



Joni Mitchell: blooming bland

RIDING THE STORM

JONI MITCHELL

Chalk Mark In A Rainstorm (Geffen LP/Cassette/CD/Meaning Of Life)

ROUND ABOUT 'Hissing Of Summer Lawns', legions of American hippy girls with highly strung hair, guitars and personalities simpered 'What is this jazzy shit, Joni?' Yes, just Joni, because they were on a first name basis, on a spiritual level, you understand. They knew all the words on 'Blue', all the concert patter on 'Miles Of Aisles', and lived for the moment when some little hippy life crisis would arise so they could quote a Joni song, or just say – (for this applied to every situation) "Nobody ever asked Van Gogh to paint 'A Starry Night' again, man, he painted it; that was it."

So said Joni on the difference between the performing arts and the visual arts.

Likewise, we ageing American hippy girls can't ask Joni to make another 'Ladies Of The Canyon'. By the late '70s, she paved Paradise and put in a horn section. Mingus, my arse. The lyrics, still introspective in that universal sort of way, still heavy on the girls with the flowery names doing macramé on hilltops – started to shoot off into little vignettes of suburban mid-life crisis: "Where the hell have you been? Your supper's been on the table for five hours."

On 'Chalk Mark In A Rainstorm' (It just washes away, man) Joni jumps between cryptic urban parables (you thought I was gonna say the sheets, didn't cha?) and blatant suburban nightmares. With a tasteless assortment of famous friends virtually destroying some of the tracks – Billy Idol turning 'Dancing Clown' into a tawdry semblance of 'Dancing With Myself'; Peter Gabriel doing a Paul Simon on 'My Secret Place' (wherefore art Art? He would sound better, with his high pitched whine . . .) and Don Henley Eaglising 'Snakes And Ladders'; Joni is ignoring her fans' instincts with her eager participation in this super groupiness. Too many cooks are making the broth bland. Only the untouchable Willy Nelson enhances the desert imagery of 'Cool Water', though the moving Indian chant of Iron Eyes Cody lends a certain native American cred to 'Lakota'.

Her 'ironic' look at material growth on 'Number One', 'Snakes And Ladders' and 'The Recurring Dream' – tales of Yuppie comedownance – has been done to death. Only the simple, guest free rendition of folkie classic 'Corrina, Corrina' emerges spotless.

(5)

Michele Kirsch