

Lyrics fly high on Mitchell album

By TOM PRIDDY
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"Hejira" is the album Joni Mitchell has been threatening to make for years.

The story behind it is all wrapped up in the cryptic title, but for anyone familiar with the work of the Canadian-born singer it doesn't take much unraveling to sort it out.

"Hejira," the dictionary says, can be a flight of escape or a sort of migration. The kind of hasty retreat that birds make when they can't survive by staying in one place.

That's Joni Mitchell all inside and out. If there has been one typical Mitchell theme for the last several years, this two-year-old line from "Court and Spark" sums it up:

"If I had my way I'd just walk through those doors and wander. . . ."

A few months ago she finally did it. Gave in to that wanderlust, packed

A review

HEJIRA. An album by Joni Mitchell. (Asylum). Music written and performed by Joni Mitchell.

some notebooks and sketch pads, and just took off, with the idea of reporting it all on "Hejira."

This isn't an exciting album, like "Court and Spark" was, but lyrically it's her most outstanding work. Other individual songs surpass the best here, but the album's total effect is fascinating and thought-provoking.

Thanks to her eye for detail she not only can "see something of myself in everyone" she meets, but she makes us see the same thing. Whether she's eating Winn Dixie coldcuts in some anonymous beach town or sitting in a blue motel room in Savannah, she takes us along.

If she found exactly what she was looking for,

she doesn't let on. A more likely possibility is that she found some additional strength and comfort in the people she met along the way.

She found the memory of Amelia Earhart on a desert highway, and sympathized with her dream to fly away from it all, but realized that the dream "scrambles time and seasons if it gets through to you."

In a dingy bed in New Orleans she ran across ailing bluesman Furry Lewis and found out something about how music can live on even when the flesh gives out.

Like a black crow, the subject of another song, she roamed across the country and swooped down on "every shiny thing" that caught her eye.

Throughout the album she shows more of a tolerance for the lifestyles of others than she has in the past. She doesn't paint quite as dreary a picture

of some people as she did on her last album.

Much of this feeling is outlined on "Song for Sharon" and "Refuge of the Roads," one of which should really be considered the title cut. They're intended to tell the Joni Mitchell story and the tale of her hejira all at once.

In typical Mitchell style, she sees love's illusions crushed, and yet she keeps asking for it all over again. You don't have to be a woman to understand the peer pressure she feels and the way her childhood myths of love and marriage have dissolved before her eyes.

Has the trip satisfied her wandering spirit? Not a chance. After it all she claims, "I've still got my eyes on the land and the sky."

On most of the songs the accompaniment is sparse, just her own electric guitar, bass and drums, but it has a surprisingly full sound. Only on side one

does the pace drag slightly, marring an otherwise fine accompaniment.

It's the lyrics, however, that make the guitar chords resonate in your mind long after you close the double-fold jacket and put the album away.

Notes: If you're looking for a Christmas gift album you might want to wait a few days to look over the new "Wings Over America" live album.

The three-record set was released by Capitol Friday, and should be in the stores this week. It features not only most of Wings' hits, but several songs from Paul McCartney's days as a Beatle.

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