



A hit for Joni Mitchell a miss for Lightfoot

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Sometimes it's the voice of a little girl, all pink and clean and full of wonder. The voice of innocence. And sometimes it's the strong and slightly melancholy voice of a woman, a voice that's hurting a little. It's fascinating—the voice of a woman who has grown up and knocked around without losing the little girl inside her.

It belongs to folksinger Joni Mitchell, and it has never sounded more appealing than it does on her first album, *Joni Mitchell* (Reprise RS 6293) which was released this week in Toronto. It's an exciting album; it displays for the first time on record a wonderful talent. And if there's any justice in these things (which, of course, there isn't) it will make Joni Mitchell a star.

Folk music has fallen victim recently to the very force that has so successfully revitalized rock 'n' roll—musical eclecticism. The Beatles have borrowed from folk music, from the classics and jazz, from the music of the Oriental world; they're using symphony orchestras, hokey jazz sounds, the most sophisticated recording technology and God-only-knows what next . . . and it's fresh and exhilarating. Great. But *Judy Collins fighting to hold her own against the busy orchestral arrangements of Joshua Rifkin, and Joan Baez singing semi-classics with the Toronto Symphony, and Leonard Cohen singing over the hum of some rooty-tooty studio chorus and Gordon Lightfoot with a studio orchestra—this is fresh. Borrowing for its own sake, it's tasteless.*

Well, all this misplaced eclecticism seems not to have touched *Joni Mitchell*, with the result that her new album is a model of the kind of perfect harmony between material and arrangement that is the basis of all good music—and invariably the mark of a strong musical personality. The album was produced by David Crosby (late of the Byrds) which may account in part for the simplicity and taste of its arrangement. But the songs themselves—the melodies and lyrics—are Joni Mitchell's, and exceedingly beautiful.

She has divided the album into two sets of five songs. The first she calls, "I came to the city," the second "Out of the city and down to the seaside." The distinction isn't that important, really, because no matter what the physical setting—be it the "chrome-plate" and "plastic clothes" of the city or the "woodlands and the grasslands and the badlands" of the Prairies—her thoughts are the thoughts of a woman torn

between the romantic notions of love and freedom.

*Seabird I have seen you fly above
the pilings*

*I am smiling at your circles in
the thoughts of a woman torn
the air*

*I will come and sit by you while
he lies sleeping*

*Fold your fleet wings I have
brought some dreams to share*

It's plain Miss Mitchell has a great love of words (she has dedicated the album to a Mr. Kratzman "who taught me to love words") and a respect for clarity of expression that carries over to her music. The melodies she has written for the songs on this album are (with only one exception) carefully shaped and distinct, one from the other. All of them bear a diving-soaring quality that makes them unmistakably hers.

Add it all up (I forgot to mention that she's a pretty fair guitarist) and you have a great album, an exciting musical experience and the hottest—make that the sweetest—new sound in folk music.

GORDON LIGHTFOOT'S new album *Did She Mention My Name* (United Artists UAS 6649) is a great disappointment. There is very little harmony here between material and arrangement and, on occasion, between performer and material.

This is the Lightfoot of *Black Day* in July, his recent single, which is one of the album's 12 cuts—a Lightfoot trying to write songs that really aren't in him to write, and trying to sing them to slick orchestral arrangements that make him sound silly and phoney. In this category I'd include songs like *Boss Man* and *May I, Does Your Mother Know* and *Magnificent Outpouring*.

There are only four cuts on the album worthy of Lightfoot—and, as it happens, they're Lightfoot at his best. *The Last Time I Saw Her* is perhaps the most deeply moving song he has ever written, *Pussywillows Cat-tails* and *Something Very Special* are beautiful songs, and *The Mountains and Mary Ann* is the kind of "travelin'" song he writes and sings so well.

Technically the album is faultless. Lightfoot is in splendid voice; guitarist Red Shea and bassist John Stockfish are superb. Producer John Simon's orchestral touches are slick and tasteful. What's wrong with the album is its premise: That Gordon Lightfoot can make it as a singer of folk-pop. Who knows—maybe he can, but for someone with Lightfoot's talent as a folksinger it's a waste of time.