

## RECORD REVIEW

## JONI MITCHELL



*Shadows and Light*. Joni Mitchell. (Asylum)

It's tough to decide what makes this such a good album — Joni Mitchell's performance or the back-up playing of her stellar sidemen.

With the likes of Jaco Pastorius (bass), Pat Metheny (guitar), Lyle Mays (keyboards), Michael Brecker (sax), Don Alias (percussion) and the Persuasions (vocals) behind her, Mitchell would have had to work pretty hard to make this double-disc set sound bad.

Recorded live at the Santa Barbara County Bowl in September 1979, *Shadows and Light* continues the jazz-oriented transition Mitchell hinted at with "Centerpiece" on *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*, and launched into full blown several years back with *Hejira*.

It's a direction that has turned off

many of her original fans — those who went for the acoustic guitar-strumming folksinger-poet who recorded *Blue* and *Ladies of the Canyon*.

*Shadows* contains little from that period of Mitchell's career. And what is included — a rather lame version of her late 60s anthem, "Woodstock," for instance — seems to have generated little interest from the performer.

Hearing "Woodstock" without thinking of Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young's definitive rock interpretation is nearly impossible — sort of like listening to the "William Tell Overture" without thinking of the Lone Ranger. The *Shadows* version of "Woodstock" does nothing to change that.

She does, however, come up with some excellent reworkings of her

more recent material.

"The Dry Cleaner From Des Moines" — from 1979's *Mingus* — is a good example. An impressive production number, the studio *Dry Cleaner* featured, among other things, some blistering Pastorius-arranged horns. With the limited manpower of her stage act, one wondered how she'd handle that sort of arrangement in person.

The puzzle evaporates as side two of *Shadows* opens. Some tasty Alias brush work introduces Mitchell's lilting acapella vocal. When the rest of the band jumps in shortly after the singing starts, the piece quickly boils over into a burning jazz-boogie jam featuring some red hot Brecker sax soloing. The idea is effective enough to come very close to overshadowing all the nifty production work that made the *Mingus* studio version such

a success.

There's also a fine version of "Dreamland." After receiving exemplary treatment by Brazilian percussionist Airto Moreira on Mitchell's *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter*, "Dreamland" on *Shadows* sneaks in on the coattails of a toe-tapping Alias percussion solo — and shortly proves to be every bit as rhythmically infectious as its studio predecessor.

In sum, if you've liked Mitchell's direction of late, *Shadows* is a set you won't want to be without. There's nothing new, but what is here is generally redone as well as the original.

If, on the other hand, Joni Mitchell the folksinger was your favorite, *Shadows* is another indication she's apparently abandoned that aspect of her performing persona forever.