

Sunday, January 9, 1977 / Kingsport Times-News 11C

Joni Mitchell Reveals Herself

NEW YORK (CDN) — Recently Joni Mitchell presented us with album jacket pictures of herself swimming in a pool and standing nude on a shoreline, all in colors worthy of a travel brochure. So it's a bit of a shock to see her gauntly gazing out from the landscape of a frozen lake, clad in black and pictured in austere black and white with a hint of sepia on her latest album, "Hejira" (Asylum).

Off in the background, far to her right and right around the back of the cover, is a male skater dressed as a flamenco dancer completing a genuflecting arabesque to a woman in a wedding gown standing patiently in the distance. On the inside cover Mitchell skates away from us, her black-shawled silhouette swooping off like a crow.

Hejira means "flight from danger" and the desert road, striped white line and all, emerges surrealistically below Mitchell's shoulders on the front cover. For Hejira also specifically refers to the flight of Mohammed from Mecca to Medina, the official beginning of the Islamic religion.

Joni Mitchell designed the cover — she is a visual artist as well as a word portraitist — and the mood of the cover is reflected in the album. Ironically, the songs here bare Joni Mitchell's psyche more than any of the albums featuring her bare body on the covers.

There are bursts of self-revelation and scapel-sharp self-dissections throughout the songs on this album. With a lesser artist than Mitchell they could be embarrassing to the listener, an eavesdropper on a religious confession with no interest in the intimacies beyond that of the voyeur.

Not here, for Mitchell is a fascinating and complex artist and woman, and this album is her most mature and fully realized work; difficult but never obscure, intense but never hysterical, austere but never niggardly.

In the process of stripping her psyche, Mitchell has also stripped her music of the high gloss it has been acquiring. Background instruments are kept to a bare minimum, with loose guitar and bass obligattos and ostinatos dominating on most cuts to create a chanting hypnotic quality over aurally subdued rhythms

from very austere drums and traps.

Also gone are many of the patented Mitchell vocal affectations. This must be her first album in years where it isn't necessary to read the lyrics to understand every word. She sings with a direct but very musical commitment to the sense of her lyrics.

She had discovered a new mode of sophistication in the process of honing down her style, a mode revealed here in "Blue Motel Room,"

a torch ballad over a rhythm background anchored by classic cabaret jazz brushed drums. Phoebe Snow and Natalie Cole have been impressive in reviving the torch style; Joni Mitchell renews it with her song, complete with an archetypal refrain: "Will you still love me when I call you up."

Mitchell's artistry has never been better than in "Amelia," wherein she equates her obsessive pursuit of love — and her

"curse" of artistic distancing — with Amelia Earhart's quest to circle the globe in the air.

Each song in this album is a slowly unfolding revelation, an insight into Mitchell's investigation of herself and her religion — if a questing hedonism balanced by an artist's perspective coupled with a ravagingly honest intelligence can be called "religion."

The WONDERFUL WORLD of HORSES
PRESENTS THE  WORLD FAMOUS

Royal Lipizzan Stallion Show

ALL NEW SHOW!

SEE...THE GREAT LEAPS IN THE THRILLING "AIRS ABOVE THE GROUND"



SEE THE GREAT WHITE STALLIONS MADE FAMOUS BY WALT DISNEY'S "MIRACLE OF THE WHITE STALLIONS"

A BREATHTAKING