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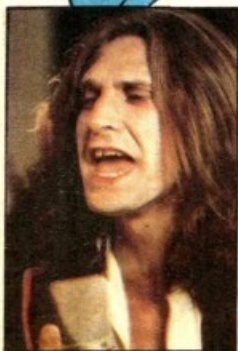
RECORD MAGAZINE

#74

December, 1976

75 Cents

"All The News That Hits"



Ray Davies The Kinks Return

By BARBARA CHARONE

LONDON—Ray Davies' tired eyes incredulously surveyed the scene before him. A sea of changing faces, gay laughter, forced conversation, and clanging champagne glasses whirled by in an elusive blur. The lavish party was being held in honor of Davies' Kinks, who've signed a new record deal, their third in the acts' thirteen-year career. But Davies remains wary as the Kinks prepared the release of their first album in over two years. He hasn't had a really big hit since "Lola," in 1969—and most of the fans still want to hear "Waterloo Sunset." As the punk-rock legions converged from all sides, Davies had to wonder: Will the Kinks still be

Leo Sayer - USA's New Fave

By MARC SHAPIRO

BURBANK, Ca.—The taping of Leo Sayer's portion of the New Year's "Midnight Special" was proceeding at the tedious pace one would expect as television's quest for perfection met the ragged, albeit human, institution of rock music. Sayer just smiled through the interruptions and inconvenience before once again breaking into the soulful refrains of the Supremes' classic Motown hit, "Reflections."

For Leo Sayer, false



starts and momentary drawbacks aren't any-

thing new. On the strength of such self-penned

songs as the Roger Daltrey-covered "Giving It All Away," and "The Show Must Go On," popularized by Three Dog Night, Sayer once loomed large as the latest in a long line of 'next big things.' Instead, after an initial promising burst as a solo star, Sayer's musical efforts met with increasing indifference. But a regrouping of forces with producer Richard Perry is helping provide a new, slick-soul sound—decidedly American in approach...Rock greatness may yet be this man's destiny.

(See story page 12)

relevant in 1977?

"I think I'm going through an identity cri-

sis," Davies said somberly. "I worry when these people say to me, 'Ray,

where have you been since 1964?'

Todd Rundgren's Utopia '77

By MICHAEL BARACKMAN

NEW YORK—"I don't see any focus in today's music," Todd Rundgren lamented sourly. "It has no sociological purpose except as background for dancing and police shows."

Three years ago, Todd Rundgren—after winning over the critics and masses with such sophisticated AM blessings as "I Saw the Light" and "Hello, it's Me"—embarked on a daring musical journey designed to pave the way to a sociologically ideal musical culture. But as

Rundgren, with his aptly titled band Utopia, stretched musical boundaries to revolutionary limits, he left a great deal of excess in his wake...and many revolted against him.

'76's *Faithful*, signaled a return to more easily

grasped material, repaired some of the damage, and Rundgren hopes his new LP, *Ra* will continue the healing. All set to embark on tours progressing through Japan, Europe, and the U.S., Rundgren is maintaining higher commitments, but has a new goal. "Just because I've put out a few stinkers doesn't mean I can't make good records," he explained.



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Norman Seeff

"Joni's tonal and dramatic modulations are quite stunning, quite unexpected."



HEJIRA
Joni Mitchell
Asylum 7E-1087

By COLMAN ANDREWS

Very few of Joni Mitchell's songs since the *Ladies of the Canyon* LP have been recorded by other artists, and I suppose that must be because with every passing album her work has grown increasingly more personal while showing her own

sensibility more fiercely and unequivocally. It is very difficult to imagine anyone else singing most of the songs on *For the Roses*, *Court and Spark*, *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*, or even, for that matter, *Blue*. Or on this new album.

Mitchell's songs and Mitchell's singing seem so close together, and she herself so close to both, that it is almost as if to paraphrase what someone once said of Van Morrison (in the days of *Astral Weeks*) she were simply standing up in front of a microphone and spilling her soul, making the words up as she went along—ad-libbing her funny, asymmetrical, sometimes heart-rendering poetry, fashioning her phrases (alternately Byzantine and blunt) with brilliant care and with casual, almost flippant elegance.

Hejira is something of a theme album, though the theme involved doesn't take one as thrillingly (and terribly) by the throat as did the theme of *Summer Lawns*. It might be said, in fact, that *Hejira* succeeds in spite of its thematic unity and not

necessarily because of it.

The theme, of course, is travel—moving, running, changing places. Flight, in several senses of the word. Rigs that pass in the night. Fortunately, the "free, free way" and its many relations (I started counting references to travel and uses of the word "road" in the lyrics, but I had to go somewhere, so I lost track (are used on many levels,) and the metaphors are rich and deep enough so that neither Touring's *Such A Drag* nor *You Can't Run Away From Yourself* ever rear their boring little heads. (*Hejira* seems an ironic title, by the way, since at the end of a *Hejira* there is presumably a Mecca, and no such haven is in sight here—the stances of "Refuge of the Roads" notwithstanding).

The music on *Hejira*, as usual with Mitchell, feels a lot like calypso (with the exception of "Blue Motel Room" and maybe "A Strange Boy,"), both in the lilt of the rhythm section and in Mitchell's own concept of phrasing—the way she

makes words fit into patches of time. (There is also merest taunting of a reggae beat on one track). Musically, certainly, much of *Hejira* will sound familiar. The artist creates his or her own clichés, but can get away with it when they are this deliberate and this obviously the artist's own.

Mitchell's song writing is as good as ever. Her almost accidental eroticism in lines like "He picks up my scent on his fingers/While he's watching the waitresses' legs" or "And I went running down a white sand road/I was running like a white-assed deer" or "Still sometimes the slightest touch of a stranger/Can set up trembling in my bones" is frighteningly efficient. At other times, the tristful precision of her descriptive phrases recalls no less a master of that mode than Philip Larkin. Mitchell could have written lines like these of Larkin's herself: "She kept her songs, they took so little space,/The covers pleased her:/One bleached

[Cont'd on page 34].

Joni**[Cont'd. from previous page]**

from lying in a sunny place, /One marked in circles by a vase of water... or perhaps (she writes about Furry Lewis and W.C. Handy, he about Sidney Bechet) "That note you hold, narrowing and rising, shakes/Like New Orleans reflected on the water." And for that matter, Larkin might easily have written of "White flags of winter chimneys/Waving truce against the moon." The first difference is simply that Mitchell's concerns are largely with aging, while Larkin's are with the sad fact of age. The only song on *Hejira* which jars somewhat is "Furry Sings the Blues," which might be described as a cross between "For Free" and "Mr. Bojangles"; it lacks, fatally, parabolic distance.

More important even than Mitchell's words, though, is the way she sings what she writes, the way she binds her words to her music. Her manner of shaping phrases is daringly histrionic at times, daringly plain at other times. Her voice knows when to soar and when to grumble, when to waver and when to hold firm. Listen to a song of hers two dozen times, with a good ear and a good voice, and it will still be nearly impossible to match her risings and fallings the 25th time through. Both her tonal and her dramatic modulations are quite stunning, quite unexpected. She has the eerie ability to make the most incidental audience not only listen to a phrase, but care about listening to it. Her readings of short pieces of song like "No regrets Coyote" (the first time), "The next thing I know," "18 bucks went up in smoke," "Honey, tell 'em you got germs," "Or me here least of all", and even just the second syllable of the word "lover" in "Song for Sharon", are nearly impossible to forget.

When she sings "Amelia, it was just a false alarm," she captures a feeling of tired longing that a generation of neo-folkies, many of them extremely talented, have been trying, and failing, to reproduce in a few words for years. And when she curls into her jazz voice on "Blue Motel Room," she is fire through smoky glass, as good as Helen Humes.

A digression: One distrusted Mitchell as a jazz singer when she tried "Twisted" on *Court and Spark*, but the distrust disappeared when she did "Centerpiece" on *Summer Lawns*. "Motel Room" is so good, and so unusually but genuinely jazz, that one almost wishes Mitchell would, as a one-time thing, try a pure, straight jazz album, with other people's compositions and with pure, straight jazz musicians of the sort who had their cabaret cards before Tom Scott was even born. Mitchell has an obvious love for the King Pleasure/Eddie Jefferson/Annie Ross/John Hendricks axis, and she could also have

fun with things like "720 in the Books," "I've Got Your Number," or "Sunday in Savannah"; but she could also probably do chillingly successful things with serious songs like "Lush Life," "The Ballad of the Sad Young Men," or "Some Other Time"...

Some of Mitchell's usual backup musicians are present on *Hejira*, including Max Bennett, John Guerin, Victor Feldman, Tom Scott, and Bobbie Hall; they are as firm as ever. Abe Most on clarinet, Chuck Domanico on bass, and Neil Young on harmonica (!) guest-star on one track each. But the most impressive player here is Jaco Pastorius (of Weather Report and Al DiMeola's group) on four tracks. His cool, lanky lines on the title song sometimes match Mitchell's own with unerring accuracy inflections, and on "Refuge of the Roads," his bass is a finely lyrical lead instrument. Larry Carlton's guitar is also a delight, especially on "A Strange Boy," where his strong, intelligent obbligati are reminiscent of Ollie Halsall.

There can be no doubt that Joni Mitchell is a major artist, as both writer and performer—one who seems already mature but still willing to mature further, to polish her considerable talents without wearing them away. Long may she run.



HOLLY DAY
Denny Laine
Capitol

By **BUD SCOPPA**

At one point during this album of less well-known Buddy Holly songs, Denny Laine is joined by several singing chipmunks—the album might've been more resonant if the chipmunks—rather than Laine—had been the featured artists. Aside from the fact that boss Paul McCartney has picked up Buddy Holly's publishing, I can't figure out why Wings stalwart Laine bothered to make this album. Individually, some of these tracks might have provided adequate filler for the next Wings album, but together, the ten tracks are so thick and sugary that they have almost no presence at all. Laine does neither himself nor Holly a service: at best, he sounds cute while the songs in these treatments seem much slighter here than they do in memory. This is silly...what's the point of elaborating? Who could possibly care?

Nyro

SEASON OF LIGHT
Laura Nyro
Columbia

By **BOBBY ABRAMS**

Laura Nyro is a songwriter *par excellence*. Her live performances in the past, though, have left me cold and indifferent, while her recordings seem to be of uneven quality. I would much prefer to hear Barbra Streisand perform Laura's songs, because what you may give up in soul, you get back in spades in clarity and arrangement.

Nyro returned to the public consciousness last year with a new album, *Smile*, her first in several years. She also did a concert tour, but caused no great sensations. From that tour comes a not bad, but largely unnecessary, double-live album *Season of Light*. There is one new song, "Morning News," but it does not seem to be Nyro's voice. Rather, it is an amalgam of old Buffy Sainte-Marie phrases reaching for that ultimate Dylan protest song. On this particular cut, her vocal energy sounds too much like new chalk on a blackboard.

By and large, the musicianship is competent but not exciting. It is too sterile, too cliched. For example, the original version of "Money" is a good song, featuring a stirring sax solo by Michael Brecker. This live version has a very trite disco sound to it. Where the original has subtlety, this has overkill. Because the Breckers couldn't tour with her, a vibe solo by Michael Mineva is featured, but is not as effective.

An important reason for seeing someone perform live, or to buy a concert album, is for the improvisa-

tional aspects. Laura improvises to ill-effect in "Sweet Lovin' Baby," a hit off of the *New York Tendaberry* album. Live, she tries to be a Mahalia Jackson, but succeeds only in being a fifth-rate Aretha Franklin on an off-night. The original was so much more real; more soulful with its sparse piano leading into the orchestra fill at the climax.

"Smile/Mars," both from her most recent album, is a nothing song, a real throwaway, no matter which version you hear. The original is more thoughtful with some credible saxophone. Live, her voice here is rather boring, grating in its patented excursions up and up the scale. This moves into a kyoto mood piece, "Mars" which is more animated in the live version, but ultimately just as monotonous. But the real question left unanswered is why? Why an instrumental cut on this album? After all, one doesn't expect Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock or Chick Corea to write insightful, angst-filled lyrics, so why must a Laura Nyro fan, who is looking for a particular kind of poetry, want to hear a progressive jazz jam.

There are some good and outstanding moments that rise above the generally flat nature of this album. "Captain St. Lucifer," a song done extremely well on *New York Tendaberry*, survives the transition to a Muscle Shoals dance number. Two songs from *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession* are updated effectively. "Sweet Blindness" is better arranged. It's not as speedy, and it lacks the unsuccessful overdubbing of Laura's backing vocals. Also, the original was burdened by a poor instrument mix, of a confused jam. Lastly, she gives "Emmie" the full vision that this song demands. One of her most poignant numbers, the original always seemed too stylized, too sweet. Now Laura has finally been able to realize her original intentions and conceptions.

Perhaps Nyro's career and her fans' needs would have been better served by including some more new songs. Perhaps commercial acceptance at this stage in her life will spur her on to greater accomplishments. *Season of Lights* is not a bad album; it's just not special.

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