

# the lighter side

reviewed by

MORGAN AMES

CHRIS CURTIS

R. D. DARRELL

JOHN GABREE

GENE LEES

JOHN S. WILSON



symbol denotes  
an exceptional recording



✓ **PEGGY LEE: Natural Woman.** Peggy Lee, vocals; Mike Melvoin and Bobby Bryant, arr. and cond. (Everyday People; Lean On Me; Please Send Me Someone to Love; eight more.) Capitol ST 183, \$4.98.

Peggy Lee can work with any vocal fashion and flatter it without betraying herself. What other white singer, for instance, can get into Ray Charles' material on his terms as well as her own? The question, in relation to changing trends, is what kind of singer does Miss Lee feel like being? I was wondering if she would care to interpret the latest fashion, and if so, how she would define it. Now we know.

As usual, Miss Lee takes over once she decides to, singing market hits with more natural instinct than any other of our classic pop singers, including Frank Sinatra. A prime example is *Spinning Wheel* from the hit album by Blood, Sweat, and Tears (excitingly arranged here by Mike Melvoin) or Otis Redding's *Sittin' on the Dock of the Bay*. On ballads such as *Living Is Dying Without You* and Billie Holiday's classic, *Don't Explain*, Miss Lee manages by who-knows-what means to be new as well as her traditional, hypnotizing self.

Much of the album's in-the-air flavor rests on the knowing arrangements of Mike Melvoin and Bobby Bryant, both studio musician arrangers, who handle these charts with enthusiasm and craft.

There are moments in the album when Miss Lee seems to be phoning it in. Perhaps she is sighing over other days and other styles. But over-all, this supremely graced singer does her job. She always has. M.A.

**DICK POWELL: In Hollywood, 1933-1935.** Dick Powell, vocals; orchestra. (The Gold Diggers Song; Flirtation Walk; Lullaby of Broadway; twenty-six more.) Columbia C2L 44, \$9.96 (two discs, mono only).

**FRANK SINATRA: In Hollywood, 1943-1949.** Frank Sinatra, vocals; orchestra. (I Couldn't Sleep a Wink Last Night; The House I Live In; Time After Time; thirteen more.) Columbia CL 2913, \$4.98 (mono only).

**FRANK SINATRA: My Way.** Frank Sinatra, vocals; orchestra, Don Costa, arr. and cond. (Didn't We; Mrs. Robinson; If You Go Away; seven more.) Reprise 1029, \$4.98. Tape:  X 1029, \$5.95.

There is no point in getting involved with the singing on the Powell- or Sinatra-in-Hollywood discs. Powell represents the relatively vacant manner of those Thirties' vocalists who veered between "legitimate" singers and microphone stylists. He was good in the sense that he diluted the chilling formalities of the legit types and had more expression than the early mike-fed crooners. Sinatra, at the time of these recordings (1943-1949), was still essentially a band singer even though he performed prima-

rily on his own. He was, in most cases, trapped in dance band tempos and was only beginning to discover the uses of the microphone.

Otherwise, in listening to Powell versus Sinatra, one finds that movie songs in the Thirties were just as ghastly as movie songs in the Forties, but Powell got slightly better material than Sinatra. In general, Powell's backing is superior to Sinatra's simply because it is looser. The Sinatra disc starts out with three selections recorded during J. Caesar Petrillo's great contribution to American culture (the two-year ban on instrumental recording during World War II): here Sinatra is accompanied by several girls going dooby-doo-doo. Dismal. After that, some of Axel Stordahl's backings suggest a Tommy Dorsey setting, but the studio strings become stickily predominant. Powell's records, on the other hand, are leavened by some bright trumpet and saxophone solos and the bands behind him don't seem to be suffering to such an extent from hardening of the artistry.

The contemporary Sinatra on *My Way* is serviced by Don Costa, who sets up entirely different arrangements from those offered to Dick Powell or early Sinatra. This is no longer a singer trying to surface through a dreadful song or an awkward tempo. The focus now is on a singer who, knowingly and intelligently, reads a lyric. But, with the notable exception of *Yesterday*, Sinatra is plagued by voice problems. He and Costa get in each other's way sometimes—on the title song, for instance, because Sinatra can't make the big parts and Costa overwrites them. Sinatra's herky-jerk beat does not help rhythmic songs like *For Once in My Life*, although there is always the expectation that he may carry it off. He doesn't—which is not surprising. But he also misses on the more relaxed pieces—*Watch What Happens, If You Go Away*—and that is surprising. This is basically because a cold, shriveled quality coats his voice, a quality which, at faster tempos, is part of the arrogance that once contributed to his appeal. Now, however, it seems to have dried up and turned to ashes in his mouth. J.S.W.



✓ **JONI MITCHELL: Clouds.** Joni Mitchell, vocals and guitar. (Tin Angel; I Don't Know Where I Stand; Roses Blue; seven more.) Reprise RS 6341, \$4.98. Tape:  X 6341, \$5.95.

For a self-contained artist such as young Canadian Joni Mitchell—that is, one who carries the full weight of writing, singing, and playing—a second album is particularly crucial. People who have recognized the promise of the first album wait to see what happens the second time out. In most such cases, the second try is disappointing, such as with Leonard Cohen's recent set.

Miss Mitchell's second album is, in

every way, a shining extension of the first. She made her task even more treacherous by using the same format: working unaccompanied, so that songs, voice, and guitar playing must stand or fall on their own merits, unsupported. In all cases, she stands.

Miss Mitchell's wide-ranged voice is pure and ethereal, but warm as summer earth. Her unorthodox guitar tunings and intricate arrangements complement the intensity of her voice.

While all of this is enough to denote profound talent, for Miss Mitchell it is only the platform from which she expresses the most fine-grained of her talents: her songs. As with the first album, each is the product of an inquisitive mind, each is filled with jewelled lines and thoughts. Miss Mitchell succeeds, where so many of her contemporaries fail, in weaving imageries into songs instead of fragments that pretend to be songs. It is not quite an optimistic talent; neither is it completely dark.

Miss Mitchell has included a definitive reading of her hit, *Both Sides Now*, with these memorable lines: "I've looked at love from both sides now/From give and take and still somehow/It's love's illusions I recall/I really don't know love at all."

Joni Mitchell reminds us what the music industry should be all about. Such reminders are pitifully rare, and dear. Buy the album. M.A.

**THE ILLINOIS SPEED PRESS.** Vocal group with rhythm accompaniment. (Be a Woman; Free Ride; Pay the Price; Beauty; six more.) Columbia CS 9792, \$4.98.

**AORTA:** Vocal group with rhythm accompaniment. (Strange; Heart Attack; What's in My Mind's Eye; eleven more.) Columbia CS 9785, \$4.98.

Somehow, everything wrong with rock music today has been carefully represented on these two albums. The clumsy musicianship, the tired chord progressions, the slipshod and out-of-tune singing, the threadbare vocal harmony, the cliché guitar riffs, bad lyrics that usually manage to allude self-consciously to fornication or getting high, the corny use of electronic distortion, the boring pretentiousness—it's all amazingly here, complete with contrived names and gim-crack record jackets. It all must have taken a lot of time, effort, and money.

The Illinois Speed Press is a perfect example of a burgeoning phenomenon called "ego-rock" (the phrase was coined by folksinger Tim Buckley). The listener can distinguish ego-rock from other types of rock mainly by the lead singer, who sings meaningless lyrics in an involved, meaningful way, and by the lead guitarist, who enjoys his own playing so much he wants to hear it at top volume, modified by all the stale Clapton/Hendrix distortion effects. Fans of ego-rock like to call it "underground music."

At best, The Illinois Speed Press sound

like a cheap imitation of Moby Grape or the now defunct Buffalo Springfield. They have the raw energy, but they lack the musicianship—and also the life and warmth—of these other groups. Save perhaps for one song, the album is monotonous and annoying.

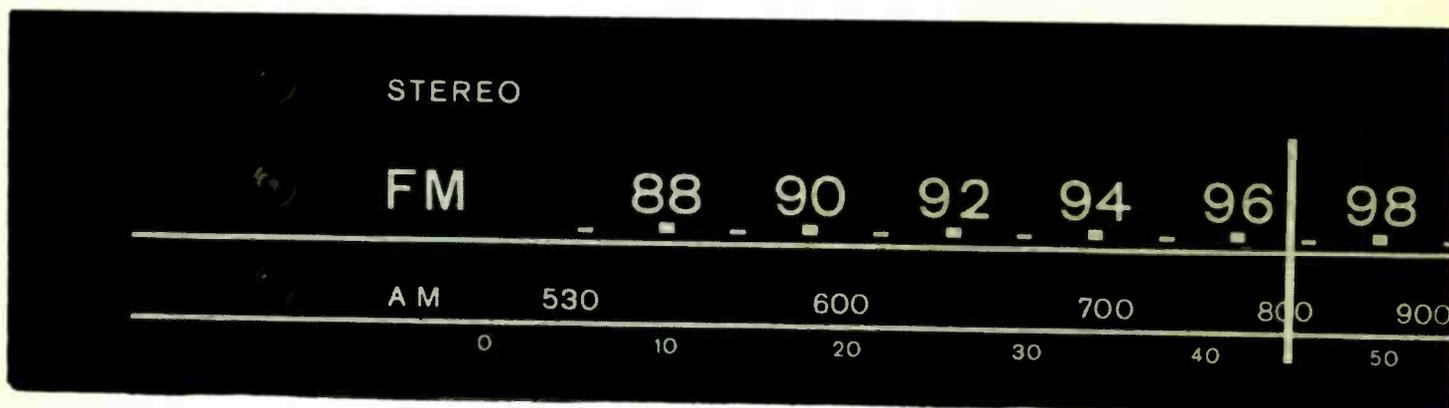
The Illinois Speed Press is bad, but I'm afraid Aorta gets the booby prize. It's trivial nonsense of the lowest order. The "theme" of the album—"it's your main vein"—is set forth on four separate tracks, *Main Vein I*, *Main Vein II*, *Main Vein III*, and *Main Vein IV*. Between them, "it's your main vein" is sung thirty-six times, regardless of the fact that the aorta is not the main vein but the main artery. But why should that stop them? After all, main artery doesn't even rhyme. C.C.



**LALO SCHIFRIN:** *Mannix*. Music from the score of the television series. Orchestra, Lalo Schifrin, cond. ABC Paramount PAS 5004, \$4.98.

It is not because Lalo Schifrin is a friend that I like his music. He's a friend because I like his music. A few years ago, I had misgivings about him as a composer. A lot of his music seemed needlessly complex, busy.

Hollywood ruins a lot of talent. It seems to have purified Lalo's. His tech-



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