

# 5 Minutes with...

Jeff Hanna  
of the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band



**Your 1979 hit “An American Dream” is still an all-time favorite with a really broad range of music fans. Is that the song people come up and say *Wow, does that ever freeze a moment in time for me!***

It’s definitely one of them. Prior to that there was “Mr. Bonajangles,” of course. “An American Dream” was written by our friend Rodney Crowell. When I heard it I thought it was a really good fit for us and I enjoyed singing it. And as a bonus we were able to get Linda Ronstadt to sing on it. It’s a cool song, kind of whimsical. It’s about this guy who’s daydreaming, trying to escape Augusta, Georgia and get to the beach. There’s not enough money to get to Jamaica, so let’s go to Coconut Grove.

**Which, by the way, is very expensive four decades later. He probably couldn’t afford Coconut Grove in 2018.**

[Laughs] It was a long time ago!

**Linda Ronstadt was not your first thought for the female vocal.**

Emmylou Harris had performed on Rodney’s version. That’s how we first heard it. We wanted to get Nicolette Larson to sing on our version. We reached out to her to see if she wanted to sing on it. She was busy and kind of lukewarm about it. It never even occurred to us that Linda would be able to do it. She

was on the cover of *Time*, the biggest female singer in rock.

**How did she end up on the record?**

We were recording in Los Angeles and my co-producer, Bob Edwards, said “Man, let’s give Linda a shout. Maybe we’ll catch her in town.” I gave her a call and she said, “You’re in town? Let’s go get dinner.” I said, “Yeah, dinner...but would you also sing on this record with us?” She asked what it was and when I said “An American Dream.” She said, “Oh, I love that tune! I can be there in 30 minutes!”

**Legend has it she walked into the studio in a martial arts outfit and nailed it in a couple of takes.**

She was just coming from a karate class. She listened to it once and did two takes. Linda really added something to that record, so we’re grateful for that. She’s a pro. **EDGE**

**Editor’s Note:** Jeff Hanna and his longtime Nitty Gritty Dirt Band partners Bob Carpenter and Jimmie Fadden still pack ’em in during a busy touring schedule in the U.S. and Canada. When they recorded “An American Dream,” for the album *An American Dream*, the group was known as The Dirt Band. One of the band’s original members (in 1966) was Jackson Browne. Among the newest members is Jeff’s son, Jaime, formerly of The Mavericks.