

Notes from the underground

Joni Mitchell's talents shine

by Donald Boles

COURT AND SPARK

Joni Mitchell

(Asylum 7E-1001)

Joni Mitchell's instinctive talents for song-writing, arranging and singing shine like never before on her new album *Court and Spark*. The girlish Canadian folk singer and guitarist has added bass guitar, strings, electric guitars and pianos, horns, woodwinds and chimes over the years, all the while making a gradual personal transition from guitar to piano, girl to woman. Her gifts have not dissipated, they have diversified, and those who seek autobiographies in the lyrics cannot sidestep the fictions and fantasies, but must instead discern patterns in her attitude toward the words as she balances them by the vocal and instrumental style.

"Court and Spark", the title cut, opens the album with a "My Old Man" vagrant lover who shifts ideologies and loses the speaker who will not relocate. The music, aided by Milt Holland on chimes, is supportive to the personal stand of preferring the fallen angels of L.A. to personal completion.

The glistening "Help Me" features the clear guitar work of Larry Carlton and the theme again is independence. Asking for help because she's falling in love again, the soaring melody

line betrays the sensitivity of the speaker, and though the relationship felt good the duality of the personal natures was recognized and dealt with in calm perspective.

We love our lovin'

But not like we love our freedom.

In "Free Man in Paris" the perspective is all first person with a rock and roll magnate contrasting his locked-up business personality to the freedom he felt when he was in Paris and alive. With the musical emphasis on lilting happiness, (Jose Feliciano on guitar) the sordidness of business is played down by the bouncy harmonies of David Crosby and Graham Nash, and the skipping triplet bridge between verses ends the line in affirmation.

Uneasiness at gamey gatherings is the subject in "People's Parties". Like "California", the phonies and manic-depressives are exposed and the plea is for more humor in meeting the situation, as if the speaker's escort's levity actually solves the discomfort. A piano seque introduces "The Same Situation", a ballad about the confusing desire for love. Prayer seems futile

With heaven full of astronauts

And the Lord on death row.

The authority-seeking man is too vain to see beyond himself, and with a legato piano the speaker prays for someone better.

Send me somebody

Who's strong and somewhat sincere.

Side Two opens with "Car on a Hill". Although it has decidedly sub-standard lyrics, the drive here is on the instrumental arranged by Joni (continued on page fourteen)



Players of Sound

Subtle innovative jazz

by Jeff Simon

Players of Sounds

Personnel:

Fred Kaplan, drums

Kevin Sio, guitar

Jeff Simon, electric piano

Steve Spear, saxes and flute

Jeff Kalen, Fender bass

Andre, keyboards and melodica

Players of Sounds plays jazz, but in one sense only; that is, if "jazz" stands for innovative music, we do it. There is a need for enjoyable live music in this are, of an original nature. Playing all-original material forces the listener into more involvement with the sound. A

cheer of recognition will not go up after the first few bars; rather, one might ask, "What's this?" (As opposed to this, hearing music copied from a record is an exercise in comparison for the listener — and perhaps this is where the involvement ends.) The non-repetitive character of our music serves to hold one's attention; once he is inside the piece, he stays there.

Now that we have got your ear, what do we do with it? The above aims are an integral part of my writing, but are nevertheless secondary. My immediate purpose is for the listener to recognize a mood, or of the changing of mood and

outlook within a tune. This does not necessarily involve empathizing with my feelings — for example, the listener may not want to be thrown into despondence at the moment. But the recognition of that particular outlook can be taken in and stored, as a point of emotional reference for later on. The specific melody line or chordal structure may not be retained, yet the addition of this musical piece of "data" will perhaps enhance and bring out all of the nuances of one's feelings. This might explain why one of our goals in the *Sound* band is subtlety — the filling in of gaps left by blatant emotional (continued on page fourteen)

Diversified but still sensitive

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Mitchell. The harmonies are her's and reminiscent of "Rainy Night House". Wayne Perkins on electric guitar is sharp and choppy, and there is a nicely underplayed, buzzy quality to the fade section as offset by Joe Sample's electric piano and the drums. The woodwinds never seem to rise above the opening phrase.

Offsetting the female waiting routine described in "Car on a Hill", "Down to You" speaks to the flesh-seeking portion of the male population, and the effectiveness relies on the now rare use of solo piano with a plaintiff woodwind passage when she announces "Love is gone". A sordid pick-up situation is described with the male working on giving only an impression and his loneliness, and his day-light mask cannot maintain the composure of the fleeting pleasure of conquest. There is a positive alternative, she says, but the choice must be his.

The glib symbolist "Just Like This Train" makes use of a highly romantic train metaphor to explain the lame submission of the speaker. She runs late, like the train, and because of a sour loss of heart, she stops her wandering and searching to get on the train home so that she may take pleasure in watching her vain lover's hairline recede into old age. Resembles "Barandgrill".

"Raised on Robbery" is an upbeat rocker held together by the solid guitar of Robbid Robertson (The Band) and Joe Sample (Crusaders) on electric piano with wah-wah pedal. Beginning with an Andrew Sisters narrative in thirds, the hustling lady in the lacy sleeves

spots her mark in the hotel lobby and delivers a four verse monologue which is suggestive, funny, pitiful, and just credible enough to be effective.

Mental breakdown dominates the last two cuts. On "Trouble Child" the speaker is trying to give an open, honest perspective to the institutionally incarcerated, with somewhat unsubstantial and repetitious music. The confident speaker defies the advice of her analyst because of post-natal alcoholic visions, faces derisive statements by her friends (played by Cheech and Chong) because she refuses to ride double-decker buses without upper deck

navigators, suffers delusions of grandeur and ends the tune with gleeful confession of schizophrenia. While not written by Joni Mitchell, the arrangement is adroit and the vocal cannot be described as distracted.

It may be disconcerting to some listeners to be confronted with a full band on most of the selections on *Court and Spark*. The use of the drummer, for example, forbids the quiet and driftiness that made "Blue" so effective. And don't let the AM airplay of "Raised on Robbery" form your opinion. All the sensitivity and flux is there, but redistributed for fullness.

An experimental sound

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experience. Of course, there are a lot of areas of gray between "happy" and "sad," between good will and anger. And then, there are the inexplicable feelings not even contained in other, more recognizable, states of mind.

It is for these reasons that each new piece gets a little tougher — not only in order to properly perform, but also to write. The composer, when dealing with complexity, must be on guard against creating a plastic sound, yet the complexity must be used to avoid falling into a genre-slot, in expression as well as response.

Above all, we play sounds. Many of our pieces reflect our attempt to use a variety of dynamic levels and tones, and combinations of rhythm, meter, melody, and chord structure, as well as combinations of instruments. In short, we experiment. Playing at intermediate volumes facilitates

a broadening of the range of experimentation, and our end result is better for the ears on both sides of the stage.

The most difficult aspect of presenting a piece as a cogent unit is the arranging. Arrangements take time and teamwork. The goal here is to provide sufficient change in tonality within each song, without exceeding the limits for expression dictated by the original composition. In other words, a song cannot try to say everything through its arrangement, or it will end up saying nothing; nor can it have so little arranging that it falls flat. Arranging can be compared to a framework that one fills with individual expression, as is done in solos.

This band, begun in October, has helped to fulfill the need and desire of its members for personal musical expression. We are now attempting to satisfy the desire for a more complete musical experience in this area.