

Joni's out of sync: 'it's just my karma'

BY MICHAEL LAWSON
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THE FIRST item on Joni Mitchell's short-term agenda is promotion to support her new album, *Dog Eat Dog*. Then, she says, it's a little real travel to "see some of the world before war breaks out, before it goes away."

The comment is accompanied by a small laugh, but make no mistake — Mitchell is not speaking lightly. The nuclear climate is just one of several matters that have the California-based Canadian singer severely bugged, and it comes through on *Dog Eat Dog*, her 14th LP and first in three years.

"I feel very alive and with the world, but I do feel angry," she concedes. "It's been a grace-note and sometimes a dominant chord in my entire life. If you look at life, there's plenty to be enjoyed and plenty to be critical of, and I would say this album perhaps contains more social criticism than I've ever written about."

Thus, whether she's singing about "madmen (who) sit up building bombs and making laws" (*The Three Great Stimulants*), or about evangelical hucksters (*Tax Free*), ecological mismanagement (*Ethiopia*) and the utter confusion of living with in a totally balled-up society (*Fiction*), Mitchell gives a frequently unsettling tone to the new release.

It's suggested to her that the closing tune, *Lucky Girl*, with such lines as "I never loved a man I trusted as far as I could pitch my shoe 'til I loved you" is perhaps the album's one real positive moment.

Mitchell rejects the notion instantly; that, she says, would imply the rest are negative. She prefers to term the new collection "serious."

"The last album (*Wild Things Run Fast*) was mostly about love," she explains, masking any exasperation she might feel at dissecting her work, "and at the time of its release, it was a very cynical period regarding romance. If you go back to 1982-83 and look at the videos, for instance, the relationship between a man and a woman was definitely leaning toward Parisian apache dancing.

"Some guy I did an interview with said, 'But Joni, there's no love songs on this album (*Dog Eat Dog*).' I thought, well, buy the last one. I mean, at the time that one came out, people didn't want to hear love songs and now they do. I'm always out of sync with the times — it's just my karma."

The new album does make one concession to the times in Mitchell's uncharacteristic dependence on electronics. She's used synthesizers previously for minor color on such mid-seventies albums as *Court and Spark* and *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*, but never before have they played a dominant role in her backup.

"It's tedious, programming all that stuff," she says, "but at the same time it gives you a real compositional articulacy — you can put the beats exactly where you want them, and then color the sound of them exactly how you want them.

"If there was an extreme reaction to this, I might do an acoustic album next time, because you do crave simplicity. There's more joy when you get a really good band and just go in there and smoke together."

In any case, the Prairie product has time to plot her moves. Her next album, she says, is three years away. Unless, of course, those bombs dictate otherwise.