


Messenger-Press Thurs



## Steve Wosahla In The Groove

Joni Mitchell

The career of Joni Mitchell both as a songwriter and a recording artist has been perhaps the most interesting of any of the top performers in all of music today. Joni's talent is on the same level as any sculptor, painter or playwright mainly because Joni pulls all of these artforms into her music.

Once in a while an album is released which is recognized as true work of artistic creativity. Such cases have been rare but momentous. Bob Dylan's "Blood on the Tracks," "Late for the Sky" by Jackson Browne and the Beatles' "Abbey Road" are just a few cases. With the exception of Browne, all of these performers had made their creations well into their careers. (Browne's "Late for the Sky" was only his third album.) And now with the latest Joni Mitchell album, "The Hissing of Summer Lawns," it is time to add Joni to the hall of fame for musicians and songwriters. The record package and concept of "The Hissing of Summer Lawns" is clearly the culmination of artistic growth and maturity.

Joni Mitchell's early career spanned the time of solo folk-rock artists when Laura Nyro, Bob Dylan and others were developing into national favorites. The songwriter and musician combination was clearly booming and Mitchell was one of its originators and contributors. It was a youthful period which, when one looks back, set the standards and direction of present day pop. At that time, Joni made albums which featured her classic songs played by just her and her alone, usually on piano and acoustic guitar. "Blue" was tops for its time and is still recognized as the definitive Mitchell recording, although in this critic's view, "The Hissing of Summer Lawns" is a far step above. Although "Blue's" songs were of the greatest depth and content, their lack of musical presence hampered them from becoming as commercially big as they now are.

It was one song from "Blue" which caught my attention, it being "All I Want," for its lyrics described a journey through which Joni would go. The words were: "I am on a lonely road and I am traveling/looking for something, what can it be..." What exactly did Joni want?

The next few years would tell. With "Court and Spark" Mitchell had fully discovered what she really was in search of. It was a mythical fantasy love and romance in which she was caught up. Perhaps this was what kept her going.

Even more engaging was the security the listener felt after listening to the personal songs of "Blue," the encounters which were as personal to Joni soon became those of the audience too. This was the foundation of her success, building that audience-performer bond. Despite her commercial triumph, Joni still is very much in touch with them. When I saw her live show in New Haven at the tail end of February, frequent cries of "talk to us Joni" could be heard. Joni Mitchell is the mysterious performer who goes about her profession in an almost isolated fashion: she never does interviews. This critic, senses all that she is interested in is her audience, and this is a rarity in any of our performers.

This just makes "The Hissing of Summer Lawns" all the more interesting. Instead of involving herself directly in the picture she paints, she has sat back and drawn up a scene of the contemporary world with its many characters.

In the inside jacket, Joni sums up the album to a certain degree: "This record is a total work conceived graphically, musically, lyrically and accidentally as a whole. The performances were guided by the given compositional structures and the audibly inspired beauty of every player. The whole unfolded like a mystery. It is not my intention to unravel that mystery but rather to offer some additional clues..."

This is what has kept her audience and most critics going. Joni never allows the work she does to be totally explained. And here it does not come together accidentally. This is the beauty of the continuity of her music, letting each listener interpret her in his own way. Naturally there have been many views based upon her work. Sometimes I believe we try to pin down her character through phrases here and there that are in some cases irrelevant to the author herself.

From a quick glance of the cover, Mitchell has solidified her work. Dividing her painting into three separate sections, the city, middle class living and the scenery of the natives in the jungles, her music clearly reflects this point of view. That is how each is connected to the other. She has summed up this outlook through Rousseau and his philosophy of "there's always someone out there to get you," mainly in "The Jungle Line" which serves as the central focal point of comparison for each of the other songs. It is the last three lines of the song which are the key statements: "Go steaming up to Rousseau's vines/Go steaming up the jungle line." In "Edith And The Kingpin" Mitchell sets up the picture of the jungle in the city while her feminist attitude prevails on "Shades of Scarlet Conquering," her key line of "A woman must have everything" summing the song up. The album's main musical highlight is the flowing side two in "The Hissing of Summer Lawns." "The Boho Dance" and "Harry's House-Centerpiece." The first talks mainly about male dominance and is one example of the middle class suburbia she talks about, the other being the latter song, "Harry's House-Centerpiece," a realistic tune about marriage and what it can turn into. It is the neat piano playing by Joe Sample which gives a twist to the song and comes off as the album's best track. "The Boho Dance" is interesting for its acute and emotional phrasing. Joni seems deeply involved. Despite the lack of firm melodic arrangements, there is an ever present effortless-ness which is transformed into each song. Joni can turn just about anything into magic. "In France They Kiss On Mainstreet" captures the rollicking spirit of "Court and Spark" and seems a logical follow-up. "Shadows and Light" closes the album and may be a hymn for her to chant forever. Her message states that every picture has its source of light, any creation has value. But as a response to critics, she tells us "Judges in black and white/saying it's wrong/saying it's right..." a rather cynical view of those who surround her and try to discover the real heart of Joni Mitchell, a performer who will forever be "rolling, rolling, rock n' rolling."