



Leah Kunkel **"Leah Kunkel"** / **"I Run With Trouble"** Rev Ola Records

The albums featured on this 2 for 1 reissue first saw the light of day on Columbia Records just over a quarter of a century ago. **"Leah Kunkel"** was co-produced by Val Garay and Russell Kunkel. Garay possesses a considerable track history as an album producer and engineer [Kim Carnes, Bonnie Raitt, Linda Ronstadt, Nicolette Larson], while, at the time, Leah was married to drummer Russ Kunkel whose list of clients remains literally endless. Leah opened her debut set with Peter McCann's "Step Right Up," and if you're looking for a peg on which to hang Kunkel's music, then her approach is not dissimilar to that of, say, Jennifer Warnes and Karla Bonoff – although Bonoff penned the music she recorded. There are a couple of Stephen Bishop tunes here, the jazzy "Under The Jamaican Moon" co-written with Leah, and the album closer "Fool At Heart." The only other Kunkel original on her debut disc is the introspective "Souvenir Of The Circus."

Kunkel states unequivocally in the liner notes that *"I wasn't singing any song that Cass sang lead on."* The reason ain't, the late Ellen Naomi Cohen [aka 'Mama Cass'] was her older sister by seven years. Her pick is John Phillips' "Step Out," which appeared on the Mamas And Papas reunion release **"People Like Us"** sung by Denny Doherty. William D. Smith co-wrote "Down The Backstairs of My Life" with Eric Mercury, and it was Garay's idea that Kunkel covered the tune. Smith plays piano on the track, and he later accompanied Kunkel on tours. Reciprocating her vocal contribution to his 1971 debut album, Jackson Browne sings on Harlan Collins "Losing In Love."

Leah would have been familiar with Jules Shear from his membership of L.A. band, The Funky Kings and his then, current, combo Jules and The Polar Bears. Here she covers his "Don't Leave These Goodbye's." As for chart songs, the Fuqua/Bristol/Bullock collaboration "If I Could Build My Whole World Around You" had been a 1967 U.S. Top 10 single for Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell, while Barry & Maurice Gibb's "I've Got To Get A Message To You," was a # 8 U.S./# 1 U.K. Pop hit during 1968 for the Bee Gees. The backing vocalists on the latter cut include Renee Armand who, a couple of years later, along with Leah and Marty Gwinn was a member of the trio, The Coyote Sisters.

Shot inside a train carriage, if you look closely at the front cover shot of **"I Run With Trouble"** [featured on the rear of the reissue liner booklet], in a layer beneath [the train shot] you'll find a full-face portrait of Leah. The resemblance to Ellen Naomi Cohen is undeniable. Co-produced by Henry Lewy [Joni Mitchell, Neil Young] and Leah, the collection featured two unrecorded Jimmy Webb songs, the album opener "Let's Begin," and the subsequent "Never Gonna Lose My Dream Of Love Again." Both cuts feature Leah and Graham Nash on backing vocals. Her sophomore album included two Leah Kunkel originals, respectively, "The Only Man On Earth" and "Temptation." In the former the narrator endeavours to hang on to love whatever the cost, while the latter is a treatise on treading a path littered with temptation. Pretty much following the formula established on her debut, her sophomore effort included songs by Peter McCann ["Hard Feelings"], Harlan Collins ["Heart Of Stone" – the harmony singing on this cut is to die for] and William D. Smith ["Dreaming As One"] – the latter song being co-written with David Palmer.

Chip Douglas [real name Douglas Farthing Hatlelid] is probably best known for his membership of The Turtles and the Modern Folk Quartet, and his role of producer for The Monkees, and Leah covers his "Someone On Your Mind." Featuring music by Craig Doerge and lyrics by his wife, Judy Henske, Kunkel's voice and piano rendition of "Fast Asleep," appeared on the soundtrack to the movie **"Rich Kids"** [1979]. Along with bassist Leland Sklar and lead guitarist Danny Kortchmar, Doerge and Kunkel were members of The Section, the 'quartet of choice' from the 1970's onward for any self-respecting

singer/songwriter when it came to recording session work. Leland, Craig and Russ contributed significantly to “**Leah Kunkel**,” but only Doerge appears on “**I Run With Trouble**,” and solely on “Fast Asleep.” Don Yowell, a close friend of Leah’s, passed during 1984, a victim of AIDS, and his song “I Run With Trouble” closes this reissue.

Once there was a time when I lived, ate, slept and dreamt female singer/songwriters. Come to think of it, when seeking aural relaxation I still enjoy the genre. It has to be said however that Kunkel’s albums, content wise, are pretty much wall to wall love songs! Nevertheless, it’s great to have them back print – I guess my old vinyl copies are now eBay bound. OK personal greed never abates! Which label is up for resuscitating on CD, The Coyote Sisters debut album?

Folkwax Score 7 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

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