

Into The Light
One hesitates to bring up Linda Ronstadt, but...

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Until now, if you have heard of Karla Bonoff at all, it is likely to have been by way of Linda Ronstadt, and in parentheses at that. Snugly encased, Bonoff's writing credit appears right after the title of three of the best songs Ronstadt has recently recorded. Ronstadt deals tough and tender justice to such Bonoff ballads as *Someone To Lay Down Beside Me* and *Lose Again*.

Now Linda Ronstadt sets a daunting standard and casts a long shadow. But watch while Karla Bonoff comes out, all on her own into the light.

A first album, called simply *Karla Bonoff*, has so far sold over a quarter of a million copies, a surprisingly strong first-time showing - even considering the endorsement, and occasional vocal contributions of Karla's friend Linda. Jackson Browne picked Bonoff to open his latest concert tours, and after seven weeks of stumping the South, Southwest and Midwest, she could finally start singing *Someone To Lay Down Beside Me* without having the audience suspect that she had copped one of Ronstadt's set pieces.



Besides all the obvious advantages, a superstar's patronage can have risks. Bad enough to have audiences believing that you have knocked off the reigning empress of sunsweet, Southern California rock. But it's worse having to take some of her knocks. Bonoff's first album was greeted with wildly enthusiast reviews. A flintheart might, however, worry about an occasionally unreliable voice and a tendency, like Ronstadt's, toward a mood of languid victimization, as when the heartsore protagonist of *Falling Star* confides, "It rains a lot inside my heart."

More often, though, Bonoff's songs are at once genuinely poignant and strong-willed, with lines of startling grace: "The people I've seen - they comes in between - the cities of tiring life" Put lyrics like that together with a typically luxuriant Bonoff melody and there are clear indications of a formidable talent. Watch her perform in her still uncertain way, singing sweet and simple, and sometimes flashing her fast, foxy smile, and there are strong intimations of stardom.

Bonoff, 26, has been making preparations for that eventfully - no, say likelihood - during most of the past decade. Born in Los Angeles, raised in Westwood right next to the UCLA campus, Karla spent her early years "being into clothes and stuff." At 16, however, she started lining up on Mondays outside the Troubadour in L.A. to audition material for hoot night and catch early performances by James Taylor and Jackson Browne. "The music scene was first attractive for social life," Bonoff recalls now. "I was bored with the other kids in high school and becoming kind of a hippy."

Karla tried UCLA for six weeks, got her boyfriend, bassist Kenny Edwards (a mainstay of the Ronstadt band) to write her English papers, then dropped out. The pair formed a group called Bryndle with Andrew Gold and Wendy Waldman, cut one unreleased album and ended up playing for rent money in a bar near the airport. "We did Top 40 stuff like *Jumpin' Jack Flash* and *I Want To Take You Higher*," she says, adding, "At least my piano playing got stronger."

After the group disbanded in 1971, Bonoff began writing - a mostly arduous process. "My more emotional side comes out when I write," she says. "All these songs, a lot of them sad songs, were real - not real stories, but about real emotions I didn't even know I was feeling until I wrote the songs." *Someone to Lay Down Beside Me* was written after watching the afternoon soaps. The lyric took 20 minutes but usually it all comes a lot harder than that. Says Bonoff, "I'll play the melody over and over, and words will just come out of my mouth. When I feel they're good, I'll write them down." After a while, she started going back to the Troubadour, trying out her new material. She also played a tape of "Lose Again" for Ronstadt, who took six months to decide on the song. "Hey, you know that's real good," Bonoff remembers Ronstadt saying, "What else have you got?"

Just now, Bonoff is winding down from all those concert gigs, pattering around her Woodland Hills house, watering her plants and trying not to fret.

Just now, she is worrying over material for a new album. Touring has put a crimp into her writing and, along with the highs of audience enthusiasm, Bonoff also experienced the some of the rigors of road life. "All this," she comments, "was a lot more fun before it became a career." In Miami, hotel maids made off with her jewelry, and Bonoff, in unusual dudgeon, sought reprisal in classic rock-'n-roll style: trashing the hotel room. "I started throwing stuff all around," she recalls, "but nothing broke. It was all made of plastic and I just gave up."

Later, however, during a quiet moment, she came up with a sassy new tune called *Trouble Again*.

Well you think I would have learned by now
And I'd keep away from you somehow
'Cause just like a little child
I keep comin' back for more
And baby when you call today
Don't you know that I'll come out and play
I never really was a bad girl
But you got me in trouble again.

Sarcastic, funny and sexy. *Trouble Again* is just the kind of song Karla Bonoff says she wants right now; "more humorous, less dreamy-eyed." Linda won't get this one, and Karla will not need to give it up or even loan it out. It's all hers. All the way.