

Falling in love with Joni

By MICHAEL KELLEY '75

COURT AND SPARK. By Joni Mitchell, Asylum, \$6.98 (list).

I must admit that I decided to fall in love with Joni Mitchell's latest release, *Court and Spark*, long before I had heard even one of its 11 superb songs. And "falling in love" is the perfect phrase to describe the experience of listening to this or any other Joni Mitchell album with an ear responsive to both musical performance and poetry.

From the beginning of her career, Ms. Mitchell's intensely personal lyrics have been among the few in popular music that could stand alone without accompaniment. *Court and Spark* continues this poetic tradition, and her compelling guitar and piano skills blend beautifully with her supporting musicians, establishing the effect this very special minstrel wishes to create. Her insights into womanhood, the problems and compromises of being a celebrity, and the frustrating search for meaningful love and success are her major themes.

Sensational effects

Musically, the multi-faceted tempo and orchestration expand the one-dimensional motifs found on all Joni's previous efforts. Gone is the "folk" quality of her early guitar work. Her latent musical vitality and energy is most evident on the rockin' "Raised on Robbery," and her piano takes on new dimensions of delicacy in "The Same Situation." Though employing more musicians than ever, Joni performs her own background vocals. The effect in "Car On A Hill" is sensational.

Though the desperation and emotion of *For the Roses* has been sublimated, Ms. Mitchell's powerful voice and lyrics of unparalleled sensitivity are again the focus of her work. Her frenetic journeys throughout her vocal range continue to be masterpieces of delicacy and control. One clearly understands each word she sings,

and more significantly, every word carries special meaning.

Fitzgerald-like imagery

With imagery reminiscent of Fitzgerald's parties in *The Great Gatsby*, "People Parties" discusses her inability to deal with the feigned social graces of the cocktail-party set. "The Same Situation" is the song thematically closest to *For the Roses* in its portrayal of the loneliness and frustration of a performer's success. Yet the song musically suggests a minuet or hymn rather than the "dirges" attributed to her by her critics on songs that dealt with similar topics.

On the lighter side, her ability at cleverly describing conversational social interplay makes the Forties-influenced "Raised on Robbery" the real smiler of the album. The chorus on "Help Me" is another of her lyric merry-go-rounds, showing why she is a genius and not merely a song writer.

So now appearing in a new light both personally and musically, Joni Mitchell's *Court and Spark* reflects that maturity tinged with resignation we all knew was there, but which she had chosen to overshadow with intensity of emotion. Listen to this album with the lyrics on your lap and a quiet blaze in the fireplace and you'll feel that Joni Mitchell continues to be to sensitivity and philosophy what Bob Dylan has been to social and political commentary. And that's not bad.

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