



Joni Mitchell

Ladies of the Canyon—Joni Mitchell (Reprise)

Joni Mitchell's first two albums have been enough to establish her as one of the finest individual composer-performers of the current day. Her songs are brilliant and original, and their arrangements are nothing less; and what her voice lacks in polished professionalism she makes up tenfold in expressiveness.

Ladies of the Canyon, Joni's newest collection, won't diminish that reputation. Its twelve (!) cuts include a wealth of new material, plus a number of songs—including "Morning Morgantown" and "The Circle Game"—she's been singing in concerts for several years. And for the first time there are piano arrangements, in addition to the usual guitar.

The newer songs continue Joni's established style, but lean more than ever toward description of individual people and friendships—"Rainy Night Home," "The Priest," "Blue Boy," and the title song are excellent examples. As before, the tunes are mostly slow and elaborate, with a few exceptions—"Conversation" and "Big Yellow Taxi"—which are all the more impressive for the versatility they reveal. The latter is also

the closest to the early parabolic style of "Both Sides Now" and "The Circle Game," although "Woodstock" is also a sort of generalizable tale (this is the same song recently recorded by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young; as usual, Joni's version of her own work is better).

Unfortunately, the album is not an unblemished success. At least half the songs are subject to unneeded, mostly choral, effects, intruding between verses or at the end; they might be seriously distracting if they weren't enough out-of-place that they're easily ignored. It's impossible to tell if they were intended in the original arrangements or added later, but other evidence—inclusion of "The Arrangement," a movie theme way below the other cuts in quality, and the rough-sounding version of "Big Yellow Taxi"—leads one to believe that Joni was under some pressure to produce. Her cancellation of concert engagements last fall, also because of heavy pressure, is one more sign.

Ironically, one of the songs, "For Free," is a lament about the cause of just this sort of pressure—that people won't listen to performers who don't try to act like superstars. Hopefully, this needn't always be the case, and we'll see a fourth album next spring undiluted by gimmicks.

Meanwhile, those who've heard Joni Mitchell's first two albums won't want to miss this one; those who haven't might better start with *Song to a Seagull* (green and orange jacket), but once one's developed a taste there's no stopping. Even the cover art is beyond comparison.

—4R

John Sebastian

John B. Sebastian (Reprise and MGM)

The return of the ex-Lovin' Spoonful leader after a long absence is marked by both an unusual release problem and an uneven performance, varying from brilliant to boring. The album has been issued by both Reprise and MGM—the former being Sebastian's new company and the latter his old one—and lawsuits from both sides seem to be in the works. As for quality, the Reprise pressing is a bit better, but the music is exactly the same.

The material in Sebastian's performance here is spotty, and even help from such notables as Crosby, Stills and Nash sometimes fails to compensate. The album opens up with the joyous sounds so reminiscent of the Spoonful. "Hurry up Lorey, hurry up Sue, we can't hardly wait for you..." is the greeting extended in "Red Eye Express," followed by the slightly over-sentimental single of last year, "She's a Lady"—nice sentiments but overextended. "What She Thinks About" is a good strong rocker which succeeds in setting a good-time mood after the lady has gone.

Then it's a trip into fantasy as "Magical Connection" tells of the obvious and "You're a Big Boy Now" speaks in an unaccompanied acoustic solo about the liberation involved in growing up and away from the family. Side one closes out with the slightly stiff country "Rainbows All Over Your Blues," and it seems that Sebastian is succeeding in providing just that.

Then, unfortunately, comes side two. When John sang "How Have You Been" at Woodstock, it went over like a lead balloon. It doesn't get any better on the record, coming off like a bad Simon thing. "Baby Don't Ya Get Crazy" is pretty good until the combination of orchestra and background vocals by some misplaced soul singers (the Ikettes) destroys it. The last three cuts—"The Room That Nobody Lives In," the instrumental "Fa-Fana-Fa," and "I Had a Dream"—all drag so badly that the less said the better.

The album is disappointing, not because it is bad, but because it could be so much better. This won't stop it from selling, but hopefully Sebastian will see

its shortcomings on his way to the bank.

—Jeff Gale

Jimi Hendrix et al.

Band of Gypsies [sic]—Jimi Hendrix, Buddy Miles, and Billy Cox (Capitol)

Last New Year's Eve, the Fillmore East in New York brought together Jimi Hendrix, Buddy Miles, and Billy Cox for a heavy christening of the Seventies. Judging from Capitol's newly released recording of the show, any freak who spent the night in Times Square should be shorn of his hair and sent to Fargo, North Dakota to work as a CPA.

Every New Year's Eve party should have at least one song dedicated to "our brave fighting boys in Vietnam." Jimi, adding the troops in Chicago and Birmingham, does it with "Machine Gun," a thirteen-minute cut that perhaps best proves the compatibility of the unlikely trio.

It's worth mentioning the fine job the engineering staff did with the difficult task of producing a listenable record from a live performance. The instrumentation is clear and well-balanced, and noise is kept to a minimum while retaining a feel of audience reaction, as in Buddy Miles' "Changes," where he joins a clapping audience in the finale to one of the album's standout cuts.

Jimi hasn't been recorded since *Electric Ladyland*, and it will come as a relief to his fans that their man is apparently fully recovered from his well-publicized bout with mental and physical exhaustion. Hendrix is getting it on as well as ever, if not more so. It's a nice record, all around.

—John Jurewicz

Guess Who (?)

American Woman—The Guess Who (RCA)

The RCA ads in *Rolling Stone* have been proclaiming The Guess Who as more than a Top-Forty group. If you put on the second side first, you might almost believe it. But remember, I did say *might*.

There are some hints of talent on the album. "969 (The Oldest Man)," the first cut on the second side, is a fairly good jazz-influenced instrumental with, of all things, a flute. The single "No Time" shows a passable idea of harmony and an ability to change structure in mid-song.

Thus ends the good; and the bad is there in abundance. "Talisman" sounds like a pretty folksong but those damn lyrics are meaningless. The topper is the cut "No Sugar Tonight," featuring such lyrics as:

"No sugar tonight in my coffee
No sugar tonight in my tea
No sugar to stand beside me
No sugar to run with me
(Dat'n-doo-dow-dow-dat'n-doo-dow...)"

The picture is clear. Despite the promotion and the three minute instrumental, The Guess Who may still be labeled Canadian Double-Bubble.

—Jeff Gale

NYR&RE

Reflections—New York Rock & Roll Ensemble (Atco)

The music for this album was composed and orchestrated by Manos Hadjidakis, who wrote the scores to the films "Never on Sunday" and "Topkapi." The

New York Rock & Roll Ensemble provide as good arrangements and lyrics for the songs as anybody (except probably some Grecians bands) could. The music is not quite rock and roll but the NYR&RE have never really been rock musicians either. They do interesting semi-classical interpretations of their material and this album is no exception. Whether or not you will enjoy this record depends on how you like this type of music. What they do, they do well.

—Jay Pollack

Shorts

Traces/Memories—The Lettermen (Capitol)

This vintage vocal group does the title songs, "Catch the Wind," "Spinning Wheel," "Hang On Sloopy," and too many others in their own inimitable creamy style.

American Avatar; Love Comes Rolling Down—The Lyman Family with Lisa Kindred (Reprise)

Mel Lyman used to play in Jim Kweskin's Jug Band, and publish *Avatar*. The Family is a commune in Roxbury. The folkish music is quiet, simple, and beautiful.

Poe Through the Glass Prism—Glass Prism (RCA)

The idea was to set Poe's poems to music, and it's not really *that* bad an idea, but every song sounds like every other one—just a cheezy rock accompaniment to such ditties as "The Raven" and "The Conqueror Worm." The album was recorded in Mahwah, New Jersey, which explains everything—Rock 'n Roll Poe is Jersey aesthetics.

A Sign of Change—Lamb (Fillmore)

Rotten Mutton!!!!

Wild is Love—Patty Drew (Capitol)

If you're a menopausal, adenoidal, polystyrene Neanderthal who wants to groove on bubble-gum lyrics and Hollywood Palace arrangements, by all means acquire this album and go all the way.

I Am The President—David Frye (Elektra)

Frye may be the most talented impressionist around as he does perfect copies of everyone from Nixon to Hubert (though he can't do Spiro very well). The sketches on the album are not as funny as they could have been, but one is outstanding—Nixon getting stoned: "... I see purple mountains and fruited plains." This is a good album but Frye's excellent impression of George Wallace is nowhere to be found. Besides, he's much better in person as he also does facial imitations in his act.

Best of the Strawberry Alarm Clock (Uni)

Isn't it amazing how a group with only two hits, "Incense and Peppermints" and "Tomorrow," can put out a "best of" album? If this was the best they could do, no wonder they aren't still selling records.

Argent (Epic)

Rod Argent and Chris White of the Zombies have put together this group, which, as expected, plays perfectly decent but unexceptional rock.

Mind Garage (RCA)

It's supposed to be acid rock, but it sounds neutral.

Magnifique!—Mirielle Mathieu (Capitol)

She sings ten songs in the language of love, and frenches them all.

—Maurice LeBeau

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