

# DISCRITIQUE

Court and Spark: Joni Mitchell  
Asylum Records 7E-1001

By CYNTHIA GILBERT

For Joni Mitchell fans here's a treat better than a surprise birthday party with a three-tier cake—"Court and Spark," her latest album gift wrapped by the composer-singer with an original pastel painting on honey that offers a hint of touching songs inside.

Sensitive songs, enhanced by fragile interpretation and definitive phrasing, prove once again her well-established talents, sure to be labeled by some as "Mitchell magic."

The album's title song is a distinctive opening, followed by a strong work, "Help Me," an upbeat cut with decided measure.

"Free Man in Paris" follows with some surprise background support by Jose Feliciano.

But here the album's momentum slows as Miss Mitchell sacrifices musical strength for poetry in "People's Parties" and "The Same Situation," a suitable title to follow "People's Parties," for both are lackluster.

The words are meaningful, but are jammed into brief musical measures that force the singer to hurry them, thus greatly diminishing the impact.

But side two regains the momentum started in the album's first three offerings with "Car on a Hill," an interesting instrumental with vocal backups.

Give a gold star to the five songs that follow—they are dynamite!

"Down to You," a soulful lament of a loveless existence marked only by meaningless physical gratification, supports a lovely musical interlude featuring Miss Mitchell on the clavinet. The mood is set by the telling phrase: Everything comes and goes, pleasure moves on too early and trouble leaves too slow.

But here an about face, as the music turns more robust with "Just Like This Train" and a boogie woogie-flavored

"Raised on Robbery."

"Trouble Child" is a thought-provoking piece, but it is overshadowed by the song that follows, "Twisted," the only non-original work Miss Mitchell has included.

Once done by Bette Midler, "Twisted" is a scat-inspired duet between Chuck Findley's

muted trumpet and Miss Mitchell's instrumental voice.

No one can surpass Miss Mitchell's inspirational interpretation.

Alone, this is worth the price of the album, but fortunately, the disc has many other plus marks—all Joni Mitchell's.

## Records

### Tom T. Hall's "I Love" Nears Million Mark

By MARY CAMPBELL  
AP Newsfeatures Writer

If it sounds country, it's country. Tom T. Hall grew up in Olive Hill, Ky., listening to bluegrass music. That, he explains, "is a very basic, clean kind of music. You have to know what you're doing to play it. It's five instruments and they are all acoustic and that is it."

But country music, which he writes, picks guitar to and sings, is a broader category and Hall likes Kris Kristofferson's definition that if it sounds country, it's country. "I've never really been into fiddle and steel guitar music that much. I've always used a piano and acoustic guitars, kind of a mellow country instead of hard country, I guess."

#### Hall Most-Talked-About

A major magazine last year called Hall "easily Nashville's most-talked-about songwriter." He wrote "Harper Valley PTA" and there haven't been many weeks in the last nine years when at least one of his songs wasn't on the country best-selling chart.

This year one he wrote and sings, "I Love," got to No. 19 on the pop chart Feb. 16 and was moving up. It was No. 1 on the country chart the week before. If it does as expected, it'll be Hall's first million sell.

Hall cut his own first records a few months before that. "I was offered several recording deals but I desperately wanted to be a writer of some kind. I had a real obsession about it. After I'd established myself pretty well as a songwriter, I had a lot of good tunes I couldn't get recorded. Jerry Kennedy of Mercury asked me to record them, so I did. How to succeed without really trying, I guess." Hall now has nine LPs, all on Mercury.

About "Harper Valley PTA," he says: "That was an incident that happened when I was a kid. A lady had read off the PTA for spanking her child. She pointed out several of their indiscretions. I was always amazed she would confront the town's aristocracy with their sins. It always impressed me. The story was with me a long time, since I was a kid. I wrote the song and changed the story a little bit."

#### "Too Far Out"

"I had the song a year and a half before anybody would record it. They'd say, 'That's a great song and really clever but it's too far out in left field for me.' Jennie C. Riley was a part-time secretary in Nashville, making \$35 a week, I read later, and there was a disc jockey trying to help her get into the music business."