

Records

Joni Mitchell-perpetual motion machine

Court and Spark, Joni Mitchell [Asylum]

What's your name? Is it Mary or Sue? Do I stand a chance with you? "There aint no happiness," she thought, "I wish I could do something beautiful." She swallowed the bourbon, looked sadly at the beer, and told herself chasers are stupid. Pouring another shot of the big brown juice she thought Old Grandad smiled at her, and she asked him, "Hey daddy why can't I be beautiful?" She waited but the bottle didn't answer. Grandad smiled silently, listening to her despair: "Oh daddy won't you talk to me?"

"If you want me to I will," interrupted a man who sat next to her and presented an empty glass. She frowned, filled his cup, and said, "You can have my beer." "Chasers are stupid," he replied, and downed his glass. They chased Grandad with Grandad until an empty bottle smiled sweetly through the Tyronian fog. Swaying in the booth, she started to lean to far. He caught her with two arms, leaned on her, and whispered in her ear, "Hey honey if you make love with me you will sing like Joni Mitchell." She laughed.

Our story about Joni Mitchell is bound to be simpler than her story about us,

"He was sitting in the lounge of the Empire Hotel

He was drinking for diversion
He was thinking of himself
A little money riding on the Maple Leafs
Along comes a lady in lacy sleeves
She says 'let me sit down here

Drinking alone's a shame
Look at those jokers
Glued to that damn hockey game
Hey honey you've got lots of cash
Bring us round a bottle
And we'll have some laughs
Cin's what I'm drinking
I was raised on robbery."

but her lover will inevitably sink like Paul Henderson.

Of her new album, *Court and Spark*, I can only ask - when will it end? Or is the perpetual motion machine a lady of the canyon? In music, lyrics and singing (that about covers it) this is her best album yet. You can only make yourself a fool when you try to describe her singing, but the music and lyrics at least have a handle. The music is new and tough. The clutter of fancy names in the list of contributors, the glitter of Crosby and Nash, the bow wow of Cheech and Chong, and the nostalgia of Robbie Robertson, is all misleading. They all help make the new sound, but the only one under the burning lime is Joni Mitchell. The use of Mr. Obscure, the guitar champion of the Holiday Inn circuit, Dennis Budimir, is ironically the most exciting attraction in the second ring (that's him Breaking like the waves at Malibu). The lyrics are stock honeys, but the subject in large is new; the teenage wasteland which taken to the tenth power is supposed to become you and I. For Joni Mitchell "People's Parties" are not the organizations of the masses, but the formulas of social

confusion. "I'm just living on nerves and feelings with a weak and lazy mind and coming to people's parties fumbling deaf dumb and blind." And she is not thinking of Hell's Peter Hondas or the city's heritage when she calls L.A. the "City of Fallen Angels," but she means the ladies in lacy sleeves who are after the Warsaw nickels of the men "looking for a woman to court and spark."

The life-is-a-bar syndrome is the force under her new album, the rod "stoking the star maker machinery behind the popular song." If at first the hardness of her new music and lyrics scares her devoted listeners (Hey mannnn, that aint Joni Mitchell!), the second time around should cool the tool. Although "Raised on Robbery" is as subtle as the sun in Ecuador, the polish and sweet restraint that are typically Joni Mitchell's keep the song from being rowdy. The fine engineering throughout the album is an electric check on the band, keeping them tough but tame. And the fine word control is the writer's, putting a little peach fuzz on the raspy sex politics. Her power of metaphor has matured from the shabby "You Turn Me on I'm a Radio" of the last album to the goodly "Just Like a Train" of the new record. "I'm a little bit corny" jumps back for a close rhyme, or "I used to count lovers like railroad cars." Her wonder lies in making the bad good - what a difference if it were Dylan, and not Joni Mitchell, who sang of "heaven full of astronauts and the Lord on

death row." So even with bottles of whiskey bobbing in the waters of the pickup queens, and the notion of salvation dried like a dead bunny rabbit, Joni Mitchell can raise a smile. And even with Rock crawling under the load of Hooples and Zeplins, a folk lady can make it walk.

The ancient feud between her guitar and piano comes to a rest. Though they're both swell and all, it's an old story of excess. Her piano can get mushy faster than bread in water, and the drone of her open guitar tuning can start to sound like seventh and unsympathetic string bouncing in the box. Now with a full and forceful band behind her she is free to use her instruments for effect and not support. "Down to You" is the only remnant of her excessive-manner. Only three other songs bear any relation to the old style, and the remaining seven are the components of her new attack. "Twisted" is a whim of bee bop and not very important for her, but "Troubled Child" is almost an essay on Mitchellism with a simple, modal jazz line offsetting the queen of folk.

Mix her matured approach to music with her sharpened eye on world-games and you get *Court and Spark*. But though her subject and medium are new this is the same Joni Mitchell who recorded *Clouds*. She includes herself in the Court confusion and Sparks, so who am I to plead innocent - It's a great album, even if she doesn't walk around nude on it. Is that you Sue?

MARK SILVA