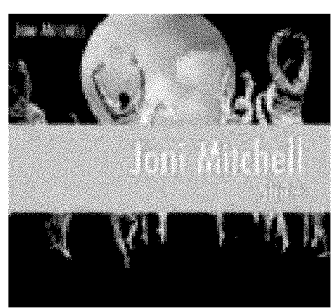


CDS OF THE WEEK » JONI MITCHELL



# Past outshines present

## THE NEW ALBUM



**SHINE**  
Joni Mitchell  
Hear Music/Starbucks  
★★

BY ROBERT EVERETT-GREEN

Anger makes some people articulate and active, while others lapse into blocked silence. **Joni Mitchell** has known both sides in her reactions to what we're doing to the Earth. Her first album of new songs after almost a decade of silence finds words for the problem, and some of them are powerful. But *Shine* is a jeremiad that blunts its own message, with music that's too mellow to express the frustration seething in the lyrics. The disc's targets are many,

from those who poison the land to jerks who pass on the right. It's *Big Yellow Taxi* expanded and annotated to album length, without that song's careening energy or concision. The best new song is *This Place*, a *Taxi*-like reflection on industrial development around her idyllic home in British Columbia. But its melodic contour, rhythmic style and instrumentation sound more like Daniel Lanois than **Joni Mitchell**. *If I Had a Heart* is another track worth hearing, in spite of a deadly dull beat. But songs like *Bad Dreams* sink into a pastoral mode that conveys as much tension as a tequila sunrise on the beach. The inertia that blights Mitchell's music these days is only partly masked by jumpy rhythms in songs such as *Hana*. Her writing is melodic but often not very tuneful. I doubt that even her biggest fans will hum along to *Strong and Wrong*. Mitchell knows a lot more about orchestration than she did in her days on the Top 10, but some of what she has learned hasn't helped her mu-

sic. The orchestral synthesizer she uses in most tunes sounds both lavish and cheap, and I tired very quickly of Rob Sheppard's squeaky saxophones. She probably writes too much at the keyboard, depending on her fingers to do the walking to some new place that they, with their habits of movement, seldom find. The opening instrumental minuet gets some of its character from Mitchell's staccato style of release. After several more songs, however, the effect starts to sound like a tic. She doesn't touch the guitar much, which is too bad. Her guitar style and especially her resonance on the instrument (a result of custom tunings) are not like anybody else's, and the guitar's demand for real kinetic involvement might have given the disc some energy. A new take on *Big Yellow Taxi* soups up the original without improving on it. It's sad to hear, in the midst of a disc whose balked musical environment may be all too apt for a once-remarkable musician who sees no way ahead for us and our wounded Earth. MORE CD REVIEWS, R3 »