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Joni Mitchell  
... 'like a black crow'

# Joni and Browne Discs 'Superb'

By BILL COSFORD  
Herald Staff Writer

Just in time to make everybody's year-end Top 10 lists came two of pop music's certified blue-chippers recently with new albums, records at the very top of their craft. Joni Mitchell's "Hejira" and Jackson Browne's "The Pretender" are both products of singer/songwriters who are reaching further than ever, in different directions. Both are superb, though each testifies to the growing absurdity that the label "pop" has become: there is simply no common ground for discussion of either in the same musical milieu as Led Zeppelin, pop's most popular group.

Mitchell's "Hejira" (Asylum 7E-1087) has nothing at all to do with rock, and precious little with

Mitchell's one-time roots in folk, either. It is a jazz record of considerable intensity, seemingly off-handed skill and amazing richness. It is a record that grows with re-hearings, drags its audience into the singer's persona for intimate talks only to send it packing again with passages that are nearly impenetrable.

IN SHORT, it is the record we should have known Mitchell would make, having heard the first rattlings in "Court and Spark" and the fulsome move to jazz of "Hiss and the Fulcrum Laws." The latter remains in some ways the artist's least "accessible," in the argot of these things; "Hejira," its giveaway title and all, at least offers a window on her intent.

This time we are party to a Joni Mitchell who has traveled too long, who is by turns tired and restless for more, looking forward and back but throughout on some sort of terms with her own craziness. She feels, she confides, like a black crow — and she's decked herself out inside the album cover very much like some great, flapping bird, on ice skates no less — but she is singing paens to Amelia Earhart, too, along with the laments for lost lovers.

THERE IS in the title song and in "Blue Motel Room" a feeling for her self-described "shell shock," but in the LP's masterpiece, "Song for Sharon," comes the essence: "Well there's a wide wide world of noble causes/And lovely landscapes

to discover/But all I really want to do right now/Is ... find another lover!"

For all her lyrical brilliance, however, it is again her voice — apparently still growing in range — that propels "Hejira" to its musical high velocity. Joni Mitchell's best album? It is impossible to say, for she is singing something very different these days than in "Ladies of the Canyon." But it is clear that this is the best work by a woman singer/songwriter of this year.

Perhaps then we can just elect Mitchell and Jackson Browne King and Queen of the Prom, for Browne's "Pretender" (Asylum 7E-1079) looks like just the album to take the silly posings out of the Los Angeles/ersatz outlaw/desperadoes-in-limosine scene. With his old friend Warren Zevon coming in with ironic lampoons from the left and Browne finding some perspective — and some vocal punch — on the right, pop may have passed its New-West-mythic stage relatively painlessly. Certainly "The Pretender" will help, and certainly Jackson Browne has again laid claim to leadership among his singer/songwriter peers.

UNLIKE Neil Young, whose most evocative recent work ("Tonight's the Night") dripped the singer's anguish like acid, Browne has found a balance in his work. Always the romantic, and too often the slightly schizoid one, his lyrics now show tempering.

Not that he's all that happy about it: there is plain bitterness in the title song's intentions: "I'm going to be a happy idiot/And struggle for the legal tender." But there's a wistful measure of resolve, a weathered wish for survival, in "The Fuse." And there's something else there as well.

Perhaps it is the work of producer Jon Landau (the man who — once — made the world safe for Bruce Springsteen), perhaps it is just Browne's own evolution. Whatever, there is a punch and snap to the voice that years ago might have made Jackson Browne a rock 'n' roll singer. Since it is clearly too late for that now — neither Browne's ballads nor his higher-kicking stuff is as close to rock as it is to simple, high-grade

pop — we can simply revel in the results, that much the better for it.

ONCE AMONG pop music's most curiously inflated figures (it is hard to forgive the rhyming of "Winslow, Arizona" with "Standin' on the Corner," much less the commission of a lyric like "Rumin' down the road/Tryin' to loosen my load"), Browne is heir to the worst of the L.A.-singer syndrome, but looks about ready to dignify the whole scene again.

And though he's still concerned with finding the perfect woman and cutting the perfectly romantic figure, Browne has found words and music to relate his quests to people beyond what Zevon calls the "Desperadoes under the eaves." The man who once released an album entitled "For Everyman" has finally created one to match that title. He's got a word or two for each of us. And it sure sounds good.

## Film Maker Wenders: Endless Search

By CANDICE RUSSELL  
Herald Staff Writer

NEW YORK — Like the lost characters in the movies he makes, Wim Wenders seems to be searching for a place to belong. "There was a feeling of hopelessness among my generation that grew up in the late 1960s," said the 31-year-old German director.



WENDERS

In his latest film called "Kings of the Road" (now playing at the Cinematheque in Coral Gables), he trains his restless camera on Bruno, the lonely servicer-supplier of provincial German movie-houses. He links up with Robert, a man with mysteries of his own, who happens to accidentally run his automobile into a lake. Together they travel the hinterlands in Bruno's all-purpose van, meeting people with lives as arid and valueless as their own.

The sense of alienation is strong in "Kings of the Road." By film's end, Bruno knows he must leave the role of wanderer but how or whether he will do so is left to the viewer's imagination.

been better received than the other features he's made since 1971 (two of which — "The Goalie's Fear of the Penalty" and "Alice in the Cities" — were also shown at the Cinematheque). It opened last spring to critical and popular acclaim in West Berlin, breaking box office records for that city.

THE CONTROVERSIAL "Kings of the Road" speaks for the necessity of human contact and intimacy, while showing characters who suffer for lack of it. The \$350,000 film may be the ultimate road picture, that genre of film which follows the aimless meanderings of disaffected young people.

Was the film modeled on "Easy Rider," the granddaddy of road pictures? "I used to like that film but in the end, it's rather superficial," said the shy, sandy-haired director. "I should also say that the film was important for young filmmakers all over the world. As for influences, Ozu (of Japan) had much more of an effect on me.

"I don't have any particular audience in mind when I make movies. All I think of are the visual images that suggest the story. I get lost if I start thinking in stories. I feel Bruno's uprootedness myself; it has to do with many things like being born in postwar Germany.

It's not so much a national feeling. Uprooteness has to do with the state of capitalism, being part of my generation, and the way relations are between men and women. Only women are re-inventing their identity, men haven't started yet."

IN ORDER for his countrymen to see "Kings of the Road" and his other films, Wenders and five other directors have formed a distribution company. Together with partners Werner Herzog and Rainer Werner Fassbinder, he is in the front lines of the German cinema renaissance.

Ironically, the Germans themselves only took notice of young directors like Wenders, Volker Schlöndorff, Margarethe Von Trotta, and Alexander Kluge once the international film community had paid them attention. Still it is difficult for them to finance their visions.

Wenders, a former film critic whose special interest is in Hollywood films of the 1940s and 1950s, first made short films from his own pocket money. While he went to film school from 1967-1970, he made eight shorts. Through co-production deals, pre-sales to television and the extra money his name commanded after his scripts won

awards, he was able to finance his features. "I got money from wherever I could," he said.

HIS LOVE of film began when he was a child. "I remember the first film I saw was a Laurel and Hardy comedy. I used to have a hand projector, the kind you crank yourself. I'd made a couple of films by the time I was five. My parents are not in show business. For centuries, my family have been doctors and pharmacists."

Consciously or not, there is a thread running through Wenders' films. "That idea of a journey, that idea of searching is kind of the central point of them all. I feel I'm on a personal journey. That's why I wonder what the next film will be. I don't want to repeat myself. I would like audiences to take from "Kings of the Road" what both characters recognize — a desire or need for a change."

Dennis Hopper, wife Lisa Kreuzer (also featured in "Kings of the Road") and Bruno Ganz will star in his next film, written by Patricia Highsmith and to be shot in Hamburg, New York and Louisiana. It's a story of blackmail and mistrust from the hand of a favorite Alfred Hitchcock scenarist.

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