



96 The Jam
The Gift



97 Rachmaninov
Symphony No 2

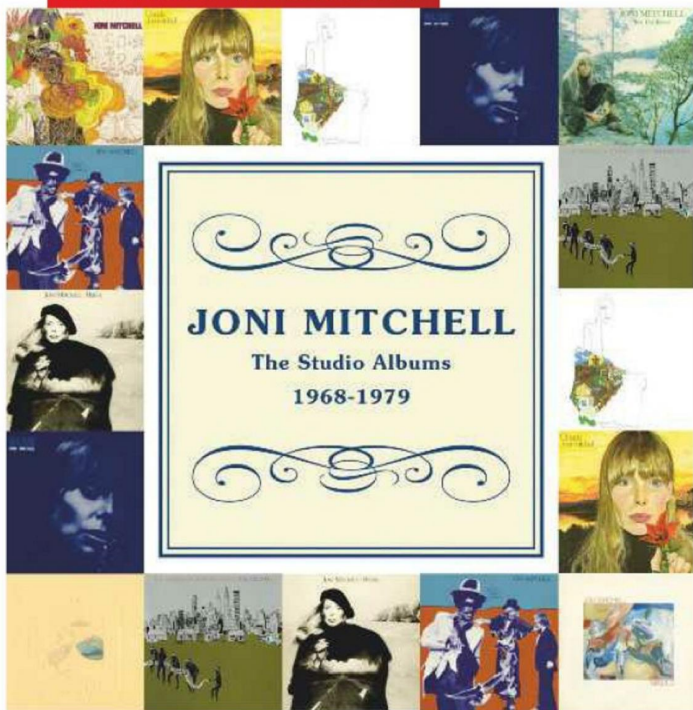


97 Peter Gabriel
Live in Athens 1987

Music reviews

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ALBUM OF THE MONTH



Joni Mitchell
The Studio Albums 1968-1979

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★★★★★

Warners/Rhino

10 CD box set

WITH CURRENT HIGH-FLYING SONGBIRDS such as KT Tunstall, Laura Marling and Joanna Newsom citing her as a seminal influence, Joni Mitchell's seminal sway on contemporary female songwriting is as strong today as it ever was. Like Bob Dylan, she has become the benchmark by which all who have followed in her wake are judged.

Read the reviews of any aspiring new female singer-songwriter in the rock press, and you will not get more than a sentence or two before Mitchell's name is tossed into the debate. You simply cannot write about female songwriting without reference to Mitchell's extraordinarily consistent and classy body of work, which defined, refined and redefined the genre several times over.

This welcome collection doesn't clutter her legacy with the customary rag-bag of demos, out-takes and other sundry bits of fluff which the reissues market has now decreed to be obligatory. Mitchell's art needs no such padding and this collection is exactly what it says it is – her first ten studio albums recorded over a twelve-year period, presented as we first heard them in neat wallets with the original artwork in an ergonomically-friendly slim-line box.

As such, it's an essential artefact in any house of culture, as indispensable as the complete works of Shakespeare, a set of Jane Austen and the collected oeuvres of Dylan and the Beatles. If you don't already own the albums, or your old vinyl copies are too scuffed and warped to play,

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then you owe it to yourself to order this special set now.

Consistency of quality may characterise Mitchell's work, but at the same time she never stood still and the artistic growth and musical development across the 105 tracks on these ten albums is breathtaking. Her early efforts such as *Song To A Seagull* (1968) and *Clouds* (1969) showcase a voice of fragile purity accompanied by acoustic guitar, often with strange tunings, which give her songs an ethereal quality. *Ladies Of The Canyon* (1970) and *Blue* (1971) are musically more developed with splashes of piano, but still in the introspective and confessional template which she invented – and which, incidentally, differentiate her

from Dylan, who of course hardly ever sung about himself.

For *The Roses* (1972) is more expansive, both musically and lyrically – *Judgement Of The Moon And Stars*, for example, was inspired by the story of Beethoven's deafness. *Court And Spark* (1974) is a step change, chic, cosmopolitan and sassy, with a full band sound and a jazz-rock ambience. But her experimentation had only just started. *The Hissing Of Summer Lawns* (1975), *Hejira* (1976) and *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter* (1977) constitute a visionary trilogy which took her jazz fusions to another level, her sinuous voice floating over some startlingly innovative rhythms and textures, her lyrics dense and full of wry and acidic social commentary.

The box ends with *Mingus* (1979), an inventive collaboration with jazz bassist Charles Mingus that explored further new territory. Mitchell's artistry remains bold and undimmed. Songwriting genius in every sense. **NW**

Joni Mitchell:
"an extraordinarily consistent and classy body of work"...

