

'Dog Eat Dog' is definitely a bow-wow

We haven't heard from her in a while and just in time for Christmas comes Joni Mitchell's unseasonably titled "Dog Eat Dog."

If you enjoy the attitude of Mitchell's songs and the incisive talent that the songwriter has for folding back emotional facades to rapidly get to the



Facing
The
Music

By A. Jay Higgins

nerve of a feeling — you'll like the new album.

If you like lots and lots of unearthly-sounding keyboards — you'll like the new album.

If you have a special place in your heart for Mitchell — you'll like the new album.

But if you buy "Dog Eat Dog" with the intention of hearing some of the unique approaches to jazz that Mitchell showed us with "Court And Spark" in 1974, "The Hissing Of Summer Lawns" in 1975, "Hejira" in 1976 or "Shadows And Light" in 1979 — you will be very disappointed.

Like so many artists who enjoyed widespread popularity during the opening years of their careers, Mitchell is frequently competing against her own debut work that was performed against the backdrop of the nearly forgotten "peace and love" era.

Even then, with such songs as "Big Yellow Taxi" and "Woodstock," "Free Man In Paris" and "Help Me," Mitchell displayed a sense of maturity that set her apart from other songwriter-performers of her era (including Carol King).

Combining her composing talents with a beautiful voice capable of spanning three octaves, Mitchell launched a career that mirrored the generation

she sang for. That same generation still loves her today.

I bet they'd love her a lot more if she'd dump Thomas Dolby's battery of keyboard synthesizers and go back to her original arrangements, which nearly always included a little acoustic guitar, a dominant piano, a nice horn section and a maybe a few strings.

But not layers and layers of keyboards.

I still believe that Mitchell has something to say as an artist, but she could find a better way to say it.

Let's take a look at this album, which entered the Billboard charts two weeks ago at 73 and has already worked its way up to, uh, 70.

"Dog Eat Dog" starts off strong with "Good Friends" featuring companion vocals by Michael ("Wildfire") Murphy. If Mitchell wanted to pay lip service to "modern pop," this would have been a good tune to showcase and then depart to return to something with a little more substance.

Instrumentally, that didn't happen. Instead we're given some message-rich but music-poor entries on Cuts 2 & 3 in the form of "Fiction" and "The Three Great Stimulants." I really enjoyed the lyrics of these two songs, which were unmistakably Mitchell, but again, too heavy on electronic or recording studio-enhanced percussion and spacey keyboards.

It's really a shame that "The Three Great Stimulants," which had the makings of a masterpiece, was so flawed musically with a backbeat that clashes with the song. Despite the music, Mitchell showed her genius for capturing a moment with beautiful lyrical form:

"I saw a little lawyer on the tube. He said 'it's so easy now, anyone can sue. Let me show you how your petty aggravations can profit you!' Call for the three great stimulants. Of the exhausted ones. Artifice, brutality and innocence."

At this point you can pick up the tone arm of your turntable, skip tracks on your Compact Disc player or fast-for-



***** EXCELLENT
**** VERY GOOD
*** GOOD
** FAIR
* POOR

JONI MITCHELL

DOG EAT DOG — Geffen GHS 24074. *Good Friends, Fiction, The Three Great Stimulants, Tax Free, Smokin' (Empty, Try Another), Dog Eat Dog, Shiny Toys, Ethiopia, Impossible Dreamer, Lucky Girl.*

Personnel: Mitchell, vocals, background vocals, vocal samples, Fairlight CMI, and Assorted Keyboards; Larry Klein, basses, keyboards, Fairlight CMI and Synthesizer Programming; Thomas Dolby, keyboards, Fairlight CMI and Synthesizer Programming; Mike Landau, guitars; Vinnie Colaiuta, drums and drum samples; Michael Fisher, percussion samples.

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ward your cassette player to pass "Tax Free," "Smokin' (Empty, Try Another)" and the title cut on Side B "Dog Eat Dog." These three songs range from the mildly forgettable to the unforgivable.

Why would anyone want to listen to a cigarette machine churn away for 15 seconds? Why not just cut Side A

short? Why waste any more time talking about this?

Moving right along to the second cut on Side B, we find the album's strongest entry and a possible commercial contender in "Shiny Toys." And what do you know? It just happens to be the only song on the album with a horn section and also is one of the numbers featuring back-up vocalists (ex-Eagle) Don Henley and the laid-back James Taylor.

In "Shiny Toys," Mitchell explores again a path she's waltzed down before — the world of materialism. In a clear and appropriate sarcastic condemnation of the spirits in the material world, Mitchell takes aim at those who make love to exotic foreign cars and pursue the latest gossip in personality magazines.

"Flashy boys and girls that really play (good, good, good). Shiny toys, when it's over don't you hate to have to put your toys away."

Side B moves along to a very sensitive anthem to the drought in Africa with "Ethiopia" and then closes out with "Impossible Dreamer" and "Lucky Girl." These two tunes came just in time to elevate this album to a two-star rating.

"Impossible Dreamer" sounds much more at home on earlier Mitchell albums and "Lucky Girl" is the sole tribute to any of the jazz impulses that Mitchell may still possess. Both of these songs feature the strongest contributing artist on the album, saxophonist Wayne Shorter of Columbia Records.

"Dog Eat Dog" may not be the biggest bow-wow that Mitchell has taken for a walk in her 14-album discography, but it's certainly in the prize-winning category. Let's hope that Mitchell will return to some of her earlier jazz influences and prove that she had something in mind when she chose to close this record with "Lucky Girl" — lucky for her and lucky for us that it's over.

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