

Pop: Jim Morrison at the End, Joni at a Crossroads

By DON HECKMAN

THE DOORS: L. A. Woman (Elektra EKS-75011). With Jim Morrison gone, the Doors presumably will fade into the vague anonymity that always drifted just below the surface of their music. In their own unique fashion, the group *did* create a kind of classic, and highly fragile, rock style. In it, musical elements were reduced to almost brutal simplicity, and Morrison's self-consciously hoarse, look-I'm-a-man voice dominated all.

In songs like "Love Her Madly" and "Riders on the Storm"—familiar to us in previously released versions—the effect is wearily hypnotic, like a Los Angeles musical smog settling into our senses. But when Morrison tries to sing the blues in

"Been Down So Long," "Cars Hiss By My Window" and "Crawling King Snake," his musical failings are obvious. Morrison's message was clear enough when it acted as an adolescent, primal scream for attention, but its lasting value as music is considerably more vague. What it comes down to—and the evidence is on the recording—is the fact that theater was Morrison's true medium, and he knew it well, using the Doors as a setting for his instinctively effective melodramatics. But like another Los Angeles mesmerizer, Aimee Semple McPherson, the content of the message was far less important than the style in which it was delivered.

JONI MITCHELL: *Blue* (Reprise MS 2038). Writing 10 or 12 original songs for a record album is a more difficult accomplishment than most people realize. Writing the material for four albums in a period of two and a half

years or so, as Joni Mitchell has done, is enough to boggle the mind — especially since she has managed to sustain, in that time, a relatively persistent artistic momentum.

This latest release represents a more enigmatic step forward than any of the others. The title is well chosen, since it reveals a womanly melancholy that is new to Miss Mitchell. Her voice, no doubt reflecting the influence of James Taylor, slips and slides, moves in and out of the rhythm, plays with words and announces her maturity as a performer.

The songs reach out in all directions. Predictably, they provide a mind's eye view of Miss Mitchell's lives and loves, and she clearly is no longer the innocent of her earlier days. We now hear about trips to Paris and Greece and Amsterdam, about winds from Africa, and her distaste for the thought that "hell is the hippest way

to go." Touches of the old whimsy remain in songs like "A Case of You" and "The Last Time I Saw Richard," but for the most part the mood is introspective and somber—sometimes passionately so.

I suspect this will be the most disliked of Miss Mitchell's recordings, despite the fact that it attempts more and makes greater demands on her talent than any of the others. The audience for art songs is far smaller than that for folk ballads, and Joni Mitchell is on the verge of having to make a decision between the two.

STEPHEN STILLS: *Stephen Stills 2* (Atlantic SD-7206). It's hard to imagine what was going on in Steve Stills's head when he made this recording. He is such a monster talent that one is inclined to wait out the bad moments in anticipation of the good ones we know are coming. But he pushes my patience. One track brims over with his su-

perb guitar and insistently emotional singing; the next suddenly assaults our ears with massive horn sections and screeching trumpets.

The answer, I suppose is that this album follows too soon on the tracks of his first solo outing and has been fleshed out with mediocre material and overblown arrangements. The best tracks for me are those on which Stills is relatively unaccompanied—"Singin' Call," "Word Game," "Know You Got To Run" and, of course, his hit single, "Change Partners." The latter, by the way, is curiously reminiscent, in its point of view, of the hit song from Stills's last album, "Love the One You're With." Hmm.

DAN HICKS AND HIS HOT LICKS: *Where's The Money?* (Blue Thumb BTS 29). Do Dan Hicks and his Hot Licks represent the wave of the future or a ripple from the past? You really should de-

cide for yourself. What you will hear is a set of tunes that rings with the bell harmonies of the Andrews Sisters, the bounce and rhythm of a 1944 Harlem jump band, the jazzy riffing of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross.

Hicks sings most of the leads, backed by two girl singers, a fiddle player and a bassist, and the tone is one of—how can I put it?—Creative Camp. Because, despite his dredging up of old styles, Hicks keeps the whole thing highly musical, with tight, well-sung harmonies, tricky and extremely contemporary lyrics, and a mildly rockish rhythmic drive that precisely frames the music in the present.

A fascinating recording. I heard the group "live" in San Francisco about six months ago and loved their weird mix of past and present. The record is just as good. Right on, alligators.

HEADS, HANDS & FEET

(Capitol SVBB-680). Here's a first-class English rock group that probably will be ignored because (1) they made the mistake of issuing a double-disk set for their first release and (2) they haven't had a hit single. Yet, in Tony Colton they have a fine lead singer, the instrumentalists are excellent (drummer Pete Gavin is a really super talent) and the material, if not particularly memorable, is attractively performed.

Why haven't you heard of them? Well, their first American tour has not yet materialized (although it apparently is in the works), and exposure is the name of the game in the pop-music business. I hope they make it over, and even if they don't, you should hear their album. It's been a long time since a high-quality new English rock band has come down the pike; it would be a shame if this one passed by, unnoticed.



Martin Mills
Joni Mitchell
Creativity to boggle the mind