Joni Mitchell still leads the band with her new live recording

SHADOWS AND LIGHT/Joni Mitchell Elektra/Asylum Records By LISA ZOWADA

Lovers and Joni Mitchell will lament. Admirers of the new Joni Mitchell will applaud. Both will hear in her new live album, "Shadows and Light," the exuberant performance of a dedicated and innovative musician.

The album features Mitchell's jazz effort with the late bassist Charles Mingus, the transitional albums "Hissing of Summer Lawns," "Hejira," and "Don Juan's Reckless Daughter." Mitchell's live album presents an opportunity to follow these collective and individual performances. It is a trip well worth taking.

As much as she is a musician and composer, Mitchell is also a poet and philosopher. Her compositions demand the same strength and sensitivity in interpretation they demand in composition.

Mitchell is backed by the very best session musicians. Michael Brecker's sax is ever present but not overbearing. Whether he is deceptively soothing with the sexy, sensual tones of his instrument or playing with the fervor of a jazzman riding a dark horse to the finish line, Brecker's sax is the perfect complement to the vocal breaks. "Black Cow" and "Hejira" are Brecker's finest moments on the album.

Also included in Mitchell's band is guitarist Pat Metheny. Metheny's playing sounds as if every note were made of fine china. Metheny's playing includes such fullness in sounds as if each note was the only note he played all night. His solo between "Amaka" and "Hejira" is easily the finest instrumental break on the album. Over Lyle Mays' swelling organ chords Metheny plays a melody that sounds as if it could be the accompaniment to a divine revelation.

Under all this music is Jale Pastorius' bass. First heard on the "Hejira" album, Pastorius' bass sounded like a muted French horn and at other times like a prison door slamming shut, defying the human ear and its melodic expectations.

Under the careful direction of its master, Pastorius' bass occupies almost as much space as Mitchell's vocals.

But above all these musicians is Mitchell. If her last few albums were busy trying to acquaint the listener to strange, new melodies, Mitchell's latest work reveals the poet at work. Her lyrics reveal both a reflective person and a willingness and ability to question one's ego, and to wonder if life is going the way she had intended.

"Maybe I've never really loved I guess that is the truth/I've spent my whole life in clouds at icy altitudes." Mitchell wrote. On this album she is as conscious of her performance as she is of her examination of life.

"Shadows and Light" is fine tribute to Mitchell's genius. Despite a backup band of such talented musicians, Mitchell still emerges as the star of the show.