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review by Stephen Holden

Karla Bonoff
Karla Bonoff (first album)

The impressive debut by Karla Bonoff, three of whose songs appeared on Linda Ronstadt's *Hasten Down the Wind*, is marred only by its emphasis on the two women's similarities; this does a disservice to Bonoff, a writer just recently becoming known as a performer, since comparisons will be inevitable. Karla Bonoff was produced by Kenny Edwards, Ronstadt's bass player, and uses most of Ronstadt's 1976 band. Although tasteful, the production's scaled-down variation on the formula that scored for another artist makes the formula, powerful as it is, begin to sound like a cliché.

Bonoff's songs of longing, loving and losing are extraordinarily sympathetic to Ronstadt, but her singing is not as similar as the material and the settings would suggest. Bonoff's approach is softer, plainer and more tentative. Vocally, she's a cross between Jennifer Warnes and Wendy Waldman. Bonoff's own versions of "Lose Again" and "If He's Ever Near" are more understated and personal expressions of loneliness than Ronstadt's. Of the unfamiliar tunes, three are outstanding. "I Can't Hold On" has a mid-Sixties British lilt enhanced by Andrew Gold's catchy guitar hooks; "Falling Star" and "Rose in the Garden" are hauntingly plaintive folk-rock ballads on a par with "Lose Again." The consistency of the material confirms a major writing talent; the performances show a promising singer.