

Pop records

by Geoffrey Cannon

THE AGONY of trying to assess friends' tastes at Christmas! The only solution, for me, is to give as gifts what I have myself most enjoyed. This is no balanced list, ranging over the rock music spectrum. Here are the albums I've played most often, which were issued this year.

They fall into four groups. First, two solo albums: Joni Mitchell's *Ladies of the Canyon*, and Neil Young's *After the Gold Rush* (Warner Brothers RSLR 6376 and 6383 respectively). Both singers are intensely intelligent, use words with grace, and have done a lot to create a new sense of the meaning of love and of individual identity in a social context which has demonstrated its disgust with conventional mores.

Secondly, only two bands have produced new, studio-recorded albums of extraordinary quality. And both are bands who have already achieved much. For me, there were no outstanding new bands in 1970. Many were very talented; some (like Sea Train and Stone Ground) promise great albums in 1971. But there was no indubitable inspiration and excitement created in a studio by new bands.

The two bands that came through, and so are now the best bands in America, are the Grateful Dead, on the West Coast, with *Workingman's Dead* (Warner Brothers RSLP 1869); and "The Velvet Underground") are East Coast, with *Loaded* (Atlantic SD 9034).

Third group: live albums. The four best live albums of 1970 may well be the four best live albums of all time to date. The Rolling Stones produced *Get Your Ya Yas Out* (Decca SKL 5065). The Who Live at Leeds (Track



Joni Mitchell

2406 001) is even better. *Delany And Bonnie And Friends On Tour with Eric Clapton* (Atlantic 2400 013) is the nearest I got to a new band, in 1970. This album is by far the best example of the new phenomenon of bands formed for an occasion. Finally, *Woodstock* (Atlantic 2663 001/3). It's patchy, but it's atmosphere, and sides two and five make it essential.

What's left is oldies, golden or just great. Most of the Kinks' best numbers are on *The Kinks*, issued this year (on Pye NPL 18326). Likewise, *The Everly Brothers' Original Greatest Hits* (CBS 66255, not to be confused with the miserable live album issued by Warner Brothers) is just what it says.

All Van Morrison's solo albums are first rank but given one choice, I'd pick Decca's recent memorial album of Van's old band, (*The World of Them*, SPA 86).

And the record I've played most in 1970? Purists may shudder, but it's a rock'n'roll revival album (Sha Na Na's *Rock'n'roll Is Here to Stay* (Polydor 2361 001). Joeko Marcellino's version of the Big Bopper's "Chantilly Lace" is perfect. Any mood you're in, Sha Na Na will put you in a good one. Bop to them from me, on Christmas Day.