



"She turns her own experiences into universal truths"

For Everyone

By LORAIN ALTERMAN

JONI MITCHELL doesn't write love songs. She writes songs about love. And she is the premier explorer of the terrain. Romance and reality both work within her sensibility so that her songs honestly express the range of feelings involved in love. In *Court and Spark* (Asylum 5072), her sixth album in as many years, Mitchell continues to probe this vital life force, and as always she couches her keen insights in poetry that moves both the heart and the mind.

Although she is wise enough to know there can be no final answers, she understands the tension between love and freedom, something every thinking person feels but can't — or won't — always articulate with honesty.

What makes Mitchell's work so fascinating is how perfectly she expresses the continuing psychic struggle. By now she has had her share of the downs as well as the ups of love. She knows that she's got to find fulfillment as a person in her art — and indeed she wants to — yet she's still looking for that one love, that one man who will "court and spark" her even though she realizes that the "spark" probably won't last for long. There are no double standards for her because she knows that both women and men feel that urge to be unfettered just as much as both have the desire for commitment.

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"Help Me" relates this frankly. There's a breezy sense of irony in her voice and music that gives a sharper edge to the last two lines, "We love our lovin'/ But not like we love our freedom." "Car on a Hill" is a moving re-creation of what it's like waiting for one's lover to show up. He's three hours late — has he been hurt? has he met someone else? why does the delight of love turn into this? She expresses all these feelings quite simply in images that stick and the music echoes the sense of impatience turning into despair. "The Same Situation" emphasizes the continuing presence of the

about being "Caught in my struggle for higher achievements/And my search for love/That don't seem to cease."

Not all of Mitchell's songs focus solely and inwardly on love. She's fine at telling tales too, like the fast and racy "Raised On Robbery" about a prostitute vainly attempting to make a sale in a bar. "Free Man in Paris" shows her awareness that the success drive just like the love drive can be at odds with freedom. Just as love makes demands so does business. This particular song is about the businessmen she knows best, those in the record industry — take her very apt lines about "the work I've taken on/Stoking the star maker machinery/Behind the popular song."

For the first time on any of her albums, Mitchell has recorded a song written by someone else, "Twisted" by Annie Ross and Wardell Gray. For some reason "Twisted," originally performed by one of Mitchell's early favorites, Lambert, Hendricks and Ross over a decade ago, is enjoying a mini-renaissance. Bette Midler just did it on her new album, but Mitchell's version is much better: she sings with a wide-eyed innocence similar to Annie Ross's and that gives the surprise ending more impact than Midler's somewhat campy rendition.

Musically "Court and Spark" offers no directions different from Mitchell's previous work. There are traces of "Cold Blue Steel and Sweet Fire" in "Car on a Hill" and of "Judgment of the Moon and Stars" in "Court and Spark." However, what she lacks in musical surprises she makes up for in arrangements and productions that become more sophisticated with each album: the drama of the soul that unfolds in her lyrics is now matched by the drama of the music.

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The instrumental break before the final verse of "Down to You" is an example of how she can build up emotion with superb taste, contrasting the lone and rather de- its lines like "Just when you're thinking/You've finally got it made/Bad news comes knocking/At your garden gate."

There's no doubt that men as well as women can relate to Mitchell's songs; but because she is a woman her work does have a special meaning to all women who are caught in the basic dilemma of knowing they must realize their own potential at the same time they still want to find that one love. It's as a friend of mine, who is very deeply involved in the feminist movement, said rather wistfully one day — "all the theory is great, but you can't share your bed with it."

Mitchell's songs are very personal in that they have roots within her own experience. It's impossible to fake the intense reality of her perceptions, but that doesn't mean that each song is to be interpreted as strict autobiography. Like all great artists she can turn her own experiences into truths that touch everyone.



"BONE" — Jeannie Berlin is a mixed-up vamp in the film, *Wednesday* at the U.A. Eastside Cinema.