

The Kansas City Star, Sunday, December 12, 1982 Page 7-I

Joni Mitchell's mix of jazz and pop has some smooth moves

The turntable

What Things Run Fast, Joni Mitchell (Capitol Records)

Joni Mitchell remains a successful performer 15 years after her first album because she always has sensed musical changes in the air and moved with them.

She originally tapped America's musical nerve in the late 1960s with a folk-music approach. "Ladies of the Canyon" and "Blue" typified that period with an austere production that featured Mitchell's piercing voice to the exclusion of everything except piano and acoustic guitar.

"Court and Spark" marked the vocalist's move toward mainstream pop with more instrumentation and lush production. At the same time, her style moved toward jazz because of her association with saxophonist Tom Scott's band—the L.A. Express.

"Mingus," on which she collaborated with the late jazz bassist Charlie Mingus, took her even further into that realm in '79, although commercially it was one

of her least successful albums.

Three years later, Miss Mitchell is back, and although she hasn't attempted another purely jazz release, she has incorporated some of the nuances used on "Mingus" and the tour that followed. The result is an extremely sophisticated pop album with a definite jazz flavor.

The pop production values that made "Court and Spark" so successful are back. Also, Miss Mitchell has used crack session men such as Toto's Steve Lukather on guitar and Weather Report's Wayne Shorter on soprano saxophones to offer sharp solos in counterpoint to her vocals.

One thing that hasn't really changed is Miss Mitchell's lyrical approach—she's still capable of being alternately romantic (the title track and "Ladies Man") and cynical ("Be Cool").

"Chinese Cafe (Unchained Melody)" opens the album with a rich sound accented by the ringing bass of Larry Klein, reminiscent of the tones bassist Jaco Pastori-

cus used throughout the vocalist's most recent live album.

Miss Mitchell is feeling a bit melancholy as the album opens:

We were wild in the old days,
The rock 'n' roll days.

Now your kids are coming up straight,
And my child's a stranger.

A moment later, she's off on the wings of Mr. Lukather's wailing electric guitar asking a lover,

"What makes you run?" Like most of us, Miss Mitchell knows all about the twists of romance, but realizes that she is powerless to do much except wonder why.

Or, as she says in the cool ballad "Ladies Man": "I guess you try to refuse what you think you can't handle."

"Be Cool" is the flip side of the coin. Rather than rue the loss of a lover, she counsels:

Kiss off that flaky valentine,
You're nobody's fool.

Be cool fool
(Lots of other fish in the sea.)

Perhaps this ability to be alternately romantic and hard-nosed almost in the same breath is what

makes Miss Mitchell endearing to her fans. Or maybe it's the high-quality music she creates that carries a listener easily from soft ballad to uptempo rock song.

Whatever your poison, it's here in abundance on this fine album.—Joe Rasmussen

Himself, Bill Cosby (Olderbo Records)

It doesn't seem that long ago when my brother and I sat on the living-room floor in front of our record player laughing at Bill Cosby's hilarious tales of growing up.

Along the way we found out about slush balls, go-karts, the Chicken Heart and why there was no air.

But my reveries aside, it's been some time (1978, although his best albums go even further back) since we've heard from the comic. So it was with considerable anticipation that I listened to his new release, the sound track of a concert film produced by 20th Century Fox for release early next year.

While the idea for a film no

doubt derives from Richard Pryor's considerable success recently with the same genre, Mr. Cosby's material is light-years from that performer's. He uses none of the mile-a-minute profanities and social issues that Mr. Pryor employs. Rather, Mr. Cosby's material is family-oriented.

In fact, that seems to be the problem. It's not that Mr. Cosby needs to start cursing, but his material is basically the same as when he made his mark in the '60s. The only difference is that now Mr. Cosby is the parent and his children are the subjects.

Where we used to have his father as the ogre with "The Belt," we now have a child who misbehaves for no apparent reason ("Brain Damage"). Where we used to have young Bill and his misbehaving brother Russell getting in trouble for playing after bedtime, we now have children who can't get through their nightly baths without a beating from

Mom ("Same Thing Happens Every Night").

Even at that, Mr. Cosby is still adept at drawing a laugh with his pronounced vocal style and myriad sound effects. Like all good comedians, he is a pro at creating a funny concept and coming back to it at well-timed junctures.

The comic's funniest bit—"The Grandparents"—is about (you guessed it) growing up. Although it probably wouldn't have worked throughout the whole album, one wishes he would have used more material like it.

I suppose Mr. Cosby deserves credit for resisting that safe route, but at the same time I miss the old days.—Joe Rasmussen

