

GLOBE AND MAIL, JACK DOBSON



**J**ONI MITCHELL'S latest record, *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter* could perhaps be better titled *Don Juan's Careless Daughter*. Many of the novel sounds that marked her shift to the fully electric, pop-oriented sound have gone bland for lack of detailed attention.

Since Court and Spark, Mitchell, one of the dozen or so in pop music who actually know what melody is all about, has for some unfathomable reason relied more on slippery vocal innuendo based on intangible backgrounds rather than a shaped melodic line. She has also showed an anti-melodic tendency to pile three or four lines (some of them important) into the space of one bar, as if there hadn't been enough room in the musical setting for all she wanted to say. It's sloppy, and even more maddening now than it was on *The Hissing Of Summer Lawns* and *Hejira*.

So is the singing. It's unfortunate for her that she has her own reputation to live up to, and that she seems to be consciously destroying her past instead of building on it. Each of the identities she assumes in her songs becomes less convincing until we're left with a mockery of the original Joni — a confused, easily injured, coffee-house singer hung up, as always, on loneliness, who only shapes differently the characters who speak it for her.

Musically, she's been overcome. The distinct statement in Court and Spark has crumbled to an imprecise stew of muddy orchestral backgrounds, wild drumming and the silky bass-playing of Jaco Pastorius (whose technique has been given almost equal play as hers). While the orchestral material simply shouldn't have been there, the drumming and the bass-playing could have been integrated better. Clearly one entire side should have been repackaged as a collaboration between Mitchell and Weather Report's ruthless percussion team (Manolo Badrena and Alejandro Acuna), with her playing a minor role. She's obviously out of touch with a lot of things (even Jericho was recorded better three years ago on *Miles Of Aisles*). This sort of rambling is dangerous for her.

# Joni's gone bland

**Joni Mitchell** has replaced shaped melodies with slippery vocal innuendo

VINYL/PAUL McGRATH

*Joni Mitchell, Don Juan's Reckless Daughter. Asylum, BB-701.*

## Piper

Piper's first album was a surprise for a band out of nowhere. Their second says they're holding steady, still knocking together the final constituents of their sound in a synthesis of hard rock and pop.

Hard rockers write three-chord hooks and pop writers write ditties; but this band seems to make both work successfully. Their fine middle ground is based on good vocal and guitar work, none of which strays from the middle road toward either Kiss or Neil Sedaka. Very careful, but not maulnuplative.

*Piper, Can't Wait. A and M, SP-4654.*

## O'Jays

The O'Jays produce records I always wish could have been carved down to three or four songs instead of eight, each a twin of another. If mid-winter parties are planned and there are no O'Jays records in the collection, *Collector's Items* is just the thing.

It's really the bible according to Gamble and Huff, with all their best sermonettes on hand, including *Survival*, *Give The People What They Want*, *Love Train* and *For The Love Of Money* (the last two remain two of the best dance-inspirers of the

past decade). The anthems are delivered by three powerful singers and the Philly International studio players. Beats disco to death within two bars. *The O'Jays, Collector's Items. Philadelphia International, PZG 35025.*

## Bette Midler

It remains unclear whether Bette Midler is in the business for a good laugh or to be a serious singer. Even then, some of the things on *Broken Blossom* are hard to blame on either personality. She simply doesn't know what she's doing, and, as long as she's in that position, she'll allow increasingly large chunks of silliness to appear on her records.

There are three fine pieces of music. On *Empty Bed Blues*, she works convincingly on top of a blazing horn section. On *Yellow Beach Umbrella*, she appears comfortable with the type of material that could make her a star and on *I Never Talk To Strangers*, in which she sings beside Tom Waits and keeps her side of things up, she assumes a dramatic role beautifully.

The rest is either underperformed or blasted out of all proportion by producer Brooks Arthur, whose quite blatant steal of Phil Spector's production style represents a serious threat to Midler's sincerity.

*Bette Midler, Broken Blossom. Atlantic, KSD 19151.*

## Parliament

Parliament, one half of George Clinton's musical-theatrical funk show, is a band with a great sense of humor and some convincing funk. The campaign to energize America against the Placebo Syndrome might better be carried on by a more energetic set, but they'll do.

In the latest installment, Dr. Funkenstein returns to earth to discover Sir Nose D'Voidoffunk has almost brought the world to its knees with his Placebo Syndrome. Dr. Funkenstein blasts him with a huge horn section and a Bop Gun and once again the world is safe for the return of James Brown. The Brides of Funkenstein add superb backups. Loads of fun.

*Parliament, Funkentelechy Vs. The Placebo Syndrome. Casablanca, NBLP 7084.*