

Record Review: Joni Mitchell Travels Winning Path

JONI MITCHELL

"Hejira"

(Asylum 7E-1087)

By SCOTT GARSIDE

Joni Mitchell is a complete talent. An outstanding lyricist from every perspective, she also has a high-pitched but expressively beautiful voice some people unfortunately find annoying. However, Mitchell excels as an instrumentalist on both keyboards and guitars, and on her latest LP, "Hejira," she has done most of the work herself. In addition to the mixing which she did with producer Henry Lewy, Mitchell is credited with being the musical director, a difficult and rigorous chore.

Mitchell is the epitome of the female artist. "Hejira," her ninth album, is testimony to this. Undertaking so much and successfully creating a masterpiece that is both different and more complicated than her previous efforts, she has transcribed onto vinyl nine new stories, most of which deal with her extensive travels of this past summer. Rumors have circulated that Mitchell travelled cross country in a

Mercedes Benz, and if this is true, her actual experiences, coupled with her astute awareness as a lyricist, have resulted in a majority of the selections included here.

From New York to the Arizona deserts, Mitchell has depicted her journey in depth. In "Song for Sharon," the disc's longest track, references are made to the Statue of Liberty, Staten Island, the Wollman Skating rink and the Manhattan skyline, representing her East coast visit. On the other hand, "Amelia," a song dedicated to Amelia Earhart, the first female aviator, mentions the burning desert and the bleak terrain, and, of course, the short-lived flying career of Earhart: "A ghost of aviation/ She was swallowed by the sky/ Or by the sea, like me she had a dream to fly/ Like Icarus ascending/ On beautiful foolish arms/ Amelia, it was just a false alarm."

Of the remaining cuts, the beautiful and graceful "Refuge of the Roads," a concise summary of her entire travels, "Blue Motel Room," a bluesy number in which Mitchell renders a convincing blues-inject-

ed vocal performance, and "Hejira," are the most illuminating selections where lyrics and melody form a perfect union.

Mitchell has taken a strong interest in electric guitar on the new LP, and consequently the keyboards have been omitted entirely. At first, you may tend to be skeptical about the quality of the music, but the songs don't actually suffer from this deletion. Mitchell's lead and rhythm guitars, coupled with the aid of Crusader Larry Carlton on lead guitars, hold down the melody lines well. Generally, the entire record is a guitar album with sparse additional instrumentation coming from Neil Young's harmonica, horns by Abe Most, Chuck Findley and Tom Scott, and vibes from Victor Feldman.

The one and only minor shortcoming lies in the melodies of "Coyote" and "Black Crow," both of which have a tendency to drag on in repetition without sounding distinctive.

Aside from this, however, Mitchell has succeeded, in recording an album of unusually high artistic merit.