

RECORDS: ROCK 'n POP

Dylan Losing What Joni Mitchell Has Plenty of—Alienation

By DALE ANDERSON
THERE USED TO BE age limits on alienation. To be meaningfully alienated, you had to be under 22 or so, like Holden Caulfield or James Dean or Bob Dylan at the start.

Dylan opened up a veritable Louisiana Purchase of alienation. His vistas of discontent stretched so far that folks needed months and years to reach that far themselves.

But lately there's been a dearth of worthwhile disaffection, despite attempts like Alice Cooper's "Teen-age Lament 1974" and Billy Joel's "Captain Jack," both of which dull their edge with mockery.

Still, it isn't the lack of contenders, Joni Mitchell's "Court And Spark" (Asylum 7E-1001, Elektra) is simply a brilliant and definite piece on what it's like to be at odds with the world and yourself in the '70s.

Her alienation isn't an innocent one. If anything, it's guilty. It's done a lot of places and been many things. Nor is it revolutionary. She doesn't want to overturn much. Just the way people fail to love one another and the way her own hopes and fears fight off fulfillment.

THE OPENING title track dives right into it—a rejection of love because she's unwilling to trust it, unwilling to give to receiver:

"The more he talked
The more he reached me
But I couldn't let go of L.A.
City of the fallen angels . . ."

So there's the failed attempt within the good-natured bounce of "Help Me" ("We love our lovin'/But not like we love our freedom . . .") and the self-imposed doom and regret of "Free Man In Paris" ("You know I'd go back there tomorrow/But for the work I've taken on . . .").

In "People's Parties," there's sophisticated barriers protecting every help-

Crosby and Stills, Robbie Robertson, Cheech & Chong — are subtle delights. In all, a desolate masterpiece. . . .

THANKS TO his wife and children, Bob Dylan's gotten past alienation and created the system of values Mitchell longs for, an exclusive system that doesn't let much in. Behind that wall he's his own man.

"If I paid the price of solitude/At least then I'm out of debt," he sings in "Dirge," garnishing even this lesser song from "Planet Waves" (Asylum 7E-1003, Elektra) with the wit and wisdom that give him that lean and prophetic look.

It's been a long time since the last real Dylan album, "New Morning," so there's much catching up to do. He welcomes you in to "heat up some coffee grounds," to sit and hear the fire spark, to spend the night, "On a Night Like This." . . .

"GOING, GOING, GONE" is a swansong to his old popstar life (I'm going before I get to the ledge . . .) but it suggests also that you listen before he disappears. "It's my duty to bring you back to the field where the flowers bloom," he hints in the rough and tumble of "Tough Mama."

"Forever Young" comes back to start side two in an irrelevant upbeat version, as if Dylan's showing he's

young enough to make a carnival of it. . . .

A FRIEND says this cut alone makes the film side her favorite, a brilliance that has to make up for the reduced voltage in the next three tracks — "Dirge" with melodrama from the past, "You Angel You" with its load of clichés and the good-natured misreading of "Never Say Goodbye."

"Wedding Song," a towering love song in his old apocalyptic manner, rescues the closing. The whole album, feels like the old, pre-Nashville Dylan, with all five members of the Band pumping and rocking behind him.

DONOVAN long ago found the cosmic clue that lets him levitate into perspective on heartbreak and the other travails of the world. That's what makes "Essence To Essence" (Epic KE 3209, Columbia) such joyous, comforting and, yes, hopeful album.

His ethereal vibrato comes in the usual delightful flavors. Calypso in "Operating Manual For Spaceship Earth" and

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BOB DYLAN in concert in Madison Square Garden.

"The Dignity of Man," "Wheels" was supposed to be.

A FOUR-SIDE history of human knowledge is "Yes" "Tales From Topographic Oceans" (Atlantic SD-2-908), as Jon Anderson, its prime mover, explains inside the cover.

Though the scope, the form and the seriousness all give this enterprise high promise, the actual delivery comes in muddled and unconvincing.

For all its cryptic ritual and angular formality and instrumental virtuosity, it remains humorless and over-technical and not enough like the grandeur and wonder and wit that such a topic might inspire in, say, Pink Floyd.



JONI MITCHELL
Sings at odds

lessness but hers. "The Same Situation" shows insecurity reigning in the privacy of a mirror:

"With the willions of the lost and lonely ones
I called out to be released
Caught in my struggle for high achievement
And my search for love
That don't seem to cease."

Lovers make her uneasy, like the one she waits for in "Car On a Hill," which starts side two. He "makes friends easy/He's not like me/I watch for judgment anxiously."

The deceptively cheerful lady in lacy sleeves in "Raised On Robbery," the album's only all-out rocker, is dead-ended in Mitchell's dilemma, down from good times, wrecked on the rocks of romance, losing even this cheap pickup. Then the bottom, the deep language of "Trouble Child":

"Up in a sterilized room
Where they let you be lary
Knowing your attitude's
all wrong
And you got to change
And that's not easy . . ."

Which rides a clarinet solo into the bright, self-righteous kookiness of "Twisted," the old Lambert, Hendricks & Ross zonker that's sung like a horn solo. It ties up all her suffering in a saucy laugh.

"Court And Spark" Irons out the murky brooding of her previous "For The Roses" and gives it a sharp crease. Her rushing lyrics fall perfectly in place and the sidemen—

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