

love's continuing saga

Court and Spark

by Joni Mitchell

Asylum Records 7E 1001

I've had a running love affair with Joni Mitchell's music for the last four years. I await each new album with an anxiousness unbefitting an objective reviewer. Nevertheless, I have yet to be disappointed and *Court and Spark* leaves me once again with that warm, peaceful inner feeling.

What with all the talk surrounding Dylan's resurrection, little has been said of Joni's cross country tour, her first in several years. It is an important event. Consider the consistent grace of her albums, both musically and thematically; then dwell on the difficulty of renovating artistically an essentially unchanging statement inside her—the futility of resolving experiential problems through interpersonal love—and you will realize the brilliance and beauty of Joni Mitchell.

Because of these qualities, *Court and Spark* clearly deserves more than two weeks of listening but at first glimpses, it seems a logical next step from *For the Roses*, with a few new twists. Her voice is particularly energetic on the jazz-based "Twisted" and brings back pleasant memories of my parents' Ella Fitzgerald records. "Raised On Robbery" really freaked me on first listening over the radio. Its pace and Midleresque treatment was outside of my conception of the sensual, restrained blonde whose only previously similar song was "Big Yellow Taxi." Definitely

she is courting an image more extreme than ever before. For example, in St. Louis on her tour she wore a red, low cut backless full length dress. But the sultriness of "Robbery" (which is about a prostitute) isn't Joni. Indeed as she would have it, this "lady in lacy sleeves" loses her John in the end.

For the *Roses* dealt to a great extent with the complications of stardom (the theme of the title cut). Likewise, *Court and Spark* contains such references. "Free Man In Paris", like "Blonde In The Bleachers" regrets the subject's absence of freedom because of "the business." "Trouble Child" is perplexing in that I can't be sure it's about her. She does that sometimes—sings in the second person. Anyhow, it's obviously within her experience and that's what matters. Like "Twisted", "Trouble Child" is psychological, but devoid of the humor:

"So what are you going to do about it
You can't live life and you can't leave it

Advice and religion—you can't take it
You can't seem to believe it

The remainder of the album is the most familiar—and can be summarized simply in a line from "Help Me":

We love our lovin

But not like we love our freedom
Some say Joni is too proud and, as in *Blue's* "The Last Time I Saw Richard", a terminal romantic. But Joni can face



the edge of misery and, with a laugh of resigned acceptance, bounce back like a flower after the rain. Such is the case with "Help Me", wherein the above lyric is merely a continuation of "I'm a wild seed/Let the wind carry me" from *For the Roses*.

In "Just Like This Train" she compares waiting for love to happen to waiting in a crowded waiting room. It's just no use, she sings, "If you can't find your goodness". Similarly, the self-judgment is present in "Same Situation" (I called out to be released/Caught in my struggle for higher achievement"), "People's Parties", and "Car On The Hill" ("He makes friends easy/He's not like me").

"Down To You" is my favorite because like Joni, there is that element of mystery. She forces the listener to wonder who this "constant

stranger" is, leaving me with the feeling that "he/she" is in fact her own greatest mystery. Somehow this puzzle fits together in three lyrical pieces—a seemingly final "Love Is Gone", and finally the challenge, "It all comes down to you."

Joni apparently has a lot of faith in her backup band, since she's taken them on tour. They are extremely competent, and in the case of Chuck Findley's trumpet on "Trouble Child" and "Twisted" for example, they are often able to create a mood. No complaints here.

Joni Mitchell's time has come and I hope she decides to tour in the South. If not, I suppose I can always fall back on something really enjoyable—getting to know *Court and Spark*.

—ward

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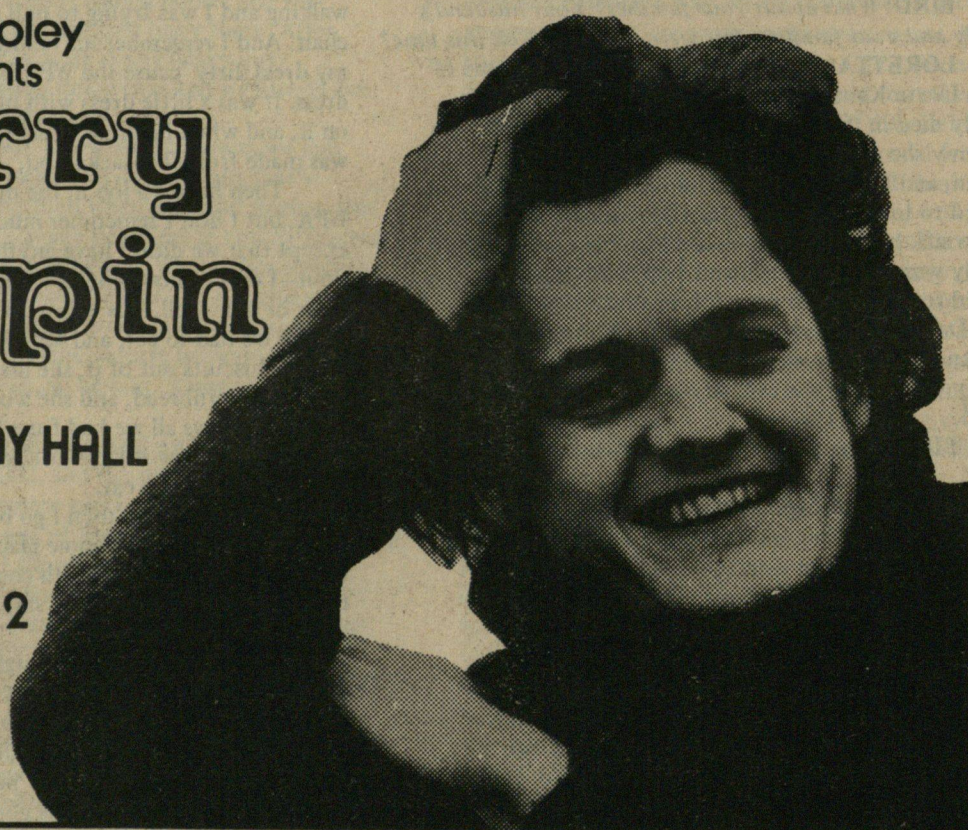


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