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WHAT MATTERS TO CANADIANS

For the Record

Mellow minstrels

Joni and others sing of joy and reconciliation

TAMING THE TIGER

Joni Mitchell
(Reprise/Warner)

A return to her jazzier side, *Taming the Tiger* finds Joni Mitchell, now 54, happy but hardly complacent. Featuring saxophonist Wayne Shorter (Weather Report) and drummer Brian Blade (Joshua Redman), the album includes sensual, romantic numbers like *Love Puts On a New Face*, with its swirling keyboards and Mitchell's pastel-shaded chords, and *The Crazy Cries of Love*, about a late-night tryst on a train bridge that she wrote with her boyfriend, Saskatoon songwriter Don Freed. But other songs, such as *Lead Balloon* and *No Apologies*, attack some of Mitchell's favorite targets: corrupt lawyers and two-faced record executives. On the acerbic title track, she sings: *I'm a runaway from the record biz/From the hoods in the hood/And the whiny white kids/Boring!* For the most part, however, the album is a celebration of Mitchell's newfound love. On *Face Lift*, she gently rebukes her mother for disapproving of her unmarried relationship with Freed. "Why is this joy not allowed?" she asks. On *Stay in Touch*, she sings the simple title phrase over and over, illuminating the words until they glow with new meaning. Like the landscape and portrait paintings by the singer that illustrate the CD booklet, Mitchell's best songs cast sometimes common subjects in an uncommonly bright light.

IN THE BEAUTY OF THE DAY

Quartette
(Outside)

When Quartette's Colleen Peterson died of cancer in 1996, few believed the popular Canadian female vocal ensemble could survive the devastating loss. Although just one of four voices, along with Sylvia Tyson, Caitlin Hanford and Cindy Church, Peterson



PHILL SNEEL/MACLEANS

Doane: an Ally McBeal for the MuchMusic set

was an integral founding member who brought superbly crafted songs to the group. Her place was filled by singer-songwriter Gwen Swick, a friend who joined the ensemble with Peterson's blessing. Happily, on Quartette's fourth album, *In the Beauty of the Day*, Swick emerges as a more-than-worthy replacement. Her songs, including the tender *Me and My Love and I* and the humorous *I Don't Believe I Do Believe*, are among the album's strongest. Overall, the collection offers the most eclectic Quartette repertoire to date, all drenched in the group's trademark harmonies. Tyson provides an Afro-Caribbean flavored alphabet song for grown-ups called *E.Z.*, while Church and Hanford serve up classy country and sultry jazz tunes, respectively. But it is Swick who

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FOR THE RECORD

contributes the album's most moving number with *All Things Can Change*, which conveys a deep reservoir of hope. No doubt it helped carry the group through its darkest hour, after Peterson's passing.

ADAM'S RIB

Melanie Doane

(Sony)

Like Ashley MacIssac, Melanie Doane is a talented Maritime fiddler with pop ambitions. But while MacIssac has been plagued by image problems, Doane faces no such difficulty. Strawberry blond, youthfully perky and wafer-thin, she's a record company's dream: an Ally McBeal for the MuchMusic set. Trouble is, Doane fancies herself a singer-songwriter along the lines of Sarah McLachlan, on whose Lilith Fair tour she performed this summer. While Doane has a pleasant enough voice, both her singing and the dozen songs on her second album, *Adam's Rib*, lack McLachlan's emotional depth. Catchy tunes like the title track and *Happy Homemaker*, with its ironic refrain "barefoot and pregnant never looked so good," seem like feminism-lite. And the lyrics to *Goliath* sound straight out of a self-help book. Worse still, her fiddling pyrotechnics have been limited to just one track, the spirited reel *Mel's Rock Pile*. Ultimately, *Adam's Rib* simply doesn't have enough meat on the bone.

THE MCGARRIGLE HOUR

Kate and Anna McGarrigle

(Rykodisc)

The brilliant debut album by 24-year-old Rufus Wainwright earlier this year betrayed what was obviously an extraordinary musical upbringing. Here is the proof. A family gathering featuring Rufus, his mother, Kate McGarrigle, his aunt Anna, his father and Kate's ex-husband, Loudon Wainwright III, his sister, Martha, uncles, cousins and friends Emmylou Harris and Linda Ronstadt, *The McGarrigle Hour* mines the rich heritage of North American music with loving treatments of folk ballads, torch songs and parlor ditties. Ronstadt joins Kate and Anna on Stephen Foster's *Gentle Annie*, while Harris sings French with them both on the rollicking Cajun tune *La Porte en Arrière*. The album's highlight is a breathtaking sing-along featuring Kate, Loudon, Rufus and Martha on Irving Berlin's bittersweet *What'll I Do*. But the revelation is Martha. Blessed with a sexy alto, she delivers a fetching, cabaret-style rendition of Cole Porter's *Allez-Vous En* and her own soul-baring confessional, *Year of the Dragon*. Rufus is very likely looking over his shoulder.

NICHOLAS JENNINGS

Mellow minstrels

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