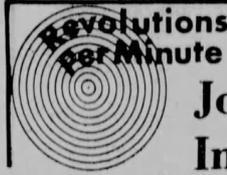


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Joni Mitchell: Intimate, Direct



A. B. Thomas

"COURT AND SPARK." Joni Mitchell. Asylum 7E-1001. \$6.98 list.

Think of your most intense emotional/mental relationship — the total joys, suicidal depressions and, perhaps most important, the frequency of both, completely off-balance, but you wouldn't have it any other way.

Joni Mitchell's songs are accounts of this kind of personal involvement; the whole body of her music is a running autobiography. She is intimate and direct: she touches you, where a stranger shouldn't know to touch. At the same time, she reveals herself, minute details flowing continuously out of her lyrics.

The lyrics are set to music that is temperamentally harmonious, but technically irregular. Her most contemplative songs still have an edge to them, while her most exuberant moods end with whispered doubts. You sense that she avoids the middle, the regular, the mediocre, and needs them.

Listening to Joni Mitchell sing, hearing her play, is one of

the most demanding experiences in music. When she's through, you're haunted. You have just had another very special glimpse at your own humanity.

"I'M JUST LIVING on nerves and feelings" — is a line from "People's Parties," and a feeling running throughout the "Court and Spark" album. The songs are, lyrically and musically, full of unresolved questions and strange twists. Each song sets its own environment and mood, while resting on the one before and after.

The most striking thing about this album is the degree to which each song depends on its arrangement, especially true with "The Same Situation," "People's Parties," "Down to You" and the title song. Each of them is a detailed view of Miss Mitchell, a direct emotional transmission to you.

All four tunes, as charted, are sparse and incomplete, requiring arrangement to both shape and color them. She has taken a big step as a musician here, in developing a musical sketch into a complete song, using instrumental toning. It is the difference between being a brilliant songwriter, which she has been for some time, and being a fully developed musician, which she has become. The factors combined make this Joni Mitchell's most successful album.

Tom Scott is the coarranger on "Court and Spark," and with his group, the L.A. Express, shares the bill with Miss Mitchell on her tours. Scott and the rest of the Express are practitioners of modern electric jazz; it is an experienced and adaptable group, with past involvements ranging from Stan Kenton to Frank Zappa and the Mothers.

Scott is responsible for the album's reed solos, which complement Miss Mitchell so well. It is instructive that he is equally adept with John Coltrane arrangements. Scott is a musician with enough skill and depth to appreciate Joni Mitchell, and

help her realize her music's potential.

In her performance on the record, you sense that Miss Mitchell is finally satisfied with the way her music is being made. She is in her best voice, her inflection is right each time. She has seldom sounded more open or vocally relaxed.

IN A SENSE, we have an "old" Joni Mitchell — hesitant, sensitive, doe-like lyrics and arrangements — and a "new," more assured and assertive. Both are represented on the album.

"Raised on Robbery" is the loudest, most driving song she's recorded — tight big-band rock 'n' roll. The lyrics are brassy and big-city, and well-matched instrumentally. It's a mean, tough little song, and it arguably calls for a more gritty voice than Joni Mitchell can provide; taking her voice as it comes, the song turns into wild fantasy.

"Trouble Child" matches her mental imagery with a sultry soul arrangement, a first attempt at an unusual, and very satisfactory, combination. The interplay between Joni's soft treble and the strong bass line is constant, and adds the necessary balance and tension together. It segues into "Twisted," until recently a little-known piece of nightclub music from the mid-'60s. "Twisted" ends the album on a note of "to be continued..."

This is the usual ending on Joni Mitchell's records. After "Court and Spark," though, we wait for the next one with more than usual anticipation.

Radio — AM

- WRNL (910) — Music scope, News, features, ABC (Inf.)
- WTVR (1370) — Country Music, News, Features, CBS
- WRVA (1140) — Popular music, News, features, NBC
- WENZ (1460) — Music, News, Sports
- WLEE (1480) — Music, News — ABC (Cont)

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