



JONI MITCHELL

Shine

HEAR MUSIC



QUIETLY FURIOUS RETURN FROM ROCK'S GRANDE DAME

43 years ago, Joni Mitchell - then Roberta Joan Anderson - began her performing career in a Calgary coffeeshop called The Depression. So there's a certain symmetry to the news that she's come out of retirement - five years, as she puts it, of "gardening and watching old movies" - to join Paul McCartney on Starbucks' new Hear Music label.

Although she withdrew in 2002 with memorable venom, scorning the "corrupt cesspool" of the modern music industry, it's not such a surprising return. In many ways hers has been a career of diva-esque goodbyes. Mitchell first proposed retiring back in 1969, freaked out at the prospect of fame, before recording *Ladies Of The Canyon*, and refers to 1972's *For The Roses* as "one of my first swansongs".

Shine is trailed as a return to the spirit of the latter record: a stripped-back, more personal album after the lavish contractual obligations of *Both Sides Now* (2000) and *Travelogue* (2002), recorded at her home in British Columbia with just a piano and an old synth. It's part of a recent flurry of activity that's also seen her complete a collaboration with the Alberta Ballet and a visual art installation.

What's hurt her back into song? Oh you know: the prospect of planetary extinction, the ongoing fiasco of international politics, drivers who overtake on the right. The presence of a shuffling, breezy cover of "Big Yellow Taxi" is an early sign that *Shine* finds Mitchell in her own peculiar protest mode. Following a beautiful prefatory instrumental, opening song "This Place"

provides an update on the paving of paradise, as Mitchell watches the mountains near her home ground up to provide gravel for Californian mansions. But where once she was youthfully, giddily defiant of the absurdity, now she seems bitterly, languidly resigned.

"If I Had A Heart" and "Bad Dreams Are Good" add to the catalogue of woes. With Mitchell's voice a smoky husk of its former glories over mournful piano and home studio synth, they are both muttered jeremiads against "holy war, genocide, suicide" and the "cellphone zombies" oblivious to it all. "Oh Earth, how can we heal you?" she sings, but it's clear she doesn't expect an answer any time soon.

There's an elegiac beauty to these tracks, Mitchell seeming ready to leave behind this angry overcrowded world. But they fail to dramatise the predicament, and that's always been her strength as a writer. The album proffers a distant prospect of redemption - in the grace under pressure of "Hana" and a strident setting of Kipling's "If" - but only really beguiles on the title track. Rippling with flanged guitar, it's a simple seven-and-a-half minute reverie to the wonder and the horror of the world, where, if only in a couplet, all the corrupt churches that "love less and less" can be balanced out by "a hopeful girl in a dreamy dress". Four decades into her career, despite her extravagant despair, Joni still carries the distant echo of that earnest teenager, crooning in the coffeeshop. STEPHEN TROUSSE

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