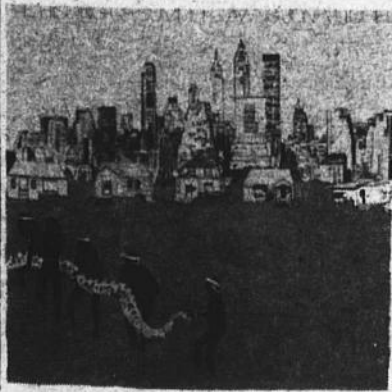


A few tidbits for the holidays



**JONI MITCHELL
THE HISSING OF SUMMER
LAWNS
ASYLUM 7E-1051**

by LARRY LEVIN

Joni Mitchell has been liberated from the confines of being solely a folksinger with a great voice and a talent for writing tremendous lyrics. She has developed into something more in the last two years.

Not that she wasn't a powerful performer before. *Ladies of the Canyon*, *Blue*, *For the Roses*; all were dependent upon her ability and little of others: But since she met up with the L.A. Express and her honey John Guerin, Joni's found the best of several worlds. For Guerin and saxophonist Tom Scott have taught Joni how to swing. They have shown her how rhythm can be manipulated, and how a band reinforces it. They demonstrated the differences between folk, rock and jazz.

The Hissing of Summer Lawns, her latest album, has shown that she's gained confidence in her new-found genres since *Court and Spark*. "This record is a total work," she explains on the liner notes, "conceived graphically, musically, lyrically and accidentally--as a whole." As she goes on to pay tributes to the performers and composers who contributed to the album (L.A. Expressers Max Bennett, Bud Shank, Robben Ford, and Guerin, trumpeter Chuck Findlay, and composers Johnny Mandel and Jon Hendricks), one can feel that she has come out of her shell, and

is accepting and seeking advice from other talented musicians.

The best example of her now-established jazz influences in *The Jungle Line*, which is accompanied by "Warrior drums" throughout. The rhythm of these drums, in fact, is the song, which tells the story of jazz swing and rhythm. "The jungle line burning in a ritual of sound and time... Pretty woman tunnelled through values and smoke/Coy and bitchy wild and fine."

This leads into *Edith and the Kingpin*, a beautiful ballad of a local pimp and a local woman, and their glaring respect (or deference) as they meet and make love to one another. These and the rest of the lyrics still deal with the typical Joni Mitchell love themes, but now they are more Street-wise (yes, like Bruce Springsteen), more realistic than before. Never before would she have written, as she does in *Don't Interrupt the Sorrow*.

"Clandestine/He don't let up the sorrow/He lies and he cheats/It takes a leart like Mary's these days/When your man gets weak."

Some of the songs, especially the opening on *France They Kiss On Main Street*, are reminiscent of Court and Spark's *Help Me and Free Man in Paris*. Others are more haunting and mysterious, like the title cut and the finale, *Shadow and Light*.

And of course, Guerin plays a prominent role in the album, but his inspiration is far more important than his drumming. He's certainly a steady drummer, but not the most imaginative. However, Findlay is one of the more Proficient sideman around, and his flugelhorn and trumpet playing are a pleasure to hear. And the other L.A. Express members are, as usual excellent. But their most important contribution is bringing Joni into a fresh world.

Mr. Levin is editor of the weekender.



**STEVE HOWE
BEGINNINGS
ATLANTIC SD18154**

by LARRY LEVIN

I had some doubts as to whether by now the legendary Steve Howe album would ever come out. Now that it has, I know that it was worth waiting for.

For all you expecting a Yes album out of Howe, guess again. *Beginnings* demonstrates what Howe has contributed to the group, and what Yes has given to him.

What he has given to them is a solid background in musicianship and arrangement. This becomes evident in the first piece of the album, *Doors of Sleep*. The opening acoustic guitar chords launch the listener into Howe's world of diversity, ranging from the solid rock rhythms found in *The Nature of the Sea*, to more lyrical, changing-speed *Australia*. In every piece, Howe sets up thematic material and presents it cyclically throughout.

The diversity continues through the rocking *Lost Symphony*, which surprisingly uses saxophone as the prominent solo instrument. The second side commences, with the title cut, chamber type piece orchestrated by Yes keyboardist Patrick Moraz. Howes guitar (and moog synthesizer!) weaves through Moraz' harpsichord and strings in a piece almost remindful of a light scherzo or trio.

Howe, suppressing his own talents for the sake of the group shines on *Ram*. *Ram* if reminiscent of *The Clap* on *The Yes Al-*

bum, and features Howe on bango, steel guitar, dobro and washboard. From there the record ends with two rock-oriented pieces, *Pleasure Stole the Night* and *Break Away From It All*.

Howe, of course, is amazing throughout. His electric wails through *Lost Symphony*, while his picking is prominent on *The Nature of the Sea*. In every case, his solos have a beginning and an end; he never loses track of where his playing is headed.

Probably the only weak part of the record is Howe's seemingly untrained voice. It's one thing to sing harmony--it's another to shine on your own. Unfortunately, if Jon Anderson were singing, this would surely be called a Yes album. But on top of harmonies sounds fine. The lyrics are concrete and down-to-earth, remindful almost of Bert Jansch and other British folk singers. I don't mean to treat them matter-of-factly; however, they are sedate and ordinary than the instrumental aspects of the album. Yet, they refrain from being too corny, and don't detract at all from the music.

I could never separate Howe from Yes in my mind, and he doesn't intend to. The album gives a good idea of the diversity of one of the members--hopefully the rest of the expected solo albums will shed some light on the group's origins. Still, Howe is a total musician, and his music here should be considered one of the bright spots of the year.



**JAN HAMMER
THE FIRST SEVEN DAYS
NEMPEROR NE432**

by STEVE UNGAR

On *The First Seven Days*, Jan Hammer departs from his background role with the Mahavishnu Orchestra and asserts musical independence in a most emphatic solo album. And solo it is, as hammer takes on the theme of genesis armed only with a synthesizer arsenal and an occasional violin.

This album is held together thematically, by a preconceived image which is meant to unify the various melodies, tones, and progressions into a coherent and intelligible entity. Very much like Joe Zawinal's work with Weather Report, the music takes on a poetic, almost literary quality which, it is claimed, transforms jazz into exploratory music.

For most of us who are there to listen to it, such an undertaking is admirable, if not excessive. Hammer himself must have thought so when he wrote on the liner notes: "These points were the inspiration for this album, and besides, they provided me with an excuse to write seven new pieces of music."

Having said this, how can Hammer expect his listener to avoid "reading" into his music? As a substitute for poetry, this music fails. As performance it merits listening, not reading.

Mr. Ungar, a professor in the French department, writes on jazz for the weekender.

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