

Joni Mitchell

Truly distinctive

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How truly distinctive Joni Mitchell is.

She is on an entirely different path than other musicians. And she's traveling on an entirely different route through life than most of us.

Journeying is a theme in Mitchell's latest album "**Hejira**" (Asylum 7E-1087).

The word *hejira* is obscure. It's a variation of *hejira*. According to Webster's Third, the meaning that applies here is "a journey or trip, especially when undertaken as a means of escaping from an undesirable or dangerous environment or as a means of arriving at a highly desirable destination."

In Mitchell's case, it is a fleeing. As the song "Hejira" explains, she's a "defector from the petty wars/That shell shock love away."

Nothing like a broken romance to prompt a woman to reflection. And reflect is what Mitchell does through much of this album.

It's a personal work — almost too much so — for she can't get away from songs revolving about herself. In "Hejira," Mitchell is not taking on the world as usual; she's taking on herself.

She is touching, though. Mitchell has a way with words, and her imagery is always telling.

"Song to Sharon" seems to be autobiographical. If so, it reveals a lot about Mitchell because the song holds back little as she looks at her past and present of life and love.

She is torn by emotions and pressures and memories, but she has optimism and even manages a bit of humor: "There's a gypsy down on Bleeker Street/I went in to see her as kind of a joke/And she lit a candle for my love luck/And 18 bucks went up in smoke."

In "Black Crow," she cuts to the quick



with hard self-deprecation: "In search of love and music/My whole life has been/Illumination/Corruption/And diving, diving, diving/Diving down to pick up on every shiny thing/Just like that black crow flying/In a blue sky."

And on the inside cover photo, there is Mitchell, not flying, but skating and looking very much like a crow.

To me, though, Joni could never be a crow. She's an artist of intelligence. She's strong, individualistic, intelligent, unique.

In an era when much of music has become cluttered with excess — lush orchestrations, strings, synthesizers — Mitchell has kept alive the small combo sound.

There are no cute musical gimmicks here. It's chiefly Mitchell's haunting, precise, clipped, voice in front of simply guitar, bass and drums.

At times there's a taste of calypso, at times a touch of torch. But mostly the music flows on wings of folk-jazziness.

The prime focus is on Mitchell's words. In expressing them, many of her songs are almost non-melodic, and yet they are compelling.

Each of the album's nine songs, most of them long, is finely crafted. The album is excellent. You don't expect less from Joni Mitchell.