweep through handily.

Part of the reason for Wainwright's popularity lag has been poor promotion, as evidenced by Arista's stingy support (a single black-and-white trade ad in *Billboard*) for his new record, *Final Exam*. In Chicago last week, just one month into the promotional tour, Davis unexpectedly withdrew all financial support, leaving the band Slow Train to return east while Wainwright continues west on his own. Another problem is his lyrics, which demand close listening in an age when the banality of "Stayin' Alive" songwriting has forced many listeners to seek solace in wordless jazz.

But the primary reason for Wainwright's lack of commercial success is his inability to translate the magnetism of his concert performances to vinyl. Although the material on *Final Exam* is brilliant on stage, the album itself is a chore to appreciate. With the exception of his sterling *Unrequited to the Nth Degree*, which combines studio cuts with live acts, Wainwright hasn't yet been able to put his irreverent sneer through radio speakers. Although all of his albums give a sense of what he's about, Wainwright himself admits, "The best way to hear me is to see me."

So, after years of suffering reviews that quote Hegel or Rimbaud to justify a recording artist's ho-hum talents, we simply offer this: We like Wainwright; once you've seen him, you will too.

—Paul Gregor and Paul Engleman  
Paul Gregor and Paul Engleman are free-lance writers in Chicago.



Loudon Wainwright III, the Mark Twain of the '70s

Loudon Wainwright III sings songs about suicide, chlorinated pools, necrophilia, hockey, domestic squabbles, crimes of passion, unrequited love, goffing, New York City dog doo, religious and political prophets past and present and the lowliness of the American tourist.

But he is more than a prankster on the rampage. A wry, cerebral wit, Wainwright is the Mark Twain of the cynical '70s. His lyrics shriek, mutter, stutter, whine

and demand attention. They are sarcastic, pun-ridden and starkly emotional without suffering the casualties of sentimentality.

Male performers just aren't capable of singing about love with the same "sensitive" feelings of Anna and Kate McGarrigle (Wainwright's ex-wife), Emmylou Harris or Bonnie Raitt; they are too awkward and their feelings too forced to be convincing without lapsing into sticky sentiment. Wainwright sidesteps

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## FILM

## Pretty Baby is nice but pretty short on substance

### PRETTY BABY

Written by Polly Platt and Louis Malle

Directed by Louis Malle  
Starring Brooke Shields, Keith Carradine

Paramount Pictures, Rated R

French director Louis Malle has a knack for exploring controversial subjects (mother/son incest in *Murmur of the Heart*; French collaboration with the Nazis in *Lacombe, Lucien*) with an intelligent blend of compassion and humor that avoids both preachiness and bathos. His newest film, *Pretty Baby*, falls short of expectations, but not because of its controversial topic, a 12-year-old prostitute in New Orleans, circa 1917.

Malle has no difficulty handling the unusual. Instead of a helpless, seductive turn-of-the-century Lolita, his Violet (well played by Brooke Shields) is a rope-skipping, wise-cracking tomboy who

takes her surroundings with a large dose of cynicism, observing the activities of her mother and the other "working girls" with an unblinking, jaundiced eye. Sex in her world is as commonplace as lunch. Being a virgin is tantamount to being made to go to bed early—a sign that she is not yet one of the grown-ups.

On the big day of her First Customer, Violet, in mock wedding dress and veil, is paraded around a room full of prominent Louisiana gentry and sold to the highest bidder—all of which she accepts with a combination of girlish excitement and casual bravado. Far from shrinking, Violet is as independent, willful and resilient a female character as we are likely to see on the screen.

Malle doesn't ignore the tawdry side of her involvements, but he has taken great care to avoid any content that might resemble "child pornography," concentrating mainly on the characters'



Brooke Shields, as Violet, the 12-year-old tomboy prostitute.

Maureen Lambray

mental and emotional conflict.

And yet Violet does not come off as a completely developed and believable child. Her aggressive pursuit of and marriage to the intense, withdrawn photographer (Keith Carradine) is stormy and theatrical, but somehow devoid of emotion. The two veer between a father/daughter and a husband/wife relationship. When Violet's mother, now married and "respectable," returns to claim her abandoned offspring, Violet cannot understand why they all can't go home together.

Likewise, we are at a loss to

understand the beleaguered Bellocq's sudden passionate refusal to surrender his child-bride, claiming that he "cannot live without her."

It is as if once Malle has latched onto his material, he can't decide where to take it. The film grinds away at a painfully slow pace. Its focus is fuzzy, at times the child's point of view, at times Bellocq's, at times that of a gifted director in love with an unfamiliar milieu.

The arty opulence and elegant civility of the New Orleans of this period fascinates Malle so that he allows the camera to linger far too

long on scenes that cease to be charming and quaint when repeated so often. He is so taken with the picturesque veneer that he has slighted the plot and the characters.

*Pretty Baby* suffers from a lack of direction and substance. Malle has again succeeded in transforming a potentially ugly subject into a very human, sympathetic story, but it is neither as bad or as good as it might have been.

—P. Hertel

P. Hertel reviews regularly for *IN THESE TIMES*.

## The filthy rich are also filthy

### THE GREEK TYCOON

Directed by J. Lee Thompson  
Written by Mort Fine  
With Anthony Quinn, Jacqueline Bisset, Raf Vallone, Ed Albert  
Produced by Allen Klein and Ely Landau; Rated R

*The Greek Tycoon* is a movie with a message: If you don't mind being crass, loutish and foul-mouthed, it pays to be filthy rich.

This film's vulgarity should not be underestimated.

*Tycoon* captures all the heart-warming suzziness of the supermarket tabloids, where each week another jet set romance ends (or begins) with a bloody nose, a torn designer gown or an attempted

suicide. The film leers at beauty, fawns over wealth and worships at the altar of power. It dreads virtue and exalts venality, "sophistication" and sleaze.

Jacqueline Bisset and Anthony Quinn portray the object and the tycoon respectively. They are Jacqueline Kennedy and Aristotle Onassis. The screenwriter has given them other names and slightly changed the historical facts of their lives, but only people suffering from premature brain death will fail to recognize them as they wend their way through the trials and torments of Aegean cruises and cocktail parties.

The film begins with the rise to power of the Kennedy clan. Am-

bitious Senator John gets summoned to Washington from a party at the Onassis spread, where Jacqueline and Ari have had their first romance-filled meeting. Kennedy gets elected, establishes the Camelot round table and then gets shot. Following a brief period of mourning at Hyannisport, Jackie runs off to make whoopee with the tycoon.

The big cheese offers her a marriage which in essence reads: you make love with me ten times a month, don't express your opinions in public, and I'll pay for all the emmenthaler and gruyere you could possibly desire. It's whoredom, and the lady knows it, but at least it's high-class whoredom.



Strange and wonderful things happen in Greece. Dishes are broken, calamari are consumed, and Anthony Quinn dances like *Zorba the Greek*. All this and more, against a lavish island background, with occasional trips to Washington, D.C., cloakrooms and New York discos.

And of course, there are tears, anguish and anger. The rich are different, you know, hotter tempered than the rest of us. They are allowed to say words like *shit*, *fuck* and *screw* in public the way ordinary citizens ask for change. In the dictionary of this movie, these are power words, words that signal emotion, concern, and love. The actors' faces do not.

—Max Powell Jr.

Max Powell Jr. is the son of science fiction writer Amaximander Powell.

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