

# Santa Barbara News & Review

## Books and Music Supplement

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Joni Mitchell

### 'Miles of Aisles': The Journey Continues



By Karen Stabiner

"Forget it, it's just all her old stuff again," a friend suggested as I undertook my search for Joni Mitchell's recently released live double album, *Miles of Aisles*. My friend couldn't be more wrong. Granted, 16 of the 18 cuts are songs previously recorded on Mitchell's six albums. But the marvelous thing about *Miles of Aisles* is that even the oldest songs are new, infused with life by Mitchell's inspired interpretations and the articulate accompaniment of Tom Scott's LA Express.

Mitchell has always had a fantastic ability to fuse the real and the fantastic in her music. Her harmonies and melodies are truly indescribable; they possess a meticulous beauty and brightness which cannot be translated into words. But her lyrics complete the circle and make us think seriously about the very specific components of our lives.

What she says usually concerns her feelings about herself, her people, and her art. But these categories are deceptively specific, for she somehow manages to carry each of her stories beyond its own boundaries. Every tale she tells carries with it questions, curiosities, uncertainties that balance and enhance the spirit of the music.

Two sides of the double album are devoted to acoustic numbers, reminding those of us who haven't recently listened to Mitchell's early albums that she is a fine guitarist and pianist. We also get the intensity, the emotional erraticism, that more

than compensates for the careful clarity of a studio recording. Mitchell's voice may let go of a high note more quickly, the strings may squeak as she changes chords—but this is the potency of a live performance, this is the musical reality. Mitchell's lyrics gain immeasurable power from the immediacy of a live performance.

The finest example of this is "Woman of Heart and Mind," which first appeared on *For the Roses*. In studio performance it was a careful, almost melancholy look at a woman's relationship to her lover and her world.

In *Miles of Aisles*, it becomes a poignant self-investigation that demands response from the listener.

And old time Mitchell fans will be refreshed to hear her new version of "Cactus Tree" from her first album, an early example of her perceptiveness and mastery of lyrics.

The remaining two sides are the ones that will astound the devotee and convert the skeptic, for Mitchell's relationship with Tom Scott's LA Express has wrought some amazing changes. Scott's jazz-influenced band electrifies Mitchell's songs with gentle reed work and strutting bass and drums, providing a substance much like that of her most recent album, "Court and Spark."

The LA Times reviewer was surprised to see people dancing in the aisles at the concerts where this album was primarily recorded, but one healthy listen to these songs makes dancing seem like a completely appropriate

response. Anyone who can sit through "Woodstock" without moving is either asleep or tied to a chair.

For those people who are beginning to wonder whether Mitchell is reaching a creative peak, she offers two new songs—"Jericho" and "Love or Money"—as convincing argument that she still has countless creative miles to travel.

## Sorting Best From Worst Among the Bestsellers

**You Can Profit From A Monetary Crisis** — Harry Browne (Macmillan)

By Wink Glennon

Browne's book, "You Can Profit from a Monetary Crisis" is similar to the host of Watergate-related books, and SLA "the inside story" books, that flooded the bookstores, trying to capitalize on the interest aroused by those events.

The difference is, that "Monetary Crisis" is aimed at a much more vulnerable audience — people who fear the future and are looking for a guide to get them safely through. In addition, it is abundantly clear that Browne unlike the SLA/Watergate authors, takes himself seriously, and firmly believes in what he is saying.

"Monetary Crisis" is broken into two parts, the first, is Browne's crash course in

After listening to the album straight through at one sitting, my only regret was that my friend was wrong: it wasn't "all" Mitchell's old stuff. I would love to have heard an update of "That Song About the Midway" or "River," or several other songs.

#### Retrospective

For those of you who are not sufficiently interested to consider buying yourself a Christmas present of an album or two, here is a list of Mitchell's earlier works:

**Joni Mitchell:** Mitchell's first album is divided into two parts which tell of her experiences in the city and "out of the city and down to the seaside." Several of the songs tell stories of other characters, but the most powerful statements are those which are the closest to her personal experiences.

One of the finest cuts (which also appears in *Miles of Aisles* is "Cactus Tree," the story of a woman and her would-be lovers: She will love them when she sees them

They will lose her if they follow  
And she only means to please them

And her heart is full and hollow  
Like a cactus tree

While she's so busy being free.

**Clouds:** A collection of careful, poetic songs, most of them talking about new love, lost love, cynicism and hope. Includes "That Song About the Midway," an incredibly fine song which Dave Van Ronk also does brilliantly.

**Ladies of the Canyon:** Even non-fans will recognize several songs on this album, just from listening to the radio: "Woodstock," "Big Yellow Taxi," "The Circle Game," and "For Free" are songs that have been recorded by several other artists as well as Mitchell. This is the first album to use accompaniment other than Mitchell's own instruments and voice, paving the way for the intricate arrangements on later albums.

**Blue:** A favorite album for most Joni Mitchell fans, this album features accompaniment by Stephen Stills, James Taylor and friends in a tasteful combination of acoustic numbers and more elaborate arrangements. The lyrics are less literary and more forceful as Mitchell confronts her experiences more directly.

**For the Roses:** A personal favorite, this album includes the exquisite "Woman of Heart and Mind" which also appears on the live album. Mitchell is still concerned with love and respect, love and disappointment, love and possibility; her voice becomes surer and she returns to story songs—"Baran Grill," "Cold Blue Steel and Sweet Fire," "Let the Wind Carry Me"—with powerful self-assurance.

**Court and Spark:** Mitchell purists were astonished to hear the cuts on this album, all featuring full accompaniment and many in an up-tempo very different from the style of most of her first songs. Sit down and concentrate on listening to the arrangements, which are absolutely breathtaking.

economics, which, I assume, is supposed to logically lead to the second part of the book, the 'how to' section, where Browne dispenses all his worldly wisdom in the form of investment programs. The problem is that Browne's logic begins to fall in the first pages of the book.

The current economic problems facing monopoly capitalism, according to Browne are all the inevitable result of government intervention in the "general market", which is, of course, a real no-no. The general market is Browne's deity, that glorious means whereby all things are exchanged for exactly what is fair, if not at a real bargain to the consumers (Browne points out that, in fact, food is under-priced, since people would certainly be willing to pay much more for food than they do now.)

This, the "general market", is the natural order of things, and according to Browne, "the only

democratic government possible".

Browne's piercing analysis runs something like this: the general market is the best possible way of exchanging, governing, maintaining order, etc. al, and it follows that any attempts to screw up the "perfect" system will be met with an equal and opposite reaction from the perfect system. This then is how all economic crises occur, and the extent of each crisis will depend on how much the different governments interfere with the general market.

We are headed towards a depression, he claims, because of the years of government tampering with the economy. But if the great and powerful would only listen to Browne there is still time to save us all. The solution is simple, end all government intervention in the economy, — subsidies, welfare, unemployment

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