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THE SOUND

**Robb Reviews
Newest Albums
by Joan Baez,
Joni Mitchell**

BY ROBB BAKER

New York

There's an old adage or quotation or something about not trusting ladies who protest too loudly. If you take it literally, singers like Joan Baez and Joni Mitchell know exactly what the saying means.

It's hard to imagine a more effective anti-war statement than the opening verse of "David's Album," [Vanguard VSD-79308], dedicated by Joan to her husband, who's now in prison for refusal to serve in Viet Nam.

"If I knew where the wild dove flew," she sings, ever so softly, "I would not tell the hunters, but I would tell you. They say you're not a brave man—or any man at all. You would not shoot the wild

are over and the victory's won/everyone mourns for the poor man's son/red, white, and blue, and victory's sweet/and they left him to die like a tramp on the street."

But the social protest ends there. The Baez album in particular is a masterpiece of understatement. Drawing mostly upon old country hymns and love songs, she sings of lovers parted and outcasts seeking guidance—always with the promise of reunion at the end, where the circle will be unbroken, where the home grass is green, where there's "no sadness, no toil or danger in that bright land to which I go."

In her liner notes, she speaks of Eucalyptus trees and daffodils and Moondog, and concludes: "This record is for all those who are locked up, that they might have the strength to act like free men, and not prisoners, and for all those on the outside, that they might have the strength to act like free men, and not prisoners."—which immediately makes one think Bob Dylan's "I Shall Be Released" should have been included, if Joan had not used the song on her previous album.

Like that double album [a collection of Dylan songs], this one was recorded in Nashville, with the backing of that city's excellent country studio musicians, headed by Grady Martin.

I've always wondered why Baez sings country so well. Perhaps it's because she's been doing it all along ["Banks of the Ohio" and "Wildwood Flower" back on the first albums] and does it with such ease. There's no pretense, no attempt to "sound country," to affect a style [like Dylan—I feel—in "Nashville Skyline"].

She can start "Just a Closer Walk with Thee" with the traditional country church organ softly under the vocals, move thru the changes [singing the backwoods version, "Grant it Jesus, if you please" instead of the censored, sacrilege-fearing "Grant it Jesus is my plea"] sounding every bit the Sunday



Joan Baez . . . "a masterpiece of understatement."



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things like brave men in the fall."

In similar simplicity, Joni sings on her new "Clouds" album [Reprise RS 6341]:

And so once again
My dear Johnny, my dear friend
And so once again you are fighting us all
And when I ask you why
You raise your sticks and cry, and I fall
O, my friend
How did you come
To trade the fiddle for the drum?

Beyond this, neither album is anti-war, with the exception of a final verse added by Miss Baez to "Tramp on the Street": "When the battles

school soloist—and then end with a vocal jump to a high note so classically pure that it couldn't be anyone in the world but Joan Baez doing it.

In all, the album is more hopeful than sad. She misses her man ["I walk out alone/I look at the sky/too lonesome to sing/too empty to cry"], but she finds comfort in God and nature, in a "hickory wind" and a "glad bluebird of happiness," and isn't ashamed to sing about it.

The album ends with the bittersweet, "My home's across the Blue Ridge mountains, and I never expect to see you anymore." But somehow, just by the way she sings it, you know everything's going to be all right.

Both Joan and Joni paint as well as sing, and both did the covers of their new albums. But the contents are rather different. Joni wrote all the songs she sings, whereas Joan selects from traditional and composed country pieces. Besides, Joni has her man [Graham Nash] with her, and that makes a difference.

"Varnished weeds in window jars/tarnished beads on tapestries/kept in satin boxes are reflections of love's memories," Joni sings, to open the album. "Letters from across the seas/roses dipped in sealing wax/valentines and maple leaves/tucked into a paperback."

If you didn't do it yourself, you surely knew someone who did. Back in your school, your hometown or neighborhood. Some "sunny day, braiding brown flowers and leaves in my hair" girl whom you've lost track of but can never forget. That, more than anything, is what Joni Mitchell is all about.

Plus, Joni knows so perfectly how people—how you—feel. She knows [amazingly like The Who's Tommy] that the more you look at clouds [for love, or life], the less you know them. Or what it's like to be "midway down the midway slowin' down." Or that there's "so much said in listening."

She knows the city, where "people hurry by so quickly/

don't they hear the melodies /in the chiming and the clicking/and the laughing harmonies" and where "the streets are paved with passers-by and pigeons fly and papers lie waiting to blow away."

She knows how to say "the sun poured in like butter-scotch," that people have to "live in present tenses," that everyone "can be cruel but let me be gentle with you," that "fear is like a wilderness /stepping stones on sinking sand," what it's like to have "picked up a pencil and wrote 'I love you' in my finest hand/wanted to send it, but I don't know where I stand."

Perhaps what she knows most of all, tho, is what she and Judy Collins [and, yes, I must have dreamed that new Collins album mentioned last week; it doesn't exist] sing in "Both Sides Now": "But something's lost, but something's gained in living ev'ry day."

[Chicago Tribune Press Service]

FM RADIO

CHICAGO FREQUENCIES

Using the Hollywood soundtrack of "Funny Girl," with Barbra Streisand. 12:00-12:15—MUSIC FROM GERMANY. Program of light music including selec-

