



Joni Mitchell

RECORDS in REVIEW

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Joni Mitchell — **THE HISSING OF SUMMER LAWNS** (Asylum 7E-1051)

If you're looking for intellectual exercise, Joni Mitchell is always good for a thorough workout.

Her exercises are getting tougher, too — tougher to keep up with — for she is holding steadfast to her intense idealism. Where others in the folk realm (a loose categorization) have slowed in their advance, Mitchell continues to plow forward through sheer uncompromising artistry and philosophy — and a strong dab of obsession.

"The Hissing of Summer Lawns" is a concept album, basically a commentary on contemporary urban society with a wary eye especially on the middle class. There may be some autobiography in it also, but you are never sure with Joni Mitchell. Never.

She remains as elusive as ever. Mysterious.

Permeating her perceptive lyrics is an aura of other-worldliness. She seems apart from the rest of us, sitting on the sidelines while the rest of us scurry and worry.

And then she puts her thoughts to music — and that's as taut and wonderous as her concepts — to really put us in awe.

Joni Mitchell can put you into an introspective state, make you investigate yourself and what lies around you. What worries me about her is I don't know if she has compassion for the everyday per-

son as she ponders and observes from her pedestal.

Perhaps she does in "Sweet Bird," a haunting view of time (our own lifetime) vanishing. She says, "Behind our eyes; Calendars of our lives; Circled with compromise; Sweet bird of time and change; You must be laughing."

There is a touch of cynicism in Mitchell, too — about women, no less. In "Harry's House — Centerpiece," she seems to have (again you're never sure) sympathy for the "battalions of paper-minded men" whose lot it is to toil for materialistic women "lost in House and Gardens."

The structure of the song is one of the most interesting in the album. Sandwiched between an old-style swing mood (in which she slices and dices demeaning life as many know it) is a turn at the blues (sort of a flashback to a man's earlier romantic dreams).

Musically, the most different piece is "The Jungle Line." Throughout is the unrelenting sound of jungle drums, set behind the threatening sounds of Mitchell on synthesizer, while she sings hauntingly. Of what? The interpretation is up to you.

Of the album, Mitchell writes on the inside cover, "The whole unfolded like a mystery. It is not my intention to unravel that mystery for anyone."

There is so much to this album that you could spend hours inspecting every detail. It is complex, intricate, demanding. It is an achievement. But if you like simplifications, simple music, it is not for you.

For the record, guest artists include James Taylor, Graham Nash and David Crosby.