

The Legend of Jesse James

by Chris Mitchell

Presenting villains in a sympathetic light, creating folk heroes, is a common practice, and perhaps no one has done so well by this practice as Jesse James. Paul Kennerley's **The Legend of Jesse James**, on A&M Records, is a musical biography of the outlaw that does as much to explain the legend as propagate it.

Kennerley builds the story around four violent events in

James' life, constructing a musical narrative that features several very good songs and enough reflective background to fill in the time gaps.

The first two events, acts of violence committed against Jesse by Federal authorities, comprise side one of the record. Fifteen year old Jesse receives a beating at the hands of a Yankee posse and sees them hang his stepfather. This incident drives Jesse to seek revenge, so the youngster joins a guerilla fighting

force. He is then tricked and ambushed and left for dead. It is at this point that he meets his future wife who nurses him back by Robert Ford.

The portrayal of James as a greedy and ruthless man is combined with the image of a God-fearing and wronged victim of circumstance. Kennerley avoids presenting James as a clear cut good guy or bad guy, and this is to his credit. back to health. Jesse returns to farming, but soon decides to rob banks.

On the second side, Jesse and his gang are turned away during their attempt to rob the Northfield bank and they suffer heavy losses. Eventually, Jesse is shot in the

The production, handled by Gyn Johns, is smooth and wellpaced. The music is first-rate country with a few stray pop notes here and there. The rhythm section of Levon Helm and Emory Gordy is excellent and the guitar and banjo playing of Albert Lee, Jesse Ed Davis and Bernie Leadon is sturdy and spirited.

The role of Jesse is sung by Helm, whose singing is as strong and rugged as ever. His scariying "High Walls" is the album's definite high point. Johnny Cash, as Jesse's Older brother Frank, is given the cream of the material and his vocals manage to make the songs even better. His singing here is evocative and as roughly tender as an older brother should be.

Emmylou Harris sings the part of Zerelda, Jesse's wife. She is given the two ballads on the album and renders them compassionately and beautifully. The song she sings as Zerelda nurses Jesse back to health, "Heaven Ain't Ready For You Yet", is the best cut on side one.

Lee and Charlie Daniels appear as Jim and Coleman Younger. Lee is very good and steals Daniels' thunder completely. Daniels does manage one good performance on side one, singing "Riding With Jesse James", but on side two he puts in the worst performance on the record. The song, concerning the Northfield robbery, is the only bad cut on the record, due mostly to Kennerley's abandoning his songwriting for a talking style country song. Daniels is bland and predictable here, sticking in a few too many of his trademark "hay-ell's" for his own good.

The finale is the perfect ending to a very good record; Helm, Cash and Harris singing in exceptionally fine harmony bringing everything to an almost operatic ending. Kennerley may not have the skill to record American folklore that Robbie Robertson has and he may not have the ear for country music that Rodney Crowell has, but this is a very good album showing Kennerley to be a writer of some talent. More importantly this record shows some of the finest contemporary country music talent performing a work that embodies the spirit of the music.



Trini Alverado as Pamela Pearl and Robin Johnson as Nicky Marotta in Times Square.

Nothing from New York

by Rob Cohn

When we first heard about **Times Square** back at the beginning of 1980, we heard that "it is going to do for New Wave what **Saturday Night Fever** did for disco". As they were coming from the same filmmaker (RSO), it seemed entirely possible.

Seeing the film **Times Square** left me wondering why the P.R. people ever made that statement in the first place. Just to set the record straight, this film does absolutely nothing for New Wave. I mean zilcho.

Basically the film is about two young teenagers, Pamela Pearl (Trini Alvarado) and Nicky Marotta (Robin Johnson) who are from totally different backgrounds. Pamela is the daughter of an ambitious politician; Nicky is a delinquent who grew up in Times Square. This 42nd street neighborhood is (coincidentally) the part of New York that Pamela's father is trying to clean up.

The two girls meet when they are (coincidentally) placed in the same room of a neurological hospital for different reasons. Bored yet? Too cutesy for you? No problem, I'll make it easy for you. They run away from the hospital together and the rest of the movie chronicles their rise to celebrities in the Big Apple.

The rise to fame is aided by popular D.J. Johnny LaGuardia (Tim Curry) who is an

on air Dear Abby for the street people. Curry is best remembered for his starring role of Frankenfurter in The Rocky Horror Picture Show in which he was brilliant. As LaGuardia he is forgettable. The film does not allow for enough character development with the result that Curry doesn't realize his full potential. Throughout the film it is impossible to figure out his motives.

The opposite is evident with Pam and Nicky. Both Alverado and Johnson develop their characters to the point where we know both; where they have come from as well as where they are going.

Kudos must especially go out to Johnson as this is her first excursion into any form of Show Biz. She is one of the most refreshing performers to grace the screen in a long time.

The Movie itself is flawed. It is not representative of the life that it is trying to depict. The music (theoretically integral) is there, but it is established as a necessary part of the whole. As for New Wave—where?

The film is not a worthwhile insight into what is happening on the streets of New York—you'd be better off listening to the first two Ramones albums if that's what you're looking for. As a statement, the movie fails. It should not be considered as a musical milestone, even if that's what the P.R. people want you to think.

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