

# Music

## Marsalis' freewheeling ride big switch from standards

By JOHN WIRT  
Entertainment writer

■ **BRANFORD MARSALIS TRIO**  
*The Dark Keys*  
Columbia

Using the classic jazz trio format, Branford Marsalis' latest album is a big switch from his previous *Loved Ones*, a collection of standards performed with his pianist father, Ellis. The versatile Marsalis — an artist whose sonic sweep includes pop, straight-ahead jazz and classical music — blows through eight often freewheeling tracks, mostly his own compositions.

In "Hesitation," Marsalis' soprano sax lines erupt and sail over his rhythm section's swinging, sympathetic accompaniment. Shifting gears, Marsalis wraps listeners in the warmth of his tenor sax's lower range during the lyrical "A Thousand Autumns." Offering more of gorgeous tenor sound, Marsalis gets bluesy via the laid-back swing of drummer Jeff "Tain" Watts' "Blutain." The set ends with another burst of creativity and the fat tenor tone of "Schott Happens."

■ **WILCO**  
*Being There*  
Reprise

This specially-priced double album is a creative breakthrough for Wilco and its singer-songwriter, Jeff Tweedy. Disc one moves from the Replacements-like rave-ups "Monday" and "Outtaside (Outta Mind)" to the sunny cracker-country of "Forget the Flowers" to the Beatles-esque "I Got You (At the End of the Century)," hand-clapping included. Tweedy continues to make use of his influences with "What's the World Got In Store," a charming hybrid that sounds like Bob Dylan-meets-the Beach Boys.

The quality continues with disc two, including the '60s Brit-pop sound of "Outta Mind (Outta Sight)" and "Why Would You Wanna Live" and the gutbucket country of "Kingpin." *Being There* is beautifully done.

■ **SHAWN COLVIN**  
*A Few Small Repairs*  
Columbia

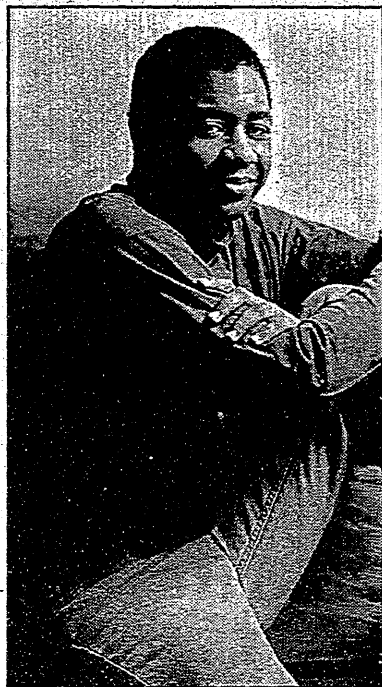
Singer-songwriter Shawn Colvin has a voice that's unique and unmistakable. The Grammy-winner links pop and folk music more skillfully than ever in her penetrating new album. Despite *A Few Small Repairs'* understated title, Colvin sings about a major domestic overhaul, probably inspired by her short-lived marriage.

The angry "Get Out of This House" makes it clear that someone's got to go. The dark side of love also figures in the quieter "The Facts About Jimmy," while the loneliness of "If I Were Brave" is devastating. Colvin continues to plumb life's depths with "84,000 Different Delusions" and "New Thing Now," doing so to chilling effect.

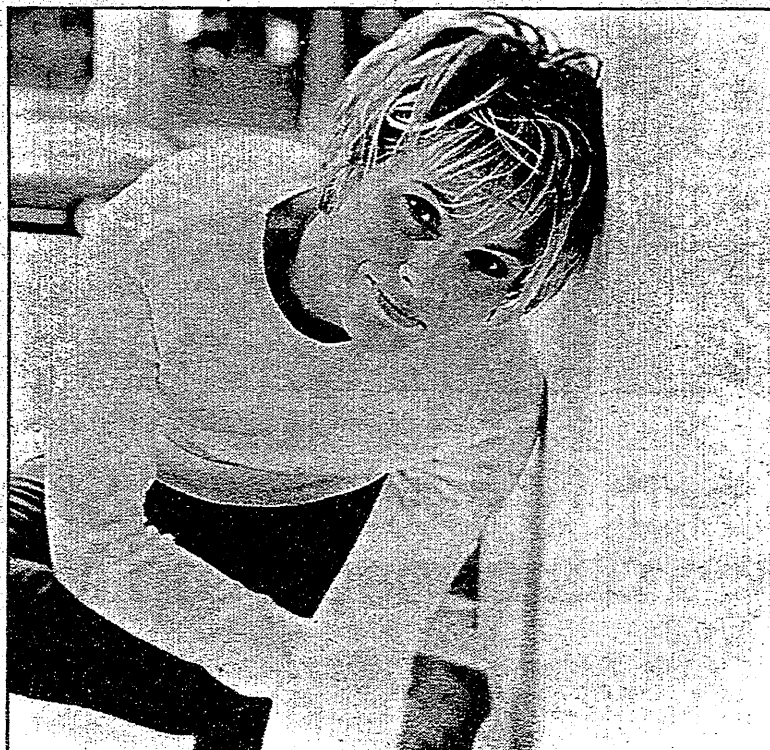
■ **JONI MITCHELL**  
*Hits/Misses*  
Reprise

Joni Mitchell's evolution from a folk singer-songwriter of greater-than-usual sophistication to pop diva is traced on the 15-track *Hits*. The simultaneously released *Misses* features 14 of her more esoteric and experimental songs.

Maybe because Mitchell hasn't been in the limelight lately, it's surprising how familiar, how wonderful her *Hits* songs are. The period mostly represented, 1967 to



Branford Marsalis



Shawn Colvin

Photo by Cynthia Levine

1974, was a time of prime creativity for Mitchell. Her blooming melodic and lyric-writing skills enliven the breezy "Chelsea Morning," plucked from 1969's *Clouds*. Many memorable songs follow, including 1970's lively "Big Yellow Taxi," idealistic "Woodstock," 1971's delightful "Carey" and 1973's breathless "Help Me."

Mitchell's *Misses* finds her blending African, jazz and new age influences in 1991's "Passion Play," going impressionistic with 1979's "The Wolf That Live" and moving further into jazz with 1975's "Harry's House/Centerpiece." A lesser known track from 1969, "The Arrangement," shows Mitchell doing what Tori Amos does now 27 years ago. On the down side, the energy of Mitchell's acoustic guitar takes a back seat to life-sapping synthesizer in her '80s and '90s work.

Missteps aside, Mitchell remains one of pop music's finest songwriters and a huge influence upon female singer-songwriters.

■ **VAN HALEN**  
*Best of Volume 1*  
Warner Bros.

The metal popsters of Van Halen made a big score last week when their greatest hits disc entered the charts at No. 1.

Dating from 1978 through the '90s, the 17-track disc features most of the expected hits, many of them featuring David Lee Roth, the flamboyant singer who left the band in 1985. Sammy Hagar — a singer with an ideal voice for Van Halen but less glittering personality — stepped into Diamond Dave's shoes and the band's commercial muscle continued. But the latter Van Halen albums show creative decline, probably due to guitarist-composer Edward Van Halen's alcoholism.

*Best of Volume 1* also features three new cuts, two featuring a much talked about — but temporary — reunion with Roth. As for the new songs with Roth, they're better for publicity than listening.



Van Halen

Photo courtesy Van Halen Productions

■ **ELEANOR MCEVOY**  
*What's Following Me?*  
Columbia

Geffen Records released Irish singer-songwriter Eleanor McEvoy's promising debut. Her second U.S. release, for Columbia Records this time, dashes the promise. Though the adult contemporary radio-aimed songs lean toward the predictable, the worst thing about *What's Following Me?* is its clichéd, loathsome production by Kevin Moloney and McEvoy. Though the low-voiced McEvoy has talent,

her songs cannot survive such sloppy, heavy-handed treatment.

■ **MICHELE SHOCKED**  
*Kind Hearted Woman*  
Private Music

Billed as her first commercial release in four years, Michele Shocked's *Kind Hearted Woman* is a mostly bleak batch of songs. Like the recent Patti Smith album, Shocked's new collection is pained, bitter, haunted. She sings of stillborn birth, casual betrayal, threat of devastating loss, the death of a beloved 4-year-old girl. A stark vision.