Pop Songs for the New Woman

By LORAINE ALTERMAN

THE medium, even more than the message, may have made women's lib hard to swallow. Revolutionary literature has rarely been noted for its wit or style, and while Germaine Greer and Kate Millett made the best-seller lists, excessive pedantry and zeal does put people off. Just as in the past novelists and poets made dogma digestible, today it is the singer-songwriter who affects the mass audience by presenting the message in a medium, music, that immediately hits both the heart and the mind.

Helen Reddy's slick "I Am Woman" served notice that some female singer-songwriters are concerned with raising consciousness, but it is really three mature artists whose current and past wor reflects the special awarenes of the new woman. We know Joni Mitchell, Dory Previ and Yoko Ono as flesh an blood women-their career and love lives are publi knowledge. They are not fla wavers for the movement but independent, intelligent talented women who hav realized their own creativ potentials. It's natural the take poetry. While a ci their songs should commun like "I Want My Love t icate their understanding c Rest Tonight" makes the ir what it is to be a woma portant point that men, a and a human being.

the three, Yoko Ono's Ap words don't always fit the proximately Infinite Un rhythm and it comes o verse (Apple SVBB 3399, tw more as a tract than a son disks) is the least successfi One need only listen Memory, Ono sings he essentially the same me a lady of sorrow, most of



Singer Joni Mitchell "She proves that women can create masterpieces" songs straigntforwardly rati er than piercingly probir limits of unintellig the ble screams as she's done the past. But her melodie become mired in monotor and her voice, though ofte swathed in echo effect lacks real color or interest

Lyrically, Ono has a te dency to let polemics ove much as women, suffer fro Of the latest albums b traditional role-playing, th

subtle, witty and economics a wit and irony that underuse of words makes a stur lines their truths even more. ning song with so muc For example, in "The Midgmore impact. But Ono ca write controlled, charmin lyrics as in "Have You See a Horizon Lately," whic recommends us to hold on t beauty because it easily slip away.

This two-record set un lerlines one of Ono's basi roblems --- self-indulgence Previn's she would have been better off with a single record, particularly since the songs ire unrelieved by any meodic interest. By not editing ierself, Ono waters down he punch of such a powerul and harrowing song as 'Looking Over from My Hotel Window," a statement of her eelings at age 39. Yet depite my reservations about her work, Ono merits attenfion because she freely rereals herself to us in a way that makes us grasp what houghtful men and women ace.

On her fourth and newest album, Mary C. Brown and the Hollywood Sign (United Artists UAS 5657), Dory Previn once again proves herself to be a songwriter of extraordinary sensitivity and sophistication. Actually the score from a musical she wrote of the same name (the title song was on her second album, "Mythical Kings and Iguanas"), this album stands as a concept album which takes the self from specific problems to an ultimate spiritual identification with a universe that encompasses all the variety, all the maleness and femaleness, that is in the world.

Of course, any brief summary is bound to make this album sound highfalutin, but Previn's images and stories are so concrete that she always keeps in touch with musically. Backed by the ex Dory Previn's "Don't Pi reality. Furthermore, alcellent rock band, Elephant' Him Down," which carrie though she has been branded

sage, to see how Previn' her songs are fashioned with et's Lament," a midget wishes he were black in order stand out from his fellows. Laughter makes us see how any minority, whether it be midget, black or female, gets lumped, under a label rather than treated as individuals. voice caresses

"When a Man Wants a Woman" while Laurindo Almeida's romantic acoustic guitar sighs in the background. But instead of cooing about love as you might expect, the lyrics point out that "when a man wants a woman/He says it's a compliment . . . but when a woman wants a man/He says she's threatening him." Again irony scores the point.

Throughout the album, although her voice is only fair, Previn dips into a wide variety of musical styles to fit the content of her lyrics.

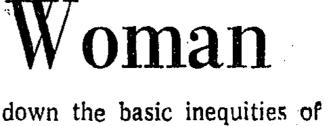
Trooping out a pack of outcasts and misfits of one kind or another, Previn's songs relate poignantly to women. Women are outcasts in this male dominated society and those who have Continued on Page 36



Continued from Page 30 struggled for self-fulfillment outside the accepted wifemother norm have too often been viewed as misfits. Without ever lapsing into shrill rhetoric, Previn's album conveys all this with dazzling brilliance and style.

Joni Mitchell is the most accomplished musician of these three women so that every element-music, voice and lyric - merge to create an intensely moving experience on her current LP, For The Roses (Asylum SD 5057). Much of this breathtaking collection of songs catalogues the trials of love with the wisdom and realism that comes from experience wrapped in an exquisite sensibility. Mitchell is not a girl basking in impossibly romantic dreams, but a womwho has gained the an strength and understanding to see that love doesn't require a victim or a victimizer. Just listen to her pungent "Woman of Heart and Mind" asserting her awareness of her own needs as openly as the inside photo reveals her standing naked on a rock in the sea.

Like Previn's album, this one follows a philosophical progression from the open-"Banquet," laying cut, ing



life to the closing "Judgement of the Moon and Stars (Ludwig's Tune)," which so beautifully uses the image of Beethoven's deafness to say that we must defy the unjust . universe by living and creating. Certainly this does not pertain to just one sex, but Beethoven's deafness does relate to being a woman. Despite his handicap, Beethoven composed great music. Despite the pressures of society, women-as Mitchell's work proves-can create masterpieces.

Each of Mitchell's songs is a gem glistening with her elegant way with language, her pointed splashes of irony and her perfect shaping of a images. Never does Mitchell voice a thought or feeling commonly. She's a songwriter and singer of genius who can't help but make us feelwe are not alone.

As Mitchell writes in "Lesson in Survival," "When you dig down deep/you lose good sleep"; but none of these women fears to explore her soul. By giving us gifts of themselves, Joni Mitchell, Dory Previn and Yoko Ono help us to understand ourselves and so are liberating both to women and men.