

Joni Mitchell

Joni Mitchell, "Miles of Aisles," Asylum

Reprise Records has, moldering in some vault in Burbank, a recording of Joni Mitchell's 1968 concert at Carnegie Hall. It has never been and probably never will be released. Why? Maybe the sound quality is bad, maybe they thought there wouldn't be enough of a market. But, having seen Joni while she was touring in 1968, I think I know the reason — she was, for the most part, scared out of her fragile mind by the audience. This is not to say that the audience was hostile, because they were effusive in their respect and love for the willowy songstress. But all those eyes were too much for her.

"Miles of Aisles" is Joni's coming of age as a performer, at least in the concert setting. Gone are her tentative, paranoiac quaverings, to be replaced by a more, shall we say, aggressive paranoia. Joni has not changed her mind, only her style. Purists may resent some of the changes, but many will find them refreshing.

There are two sides of Joni alone, and two of Joni with the L.A. Express, led by Tom Scott. The spectrum of her development is examined, from "Cactus Tree" to the two new songs, "Jericho" and "Love or Money." The L.A. Express numbers in concert centered around cuts from *Court and Spark* which are wisely omitted on *Miles of Aisles*. Instead Joni chose to use either new songs or new arrangements, sufficiently interesting and fresh, of the oldies. "Woodstock" gets the blues treatment. "Carey," a charmer to begin with, becomes positively entrancing. "Jericho" is a strikingly lovely song, about, naturally enough, the breaking down of walls.

There are disappointments, too. "All I Want" is flacid, "Blue" adds nothing to the studio version and "Love or Money" is not very strong. Moreover, there's an error of omission — the hard charging version of "Raised on Robbery" which was so exciting when Ms. Mitchell appeared at Hill isn't here, and I wish it was. But you can't have everything.

Joni has made it to the point where she's comfortable on stage. And the confidence shows.

—Justin Arthur Prettyface

Billy Cobham, Stanley Clarke, & Miles Davis

Billy Cobham, *Total Eclipse*, SD1821. Stanley Clarke, *Stanley Clarke*, NE431. Miles Davis, *Get Up With It*, 33236KG.

Thank God for Miles Davis. With Billy Cobham and Stanley Clarke, two of the best young players on the scene, turning out the kind of tired, pop-rehash manufactured on their latest LPs, we've still got Miles to show us the Light.

It's not that Cobham's and Clarke's records are so bad really. It's just that they are capable of doing so much more. If I walked into a bar and the band was playing the music that's on Cobham's *Total Eclipse*, I'd be pleasantly surprised—nice, tight horn arrangements, tasteful but average solo work—good beat, easy to dance to, give it a 73. But Billy Cobham's music shouldn't be a pleasant surprise. It ought to knock you on your ass. He's a



Flora Purim

Aretha Franklin

RECORDS

Aretha Franklin

Aretha Franklin, "With Everything I Feel in Me," Atlantic SD 18116

Well, we know it's not everything she feels in her; she's already given us much more than this. But here's Aretha, slickly packaged and produced, hawking love of the satin boudoir variety. It's good stuff, though there's nothing really exciting going on; mostly tame and painless "do it to me baby" riffs, and a mass of formalized instrumentation so dense that a good Stevie Wonder tune fell in and never made it out the other side. As always with Aretha, there are at least some treats. On a few cuts she talks just as smooth as she sings; there's an unusual vocal twist or two that brings Ann Peebles to mind; there's a touch of good hand-clapping gospel rhythm on "Sing It Again"

and at least one — "Without Love" — seems to be a basically fine song.

But there was a time when Aretha took a standard Dionne Warwick/Burt Bacharach tune — "I Say A Little Prayer" — disrupted it, brought down to earth, and made a little gem of it. Now she takes "You'll Never Get To Heaven" (same duo) and throws a couple more layers of frosting on. Real curious. But check out the album cover; on the back, a montage of glamorous Arethas framed by what appears to be the late great Jayne Mansfield's swimming pool — and on the front, a pin-up shot of the Queen in the natural state, graced only by a luscious fur and the shadow of a mysterious smile that seems to suggest that, in some perverse way, she knows what she's doing. After all, America is the land of the sugar jones, and the stuff is getting more expensive all the time.

—Ivy Ramo

Flora Purim

Flora Purim, "Stories to Tell," (Milestone M-9058)

Flora Purim is a jazz vocalist whose musical roots can be traced through Chick Corea's *Return to Forever* group, for which she sang. Those of you (like myself) who are unfamiliar with Corea's work will instantly recognize in her singing the Astrid Gilberto—"Girl From Ipanema"—Bossa Nova-Brazilian sound that kept the whole country humming and swaying some ten years ago.

On this album, however, Ms. Purim's singing goes beyond the usual provocative rhythms and sensuously detached mood of that idiom to suggest something more—an ethereal, mysterious, Third World qual-

ity that puts you in touch with ever subtler, crueler, more ecstatic regions of inner space.

Her voice is a stunning instrument, always clear and pure, with its unearthliness complemented well by ARP and MOOG sounds on many cuts on this album, as it produces sounds ranging from siren-like wails (on "Silver Sword") to torch-song desolation (on "To Say Goodbye") to ecstatic sighs (in a duet with her percussionist-husband Airtio Moreira on "O Cantador"). She sings songs about dreams, heaven, hearts, flying, shadows, twilight, love, hope, silence and desire, all with masterful clarity and utter abandonment. Her flawless diction communicates unmistakable messages whether she sings in her native Portuguese, or in an accented English that will drive you wild.

—Ed Reckford

monster on drums, everybody in his band is a bitch: John Abercrombie—guitar; Mike Brecker—reeds; Randy Brecker—trumpet; Glenn Ferris—trombone; Milcho Leviev—keyboards; Alex Blake—bass. There's no reason for the music to be anything but beautiful.

But this is contrived, trendy, uninspired

stuff. So much so that these beautiful musicians can't open up enough to really play. The music's so overproduced, so tightly packaged, there's no looseness, no freedom. Cobham, or Cobham's promoters, have chosen a bag they consider to be the current thing, and boxed the music up to fit that bag (and just in time for

Christmas). A lot of it, especially in the horn arrangements, bears an uncanny resemblance to Chicago. Chicago! Of all the bland, non-descript, baby-food bullshit, they're the worst. And for cats like these to wind up sounding like that? It's sad. Sad.

Much the same could be said of Stanley Clarke's latest: beautiful players: Clarke—bass; Tony Williams—drums; Jan Hammer—keyboards; Bill Connors—guitar; Airtio—percussion; but again, the music is overproduced, the package too tight. Yet Clarke's LP at least has some saving graces. "Spanish Phases for Strings and Bass," with Stanley's hard, clear sound in front of some sensitive string arrangements by Michael Biggs, is very strong, very moving. Clarke's technique alone, his speed, his sincere force of attack, is shattering. "Phases" is a lucid showcase for this gift.

Other than that, there's occasionally inspired rock-oriented jams tied together with some pretty but typical horn and string arrangements. The album suffers from lack of material, possibly due to Stanley's not wanting to do things too much like his contemporaries.

Miles' *Get Up With It* points out what's wrong with a lot of the electric jazz-rock thing by being so right. Where others are stilted, Miles is free; where others are fashionable, Miles is purely himself. This is not a great record (it could have been given the personnel: reedmen Dave Liebman, Steve Grossman, Sonny Fortune, Carlos Garnett, and John Stubblefield, keyboards Herbie Hancock and Keith Jarrett, guitarists John McLaughlin and Cornell Dupree, drummers Billy Cobham and Bernard Purdie, and percussionists Mtume and Airtio, among others) but it's music—free, sincere, and unfettered by the pratfalls of commercialism.

Rock has made its impression on Miles, but in a much different way than it has on Clarke or Cobham. Miles never emulates. Where Cobham, and Clarke to some extent, have set up a rock style after which to model their music, Miles has no model save his own soul. He draws from rock—a rhythm section groove, or a phrase on which to extrapolate a tune—but his music is still put together as only Miles can put it together. What sounds he borrows are brought into the whole of the music in a way that makes them Miles' own.

On trumpet, Miles plays more in a few notes than many players do in a lifetime. There's a thoughtfulness in the way his tones are shaped, a precise flexibility which enables him to say a great deal with very little. The wah-wah adds a new dimension to this shaping, but it's an extension of an approach that was part of Miles' style twenty-five years ago when he played with Charlie Parker. He's playing electric organ how too, and there's a lot of space in that, believe me. Widely spaced chords, slow moving harmonies—you've really got to hear it.

Finally, what Miles' *Get Up With It* has that *Total Eclipse* and *Stanley Clarke* doesn't have is freedom, room to wander and fly in. Really beautiful music, music that leaves the Earth, is music that is discovered as it is played, by both the musician and his audience. There has got to be openness, space to explore and find the Spirit, the Light. Neither Clarke's nor Cobham's records have this. Miles' does.

—Steve Wood

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