

# RECORD REVIEW

## Bob Dylan's best in years; Joni Mitchell up to snuff

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"Planet Waves" is the best new Dylan album in years. The vocals are strong, the words are right and the Band's backing is terrific. And the record stands up well after repeated listenings, good news for consumers faced with spiraling record costs.

"Going Going Gone" highlights side one. Robbie Robertson's electric guitar playing is almost painfully sparse and economic. The lyrics paint a portrait of desperation effectively despite some forced rhymes (edge—ledge, etc.). Dylan's delivery is outstanding; he emphasizes the last word of "I've just got to go" as if it were second nature.

"Dirge" highlights side two and transcends everything else on the album. The sparing guitar-voice-piano arrangement produces a stark setting that fits the bitter, pessimistic lyrics. This is not the tender Dylan of "Never Say Goodbye"; to the contrary, hearing the bite in his voice when he sings "It's a dirty, rotten shame" brings to mind the Bob Dylan of old. He even tosses in some anti-progress and anti-technological sentiments for good measure.

Cropping up now and then are references to the artist's past. One song, "Something There Is About You," is obviously autobiographical and as such quite engaging. Much more intriguing, though, are things like the phrase "baby blue" popping up in the last line of "Never Say Goodbye." Fascinating.

Coinciding with the LP's release, Dylan's 21-city tour with the Band is now in full swing. By Feb. 14, over 658,000 people will have paid up to \$9.50 each to see him perform; 5 million others who mailed in ticket orders will end up with refunds. What does it all mean? Just this; Bob Dylan must again be considered a major force in American popular music.

"He was sitting in the lounge of the Empire Hotel . . ."

The first time I heard "Raised on Robbery" come on the radio, I thought it had to be none other than Bette Midler, the boogie-woogie queen of the Seventies. Soon, however, Joni Mitchell's voice and phrasing became clearly recognizable. No matter, "Raised on Robbery" is a fine song, one that brightens the airwaves every time it is played.

Joni Mitchell has a knack for depicting common, often down-on-their-luck characters in most delightful manner. "Barangrill" (from "For the Roses") is a primary example of how the ordinary can be made warm and humorous. "Raised on Robbery" has much the same effect, although it relies more on narration than description. And it certainly is refreshing to hear a "folkie" give such an energetic performance.

"Court and Spark" is the name of the album containing "Raised on Robbery." Considering the overall excellence of its single and the LP that preceded it ("For the Roses"), this new album is not quite up to snuff. Tunes like "Help Me" seem plain and uninspired, while tunes like "Free Man In Paris" deal less successfully with the same themes that ran through Ms. Mitchell's last LP. A sort of joke track, "Twisted," does not come off well either.

In all fairness, some of the material is good: both "People's Parties" and "Court and Spark" are standouts. But as an album, "Court and Spark" is too inconsistent to be regarded as an exceptional effort. The cover isn't even as good as the last one, and I'm still trying to figure out how Cheech and Chong found their way onto the LP.

Personally, when I want to hear Joni Mitchell, I'll stick with "For the Roses."