



Pete Oppel

Joni Mitchell's mirror

THE FIRST IMPRESSION one gets from listening to Joni Mitchell's latest, "The Hissing of Summer Lawns," is that it is a cold, detached album.

For the first time Joni Mitchell seems to be writing in the third person.

Another immediate impression is the jazz influence on the album—an influence even more predominant than it was on her live album with Tom Scott and the L.A. Express.

The third impression one gets on first listening is that this is not a West Coast album. There are references to France, Africa and most of all New York. The New York City syndrome, in fact, dominates the album.

But while listening to the album, my eyes and my thoughts kept returning to the liner notes: "This record is a total work conceived graphically, musically, lyrically and accidentally—as a whole."

If this is true then Joni Mitchell has painted a bleak picture of life and love in the man-woman relationship. A life filled with unfulfilled promises of the future by the young lovers who hope that life will always contain the simple pleasures: "We'd all go looking for a party, looking to raise Jesus up from the dead. I'd be kissing in the backstreet, thrilling to the Brando-like things" he said. And we

were rolling, rolling, rock 'n' rolling."

It's also a life filled with imaginary dreams and hopes than can never come true: "A celluloid rider comes to town, cinematic lovers sway. Plantations and sweeping ballroom gowns take her breath away."

In Miss Mitchell's allegory, Edith marries her kingpin who installs her in a fashionable all-electric home where "she could see the valley bar-b-ques" and from her window still see the blue pools in the squinting sun and hear the hissing of summer lawns."

She does get to venture from her isolated fortress "looking for some sweet inspiration . . . just another hard time band with Negro affectations." She also looks for that type of love she al-

ways imagined she would receive, but finds the same plastic men. "Don't you get sensitive on me, 'cause I know you're just too proud." She learns that she is trapped within her fate: "Nothing is ever capsulized in me on either side of town. The streets were never really mine, not mine these glamour gowns." The dreams of the celluloid rider vanish in the hissing of summer lawns.

Joni Mitchell paints her best picture of this life—a picture of the results of this type of existence for both sexes—in the song "Harry's House—Centerpiece." The woman, of course, is the centerpiece—nothing more in Harry's life—and she is trapped in Harry's house. But life does not offer any more—perhaps even less—



Joni Mitchell . . . a bleak picture of the man-woman relationship.

for Harry who flies to New York for a business meeting and takes a cab downtown ("Taxi schools of yellow fishes, Jonah in a ticking whale.") and sees all the other plasticized women ("Beauty parlor blondes with credit card eyes looking for something chic and fancy to buy?").

About the only fault one can find with this masterpiece of an album is that it may be too difficult to listen to—I mean, really listen to. The Joni Mitchell sect will buy it, play it and continue to live their vinyl-covered lives. But if we look into Joni Mitchell's mirror and see the warts and the scars there, maybe there'll be hope—not for the world, but for the ones we love.

FUNKY KINGSTON BY TOOTS AND THE MAYTALS. Jimmy Cliff introduced Americans to reggae music via an underground movie masterpiece called "The Harder They Come." Bob Marley and the Wailers provided the reggae impetus with three American albums that showed what an inspiration he had become to Eric Clapton, among others. But it was Toots and the Maytals, Jamaica's reggae superstars, who invented the sound and the beat of this type of music. This album is a collection of their best recordings during the last five years.

Toots is actually Toots Hibbert and back in 1968 he wrote a song called "Do the Regga" because he needed another song for an album. It was this song that is credited with launching the reggae sound and era.

Toots and the Maytals have been together for 12 years now and during this time they have recorded eight albums and hundreds of singles. This collection, the only Toots and the Maytals album released in the United States, is the best of these recordings and one of the best records I have heard in quite a long time.

The first song on the album, "Time Tough," displays what reggae is all about, Hibbert's repeating vocal lines, the hypnotic bass bottom line and the backup chorus provided by Jerry Mathias and Raleigh Gordon. This album is filled with wonderful Hibbert originals including "Got To Be There," "Pomp and Pride" and the reggae masterpiece, "Pressure Drop." Toots even includes the best recorded version of John Denver's "Country Roads."

RUFUS FEATURING CHAKA KHAN. This group, for some reason, has been given a bum rap. It is always billed as a so-so band that wouldn't be anywhere without its lead singer. That might be true, but on this album the band—especially Tony Maiden on guitars and Andre Fischer on drums—comes into its own when it doesn't fall back on the patent soul-disco riffs.

I especially liked Maiden and Fischer's work on "Little Boy Blue," but their instrumental "On Time" is a bore.

Chaka Khan still sounds too much like a shallow Aretha Franklin, but she can handle a song like "Jive Talking" the way it was meant to be treated.

JOURNEY TO LOVE BY STANLEY CLARKE is a jazz-rock album from the former Chick Corea bassist that features such guest stars as his former boss, Jeff Beck and John McLaughlin.

Clarke also plays the synthesizer and authored all the compositions on this album. Although Beck's work is the most outstanding, the Corea-McLaughlin influence is the most evident. All the songs are void of direction and structure and it's difficult to see where Clarke was going with this album.