

BEAUTY REVEALED

'Ladies Of The Canyon' Shows Joni At Her Best

By AL RUDIS
Chicago Sun-Times Special

Joni Mitchell continues to be one of the outstanding song writers and performers producing today, and "Ladies Of The Canyon" (Reprise) is her best yet.

It's not too early to name it among the 10 best albums of the year.

The album is one that reveals more beauty the longer it is observed. At first hearing it is pleasant; the second time some of the little touches are heard and the reaction is surprise and delight; from then on it's peeling layers off the sweet onion, with something new below each one.

There's nothing weak here; you may have your favorite songs, but they are all inexhaustible. The arrangements are simple, mostly voice and piano or acoustic guitar, but with no hesitation to add a cello, flute or clarinet where needed, or some double-track voice of friendly choir. No producer is listed, so Miss Mitchell must be held responsible, along with Henry Lewy, listed as engineer and adviser.

It is hoped the songs aren't too autobiographical this time because most of them are on a down trip. "Conversation" is like a letter to Ann Landers from the "Other Woman," with the stock phrases — "I know she keeps him down" and "tomorrow he will come to me, and ask me why—Why can't I leave her."

"Morning Morgantown" starts things off in a childlike, nursery-rhyme mood, but "For Free" immediately follows and sets the unhappy tone with an encounter between wealthy, commercial artist and dedicated, poor, pure artist. "Ladies Of The Canyon" is a light exercise in personality painting, but



then there is no more relief, with "Willy," "The Arrangement," "Rainy Night House," "The Priest," "Blue Boy" and "Big Yellow Taxi." The last is a cherry, lively tune until you hear the words.

But all ends on a note of hope, with "Woodstock" done even more like a hymn than a Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young version, and "The Circle Game," a beautiful parable of life which may have been more stunning in Buffy Sainte-Marie's interpretation but which loses nothing through the gentle Mitchell treatment. It is bittersweet and profoundly moving, and so is this whole album.

Smokey Robinson And The Miracles seem to have been around forever, and like clockwork they come forward with new hits.

Their albums fall mostly into the Motown formula: Take a hit or two, add filler material and jumble it all together.

Lately, however, Smokey and Friends have been taking a little more trouble with their albums. "Special Occasion"

C
bun
lect
"po
T
(RC
ture
ing