

Messenger-Press Thursday

Steve Wosahla In The Groove

JONI MITCHELL

With each new project she embarks upon, Joni Mitchell seems to reach the height of her career. Since "Court and Spark," Ms. Mitchell has been the top soloist in popular music. Each of her albums have supported this trend but her latest, "Hejira," easily puts the icing on the cake.

To this writer, the lyrics don't seem as interesting as the music presented on "Hejira." From "Court and Spark" on, Joni has used a rather large back-up group of musicians to accompany her. In turn all of the elements have seemed to come together. If you recall, "Blue" contained a selection of songs in which Joni Mitchell assumed most of the musical responsibilities. However, at that time her voice had not fully matured into the vocalist we now know her to be.

"Hejira" is much the same as "Blue." The actual number of contributing musicians on "Hejira" number nine but on each individual song, the group never exceeds three or four. The arrangements are simple but grand.

Unlike "Blue," which perhaps suffered slightly from its simplicity, "Hejira" is as satisfying an album as you'll want to hear. In a sense it fills the void from the soloist dominated "Blue" through the elaborate "The Hissing of Summer Lawns" and is a return to that past "Blue" style. Yet this time has been marked by years and in that span, Joni Mitchell has matured into a master. This is definitely her album, the accomplishment we've been waiting to hear.

Self-discipline is a term which might well define the concept of "Hejira." She's taken on the challenge of really making a "solo" album and has met it. For example, "Song for Sharon" features just the basic drum, bass-guitar trio of John Guerin, Max Bennett and Joni. The impact is still strong, a direct reflection of the entire disc. We all knew she was an exceptional acoustic guitar player but never before has she ventured into playing the electric guitar so satisfyingly as she has with "Song for Sharon." The tune is a superlative example of how easily she can carry a tune. The gift shines.

"Amelia" stands alongside "Song for Sharon" as the best piece here. Six line verses and a melody which lingers from its haunting mood develop into what I had previously said about the album: that art of self-discipline.

You may have noticed Joni refer to herself as "Mitchell" in the album credits. Ah yes, the artist Mitchell. This is her masterpiece. Not to be carried away by these thoughts, she pays tribute to blues singer Furey Lewis in "Old Furry Sings the Blues." Neil Young's hazy and haunting harmonica set the scene and it's an interesting contrast. "While our limo is shining on his shanty street," she writes, "old Furry sings the blues." It's rather refreshing that even though she expects her due notoriety, she hasn't forgotten those who've come long before her. That sort of thinking separates the artists from the stars.

The expansive, jazzy "Blue Motel Room" and the delightful "Coyote" round out the album and at a quick glance, I've found there to be no weak cut on "Hejira." Musically, it is her finest work ever. I doubt she will do better but then again, Joni Mitchell takes a liking to topping herself.

"Hejira," unlike "The Hissing of Summer Lawns," which had several themes running through it, has one central idea throughout its rather long context. (The total playing time exceeds fifty minutes.) The word "hejira" means the same as "hejira" which is defined in Webster's Dictionary as "any journey made for the sake of safety or as an escape; flight." The term refers back to Mohammed's journey from Mecca to Medina in 622 A.D.

Like the title song says, Joni is "a defector from the petty wars traveling in some vehicle." Ms. Mitchell has taken "refuge in the roads" and in taking this chartered vacation, she has written a group of songs whose performances will prove to be her finest ever. She's definitely grown up into that mature and sophisticated woman we could see signs of in the heavily romanticized "Court and Spark" excursion. Still, that adolescent girl is shining and although her travels may be to escape those petty, everyday conflicts, she promises to return when "love sucks her back this way."



On New Year's Day, "Sailin'" was released and I strongly feel this is the album which should break Kim commercially as well as gain her further notoriety.

"Sailin'" was recorded in Muscle Shoals and features the usual entourage of musicians from that area. This includes both the Muscle Shoals Horns and rhythm section. Produced by Jerry Wexler and Berry Becket, the material presented here is not as strong as that of the predecessor but the overall product is skilled and more professional.

One of the reasons I have such optimism for the album is a song entitled "Let Your Love Come Easy." Disco music has prospered in recent months with Savannah's "Cherchez La Femme." Kim's song also has a discoish flavor to it and I'll go as far as saying that it could become a smash single; it has all of the necessary ingredients. The Muscle Shoals rhythm and horn arrangements, especially Pete Carr on guitar, make Kim's seductive and sexy singing feel right at home.

The same feeling lends itself throughout the majority of the disc. While there are no other particular strong standouts, the level of quality remains consistent. Incidentally, "Love Comes From Unexpected Places" won Kim and Dave the grand prize in the American Song Festival for professional writers. It requires an intimate listening at first but is quite enjoyable thereafter.

"Warm Love," by her favorite, Van Morrison, is included on the album and it, along with her own "Tubin", fit the laid back mood of "Sailin'." "All He Did Was Tell Me Lies" is set in a New Orleans festival type atmosphere while "The Best of You (Has Got the Best of Me)", captures the presence of her band in concert. It seems unaltered by the studio.

Speaking of live appearances, Kim will begin a national route at the end of January. Hopefully during these next few months, "Let Your Love Come Easy" will be a hit as Kim Carnes rides on the crest of her dreams and sails into the harbor of success which eagerly awaits her.

Patti Smith is a rocker we tend to take too seriously at times. Her first Arista album, "Horses," received a lot of press build-up and now with her follow-up disc, "Radio Ethiopia," reviewers have turned their backs on her. I have mixed emotions about the album but in the end, I think my good ones take precedent.

Produced by Jack Douglas of Aerosmith and Montrose fame, "Radio Ethiopia" is more of a production than anything else. (Please note that here, the "Patti Smith Group" is billed.) On her last album, Patti created a unique brand of relentless energy in a controlled setting. "Horses" was a simply produced rock affair. Here, Douglas has united the band and Patti into one. The results aren't as successful but still, good rock music can be found in spots throughout the album.

Her nazily, sometimes dragged voice isn't very good or pleasant but it is effective. "Poppies" is in the style of "Land" and it exhibits that effusive energy she can create by combining a myriad of oncoming images to keep a particular song going.

"Radio Ethiopia" lacks the strength of side two on "Horses" where the songs built up