

# Sparks and Solar Fire

By PETER BAUM

**COURT AND SPARK - Joni Mitchell**  
**SOLAR FIRE - Manfred Mann's Earth Band**

So what if January was the worst economic month in twenty-five years. After all, you can't expect the likes of Czar Simon to realize that MUSIC IS A GAS too! What with Dylan back together in fairly good shape, the individual Beatles contemplating reunion (remember, you heard it here eighteenth), and Russell Dean and Hawkwind not expected to record for months, THERE WILL BE NO MUSICAL RECESSION IN 1974! If the recent releases by Joni Mitchell and Manfred Mann's Earth Band are any indication of things to come, this optimistic forecast may not be as ludicrous as it sounds, for here are already two superb recordings for your 1974 listings.

Joni Mitchell has never been a particular favorite of mine, but with her new album, *Court and Spark*, she has completely won me over. Ms. Mitchell has always been an extremely insightful writer on the subject of human emotions and relations as well as a true musical stylist, but some of her past performing and vocal habits had discouraged many rock-oriented listeners like myself from directing much attention to her. However, Mitchell has refined her vocal technique over her last few albums and on *Court and Spark* her performance finally matches her exquisite songwriting. In addition, the supporting musicians are used to better advantage than on previous recordings; the arrangements and production absolutely shine. Thematically, the album deals with the unresolved problems Joni Mitchell observes in herself as well as in others during "the search for love that doesn't seem

to cease" ("The Same Situation"). As on past albums, she is still torn between her need for love and her need for independence, complicated by the



Joni Mitchell

demands of fame ("Free Man in Paris") and a bewildering social scene in which "Some are friendly-some are cutting-Some are watching it from the wings-Some are standing in the centre-Giving to get something" ("People's Parties"). Yet, Mitchell is a bit more capable of overcoming her conflicts and dissatisfactions this time, and this is reflected in the programming of the album's selections. The early songs deal with the aforementioned sub-

jects, culminating with the realization of unresolvable ambivalence on "Down to You." With this statement made, the writer can become more free and

Manfred Mann's Earth Band dazzles musically as Joni Mitchell does lyrically. Mann, one of the original British invaders (in 1964 with the legendary "message" song, "Do Wah Diddy Diddy"), has been lurking in the shadows for years with various progressive rock projects, such as the "jazz-rock" band Chapter Three. With this fourth Earth Band album, Mann should be back on top for the first time since one of his Dylan renditions, "The Mighty Quinn," hit in 1968. As the title and cover design indicate, the Earth Band has become a bit less earthy this time out. The compositions are ethereal but within the range of the most musical of hard rock, spacey without being incomprehensible like Amon Duul's "space-rock" or ploddingly excessive like Hawkwind's. Mann is a masterful keyboard player who, like Rick Wakeman, is not so much distinguished by his solo work as by his ability to fill out the group sound to almost orchestral proportions. Unlike the preceding "Get Your Rocks Off" LP, *Solar Fire* features a good deal of synthesizer, which Mann plays with zest as well as with taste. The instrumental "Pluto the Dog" is successful in the use of the synthesizer as solo instrument. Mick Rogers handles the leads on guitar and vocals beautifully, particularly on "Mercury" and "Joybringer," the latter being the album's most accessible cut, sure to please all listeners. The album can be best described as music for the head as well as the body, which the best of rock should always be.

loose. "I used to count lovers like railroad cars...Lately I don't count on nothing, I just let things slide ("Just Like This Train"). With the last three cuts, Mitchell is able to fantasize joyfully ("Raised on Robbery") and even laugh at the collective craziness of us all in the masterful transition from "Trouble Child" to Ross & Grey's "Twisted." The album is a rare blend of thought, feeling, and style that succeeds on every level.

On their new *Solar Fire*.

**Annenberg Center**



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**THIS WEEK:**

**SERIES A: Japan**  
**Different Civilizations**  
Thursday, February 14, 7:15 PM; Friday, February 15, 9:45 PM  
 (Rogue Sublime) - Brachiosaurus and the modern event-gods merge in an icy, terrifying con game, based on a true incident in which a boy is forced by his parents to prove himself in the path of automobiles as they can blackmail the driver. Haunting, startling program. A remarkable, gripping feature from Japan. The foremost discovery of the 1969 New York Film Festival. - **Review**

**SERIES B: Changing**  
Thursday, February 14, 9:45 PM; Friday, February 15, 7:15 PM  
 I. F. STONE'S WIGGLY (Larry Brown) - Brisk, witty, hard-hitting visit with an extraordinary American - impassioned journalist-labor-subversive I. F. Stone who believes all governments are run by liars and employs manual test and vital zeal to catch them. A rare achievement. - **The affectionate portrayal of a youth joyful with all his talents and humor intact. - Newsweek**  
 (C) **COMMUNIST (Edward Galt)** - The dynamics of personal change require to happen in cinema-verse. **REARSLIPPER (Charles White)** - Reality: student's transformation into radical.

**SERIES C: Secret Communications**  
Saturday, February 16, 7:15 PM; Sunday, February 17, 9:45 PM  
 (Monsieur) (Claude Berling & John Spillius) - 20 years after survivors return to Berlin, Gelsen only to be confronted by paradox, irony and a mass of unanswerable questions. The most thought-provoking film yet made on the concentration camp. **REARSLIPPER (Charles White)** - The dynamics of personal change require to happen in cinema-verse. **REARSLIPPER (Charles White)** - Reality: student's transformation into radical.

**SERIES D: Varieties of Horror**  
Monday, February 18, 9:45 PM; Tuesday, February 19, 7:15 PM  
 THE CAT PEOPLE (Lionel Linow) - Horror by implication. This classic thriller - an amazing box-office success produced by the legendary Val Lewton - has become recognized as an important example of sophisticated horror in the cinema. By re-arrange and re-orchestrate highlights, the filmmaker forces the viewer to add his own dramatic fears to the ambiguous dread of the action.

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