

ON RECORD

by Michael Mascioli

Joni Mitchell, "Hejira" (Asylum)

Ever since Joni Mitchell abandoned, four albums ago, traditional metric and melodic concerns (much as a painter changes his style by relinquishing line or color) her songs have taken on a rambling, improvisatory quality—lines are crammed with syllables, singing has given way to unmusical intoning—making them more inaccessible, more difficult to distinguish.

But repeated listening steadily exposes their individual identities and brilliance. It happened for me with her "Hissing of Summer Lawns" and even more quickly with her latest, "Hejira" a collection of songs about flight, escape, the road (an "Hejira" being a journey to a desirable place).

Emphasis is now on increasingly introspective lyrics in which she balances her obsessive yet futile search for love ("Love's a repetitious danger/you'd think I'd be accustomed to"*) With her flight from relationships gone sour, calling herself "a prisoner of the white lines on the freeway." The two themes culminate breathtakingly in "Amelia," arguably her masterwork (*The Village Voice*) saw fit to cite the entire seven-stanza lyric in a review. Addressed to the aviatrix: "It's so hard to obey/his sad request of me to kindly stay away/so this

is how I hide the hurt/as the road leads cursed and charmed/. . . Amelia, it was just a false alarm." * "Black Crow" is tinged with a dark soaring and swooping in her voice, while "Blue Motel Room" is more lighthearted ("I know that you've got all those pretty girls coming on/hanging on your boom-boom pachyderm/. . . Honey, tell 'em you got germs." substituting bluesy riffs for her usual frantically strummed chords.

My personal favorite is "Song for Sharon," which, though over eight minutes long, never falters, steadily playing a complexity of images and emotions against metallic instrumentation and Joni's own chanted backing vocals (*a la* "Woodstock").

*Crazy Crow Music

Judy Collins, "Bread and Roses" (Elektra)

I find that a rigid formality—an inability to properly emote—in Judy Collins' voice often mars her interpretations of popular songs. She is wont to coast on a pure yet emotionally vapid quality in her voice (her "Send in the Clowns" is a perfect example). But since few of the tunes on "Bread and Roses" are familiar, it emerges as a quite satisfying effort.

True, her version of Duke Ellington's "I Didn't Know About You" is kettle drum-hollow next

to Sylvia Syms' full-bodied reading on "Lovingly" and after hearing the austerity in Leonard Cohen's own "Take This Longing" it is hard to find Collins' treatment anything but bland, dispassionate and too pure. Yet traditional-type ballads thrive on that same purity, and so "King David," the lavishly-produced feminist title cut and the fleeting "Marjorie" (featuring a wondrous vocal arrangement and overdubs by Collins) all succeed. And "Special Delivery," an upbeat contemporary love song, does nicely, thank you—at least, I

suspect, until I ferret out the original.

Betty Carter, "What a Little Moonlight Can Do" (Impulse)

Betty Carter is, to my mind, the greatest jazz singer alive, and so her meaty (24 cuts) double LP "What a Little Moonlight Can Do" easily proves the cream of the recent crop of reissues. Though today more free-form and less tuneful elements abound in her performance, "Moonlight" attests to the unvarying fundamentals of her approach.

Playing free and fancy with her phrasing, slipping smoothly into notes, coloring the likes of Irving Berlin's "Remember" with robust, polished scatting, she displays a style that is idiosyncratic but not affected. Her technical bravura changes a piece of fluff like "You're Getting to be a Habit" into jazz artistry of the highest order or, with the ease of a sumo wrestler flipping a pre-schooler, makes the title tune her own as surely as if she held the copyright. That song and others quickly hit the boiling point and go up in a four-alarm blaze, but the fire can just as suddenly dwindle to a warm glow with, say, a poignant "Something Wonderful," which she made me hear for the first time.

"In My Reverie," with its dives from airy notes to cloudy, deep ones, the samba-ish "All I've Got" and "I Don't Want to Set the World on Fire" (a damn lie, if you ask me) all clamor for top honors. Encore, Impulse! Please!!!

Billie Holiday, "The First Verve Sessions" (Verve) and "A Day in the Life" (Different Drummer)

If any reissue is going to give Carter's "Moonlight" a run for its money, its "The First Verve Sessions, 1952-54," 24 tracks by Billie Holiday. Mellowed by drink, drugs and time, her voice is ripe with a tantalizing vibrato and a smoky texture in which a curtain of melancholy seems to ripple even in more lighthearted numbers. Her delivery is relaxed, her

(Continued on page 31)



Joni Mitchell's "Hejira" is a brilliant collection about getting away

Maybe the rabbit died laughing?

Something to look forward to from Avco Embassy! The hilarious Joan Rivers is directing "Rabbit Test" from a script she penned with Jay Redak. Actor Billy Crystal plays a pregnant man in this very unique comedy. Making cameo appearances will be George Gobel as the President, Fannie Flagg as First Lady, and female impersonator Charles Pierce as the Queen of England (sorry Liz!). Roddy McDowell and Ronny Schell play double roles, each appearing in drag half the time.

Needless to say, it sounds like Joan will have a very campy movie on her hands!



GOD SAVE THE QUEEN: Charles Pierce, here hamming it up with producer Phil Oesterman, is slated to play Elizabeth Regina in Joan Rivers' "Rabbit Test."

Newman made a trip to the Boston Marathon to "research an upcoming film in which his wife (Joanne Woodward) will portray a jogger turned marathon runner." In any case, Paul is killing two birds with one stone



OUT OF THE RUNNING? Paul Newman, despite rumors to the contrary, says he's not involved with the upcoming movie "The Front Runner." (That's wife Joanne Woodward on the right.)

in cinematic technology, Painovision—you feel it as well as see it!"

The darker side of wholesomeness

Former Disney star Tommy Kirk revealed that being gay terminated his career at the Disney Studios. After appearing in a string of top moneymaking productions, Kirk was summoned to the office of Disney himself and ordered to begin "liking girls." Kirk went on to say that "at any other studio, being gay would mean nothing—only at Disney."

The return of Lillian Gish

Lillian Gish, silent screen star, will appear in Robert Altman's "A Wedding," her first film in over nine years. Rumors have run rampant for decades linking Lillian with her sister Dorothy in a most . . . shall we say provocative? . . . arrangement. Lillian will be portraying the mother of the groom (or is it the groom?)



GISH DISH: Lillian Gish (shown in a 1922 silent here) has been long closely linked with her sister Dorothy. The bonds of sisterly love run deep, but how deep in their case?

Don't call him Madam

Paul Williams, speaking of confusing, was only slightly annoyed when Barbra Streisand mistakenly referred to him as "Andy Williams" at the recent Oscar telecast. "Oh well" he exclaimed, "at least she didn't call me Esther Williams."

First Cardinal Spellman, now St. Sebastian!

"Sebastiane," the English-made feature about St. Sebastian which has proved a surprise hit in the United Kingdom, has been picked up for distribution in the U.S. by Libra Films, whose current hit is "Cousin Cousine." The film, which has a Latin soundtrack and a heavy gay element, will probably premier in New York in late June. Libra executive Ben Barenholtz feels the picture will not be limited in its appeal to just gays.

A slap for the juice pusher, Holm style

Joining many others, Celeste Holm has rapped Anita. The former actress received a thunderous round of applause after her Town Hall appearance in New York. "I was under the impression," Celeste stated, "that this country was based on Freedom, and I can't believe Anita said those things, but if she really did, I apologize for her." Three cheers for Celeste!

Killing two birds with one stone?

After all, we athletes are straight, hon!

The U.S. Olympics Committee is seeking to halt a gay porno film using the title "Olympics" on a gay sexpo item that was being shown at the Jewel Theatre in Manhattan. A spokesmah for the committee reported that "Gay porn is hardly the image we're seeking." The committee is hot on the trail of the distributor to cease and disist distribution.

The picture is a bomb—literally

Everyone's a critic! I suppose that after running out of government buildings and diplomats' cars, terrorists would naturally turn to the cinema. In France it's happening frequently. Firebombs have disrupted several exhibitions. I can foresee the day when disaster pictures such as "Earthquake" are advertised with "the newest

