
PEOPLE ON THE COVER



Linda Ronstadt had the flu. She had just struggled valiantly out of bed to face our cameras, and she was waiting, wrapped in a terry-cloth bathrobe and eating a banana, for her hair to dry. A bouquet of long-stemmed American Beauty roses—a gift from an admiring friend—lay wilting on the coffee table of her hotel suite, still wrapped in the paper they had come in. Linda regarded them sorrowfully. "I didn't have a vase for them when I came in last night," she said. "I could have put them in the bathtub, but it was either them or me, and I won."

The picture you see on our cover is a triumph of grit over flu. But photographs of Linda are slightly deceptive. For one thing, she has glints of gray in her glossy brown hair, and tiny frown lines between her big brown eyes, and an imperfect nose—all of which make her face more interesting and extraordinary than most faces you could name. And, the in-person Linda laughs and smiles a lot but the on-camera Linda has a pouty, smoldering sexuality and a congenital fear of smiling. Of course, with the flu, who feels like smiling? But I did once say to her, "You do pouting very well," and she said, "I practice."

Let me tell you something about what it takes to make a Redbook cover portrait of Linda Ronstadt. There is a fashion editor and her assistant. There is a photographer and his assistant and the man who runs his studio. There is a hair stylist and a make-up artist and an art director. And there are a couple of cats. And poor Linda Ronstadt had to walk into this room full of strangers

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and be both beautiful and cheerful. At one point we decided to give her a break, and we cleared the studio of everyone except Linda and the photographer, Ron Colby. But we kept peeking through the keyhole, and the art director, Maxine Davidowitz, kept shouting, "Isn't there a law about the two of you being alone together, like in a gynecologist's office? Don't you have to have a nurse present?"

Before the shooting I had gone into Max's office and extracted a promise. "Swear to me," I begged, "that there will not be any Linda Ronstadt records playing on the stereo when we walk in." She agreed that would be tacky, and promised. Now, usually at a cover shooting we sort of prance around a lot and clown and sing old camp songs and do impressions of Barbra Streisand—just to loosen everybody up. But it's a little intimidating to do that in front of one of the most successful entertainers in the world. So we put some music on the stereo in the background and pretty much ignored it until we realized it was a funereal dirge that was making everyone singularly depressed. And then, much to our embarrassment, we realized that we didn't have any other music. (It's something like inviting Julia Child to dinner and discovering that all you have in the pantry is canned pork and beans.) We finally resorted to the radio.

We spent a lot of time rummaging through Linda's closet, deciding on costumes. ("You bring what you have," she'd told us, "and I'll bring what I have, and we'll play.") Up until a year ago, all she owned was jeans and two dresses to take on the road for concerts. Then she discovered clothes—and a sense of fashion that ranges from cowboy boots to funky furs. (Once the Los Angeles Dodgers gave her a baseball jacket, which she took to a furrier and had copied, so now she has a little beaver baseball jacket.) She was also wearing an extremely beautiful simple diamond bracelet—just like a strand of pearls, only they were diamonds—and we casually remarked, "That must have been a loving gift from a generous friend." "Are you kidding?" she said. "I should only find somebody who would buy me things like this."

Right after our cover shooting, Linda sailed for Europe for a much-needed vacation, taking her mother along, she said, "just to be sure I'd go." Last year, instead of a vacation, she went to Nashville and spent ten days recording a not-yet-completed album with Dolly Parton and Emmy Lou Harris, harmonizing happily with their two voices and feeling "like lecithin in a candy bar."

The cover is an interesting portrait, and the article on page 23 is an interesting portrait too. Do read it and find out why she sings all those sad songs.

—AIMEE LEE BALL