

EDMONTON JOURNAL, Saturday, January 22, 1977 39

Pop Records

By Joe Sornberger



It's a long way from Saskatchewan to L.A. — and the distance is beginning to tell on Joni Mitchell.

Her point of view has shifted. In her earlier albums, a kind of simple, awestruck fascination was woven into the fabric of her songs. She was admitting "I really don't know life at all" in tunes like *Both Sides Now* (Clouds) or watching the seasons fly by in *The Circle Game* and waking up to wonderful *Chelsea Mornings*.

That changed, with later albums like 1974's *Court and Spark* in which we found her escaping "the star-making machinery behind the popular song" in tunes such as *Free Man In Paris*. She became *The Sophisticated Woman*. But there was still that wide-eyed innocence of a beautiful lady falling hard in and out of love in tunes such as *Help Me*. And the tunes were fine, jazzy things.

Now the progression from simplicity to sophistication has brought her to a new spot: cynicism. The Joni Mitchell offered to us on her new *Asylum* LP, *Hejira*, is a jaded, seen-it-all woman who no longer is fascinated by what she sees. She's merely taking notes. She's just interested.



Joni Mitchell

Take, for example, the tune *Black Crow* on the second side:

*I looked up at the morning
After being up all night
I looked at my haggard face in the bathroom light
I looked out the window
And I saw that ragged soul take flight
I saw a black crow flying
In a blue sky
Oh, I'm like that black crow.*

Which is okay if you want to hear cynical music. Except that Mitchell doesn't write as well when she's cynical as she does when she's awestruck. She just seems to jot lines down. For instance, these starting lines:

"I was driving across the burning desert" — *Amelia*.
"I'm travelling in some vehicle" — *Hejira*.
"I've got a blue motel room" — *Blue Motel Room*.
"I met a friend of spirit" — *Refuge of the Roads*.
"I went to Staten Island" — *Song For Sharon*.

And if the writing seems to be made up of random thoughts, the music seems even more so. The songs are practically tuneless, with no one melody jumping out at you.

As a result, nothing about the album is memorable. It's pleasant enough when you play it and listen to the tales of her travels. But after two songs you find yourself looking around the record rack for something with some zip to it.

Me, I reached for *Court and Spark*.