



RECORDINGS OF NOTE

Mitchell returns to old folkie ways

POP / Alan Niester

NIGHT RIDE HOME

Joni Mitchell

Geffen GEFC-24302

If **Joni Mitchell** has become the forgotten lady of Canadian popular music, she really has no one to blame but herself. Her album releases are now few and far between (this being her first since 1988's forgettable *Chalk Mark In A Rain Storm*), and her songs rarely fit any but the most wide-ranging radio formats. But then, she probably doesn't care much about her status any more.

Nearing 50, she long ago jettisoned the pursuit of popular taste to follow her own muse. The listener comes to **Joni Mitchell**, not vice versa, and it's been that way since about 1970.

That being said, this is one of the more accessible of Mitchell's recent works. She has, thankfully, backtracked over her experimental jazz stage and fallen right back into her old folkie ways. This is a low-key, unencumbered effort, with Mitchell caressing her own poetic images with simple acoustic guitar, accompanied predominantly by the supple, jazz-tinged bass lines of husband and producer Larry Klein. Mitchell's voice, at one time brittle and vulnerable, has become fuller and more confident over the years.

This is a consistent and flowing affair, an organic work in which no one cut really seems to stand out from the rest. Mitchell does not write hook-filled, commercial pop melodies. Her tunes seem more like trails meandering through a forest.

While it would seem unlikely that this would appeal to any but long-time **Joni Mitchell** fans, the recent commercial successes of like-minded artists such as Chris Rea and Chris Isaak suggest there may be a widening market for works of understated taste and intelligence.

THE MARTYR MANTRAS

Boy George

Virgin VL4-3004

In England, this wasn't even marketed as a Boy George release. It was issued under the moniker *The Martyr Mantras* by Jesus Loves You. Here, it's a Boy George release, but the name on the cover is printed in a psychedelic script that is nearly indecipherable. All of which suggests that this is a Milli Vanilli exercise in reverse — the artist actually does all his own singing, he just doesn't want anyone to know who he is.

But that's understandable. Boy George may have been the weirdest and coolest pop icon of the early eighties, but his androgynous profile and well-publicized drug problems have made him the musical leper of the early nineties.

But once past the mystery packaging, there is no mistaking that this is indeed the Boy himself. Who could mistake that somewhat flaccid but clean-cut vocal style, laid neatly over top sophisticated, but suddenly slightly dated, ultra-Caucasian dance and reggae grooves? Slick, but no longer really valid, this is merely a footnote to a career long gone sour.