

Accuphase announces a new product concept:

a preamp designed especially for records.



The Accuphase C220 is a new kind of component for the critical listener. More than that, it is a new engineering achievement—one that produces a transparency and purity of sound rarely heard from records.

The C220 eliminates all auxiliary functions of the traditional preamp, other than those needed for record reproduction (thus eliminating the compromises inherent in accommodating other functions).

Its use of direct coupled Class A amplification in all stages, Ring Emitter Transistors (RETs) and symmetrical push-pull circuitry dramatically upgrades the sound quality of a fine record collection.

The Accuphase C220 has a built-in switchable head-amp which allows the use of moving-coil cartridges; it has switches to match its input impedance with the output impedance of any cartridge.

Class A amplification with symmetrical push-pull circuitry is used in all driver stages of the C220.

Four RETs—a new device consisting of 100 transistors in parallel (400 in all)—deliver exceptionally low impedance, superior high frequency content and high power amplification. Distortion at each amplifier stage is less than 0.001%. Total gain is 86 db—the highest gain of any preamp available.

The C220 is not inexpensive. But like every Accuphase product, it is handcrafted to prove trouble-free and maintenance-free—an example of Accuphase planned longevity in an era of planned obsolescence.

Each year of our existence, Accuphase products have received highest honors and awards from all over the world. Every Accuphase product has become a classic.

Now we are pleased to introduce the winner of the 1978 Grand Prix for audio products in Japan—the Accuphase C220.

It may look like a new kind of component. But we think you'll find it's really a new record collection.

C220

Accuphase

When you're really serious about your music.

RECORDING OF SPECIAL MERIT

TOMMY JAMES: *Midnight Rider*. Tommy James (vocals, guitar); vocal and instrumental accompaniment. *Midnight Rider*; *Still Got a Thing for You*; *Double or Nothin'*; *What Happened to the Girl*; *Keep It in the Groove*; and three others. FANTASY F-9532 \$6.98.

Performance: **Excellent**

Recording: **Excellent**

Despite his many pop hits with the Shondells in the Sixties and as a solo performer in the early Seventies, Tommy James has been consistently underrated as a craftsman in both songwriting and singing, unfairly dismissed as a "bubblegum" entertainer by rock-media nabobs, and ignored when wails of sympathy are raised for rock musicians battered by the music industry. He began his career singing mostly the usual teen love complaints assigned to him by his label, but in only a few years he was deeply involved in writing, arranging, and producing his own material. The 1969 album "Crimson and Clover" showed him to be a mature artist, and it was commercially successful as well. Nevertheless, personal and professional difficulties in the past several years seemed to have put his career and reputation in limbo.

"Midnight Rider," his second album for the Fantasy label, is a welcome sign of recovery. James still has the same light but husky tenor, excellent phrasing, and total absorption with a song that he always had. Of the eight selections on the album, he wrote four (some of these in collaboration with members of his former band, the Shondells), and they are all sturdy, well-crafted examples of straight-ahead pop. The other four are by veteran Jeff Barry, who is older than James but writes in the same style. Most of the tracks on "Midnight Rider" are about love, a subject James approaches these days with a cool passion that only now and then breaks into a vibrato cry. The production, by Barry, is solid and polished. While the album sometimes recalls the halcyon days when James was first establishing his artistic independence, there's nothing on it that isn't contemporary—especially *Keep It in the Groove*, with its exciting polyrhythms, James' own *Double or Nothin'*, which sounds like a comeback single, and *Bobby, Don't Leave Me Alone*, an eight-minute pop mini-concerto.

If a music career is a kind of contract between an artist obliged to give his best and an audience that recognizes and responds to it, "Midnight Rider" proves that Tommy James is keeping his part of the bargain. J.V.

JONI MITCHELL: *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter*. Joni Mitchell (vocals, piano, guitar); instrumental accompaniment. *Overture/Cotton Avenue*; *Talk to Me*; *Jericho*; *Paprika Plains*; *Otis and Marlena*; *The Tenth World*; *Dreamland*; and four others. ASYLUM BB-101 two discs \$7.98, Ⓢ ET8-101 \$7.97, Ⓞ TC5-101 \$7.97.

Performance: **A little too abstract**

Recording: **Very good**

At first this may seem another of those difficult Joni Mitchell albums of the "Hissing of Summer Lawns" ilk, fraught as it is with zonky and unexpected, if not alien, sounds and dotted with those chords that exist only in Joni Mitchell music. The words of a given

(Continued on page 116)

piece are fairly easy to track, but even then it takes a lot of work on your part to hear the thing as a whole.

The album starts with what Joni calls an overture (actually a moody little montage of chords, awfully short and awfully quiet as overtures go), which suggests more of a narrative quality than I can find in it. It sounds like a parade of her latest ambitions for "the popular song," but a parade constructed more for herself than for the rest of us. There is narration—from her own viewpoint, in the third person, and back in the first person in character after the manner of Randy Newman—and there is exploration, especially in the nonverbal parts. In *Paprika Plains*, there is composition: it runs 16 minutes and 19 sec-

onds—one whole side—making it by far her longest "song" to date, and it is an ambitious now-symphonic, now-jazz piece, intelligent but also rambling and arcane. It makes a slick, quick change from Tom Scott's jazz band to classical orchestra and back again, leaving me—again—unable to hold onto the feeling that the piece is a whole and not just a clever grafting job.

The title song has the most interesting lyrics (you have to allow for the fact that I'm still, unfashionably, political), although its melody doesn't amount to much. But there are ideas scattered throughout the two-disc program, and it is not entirely a humorless abstraction Joni Mitchell devised just to please herself. Her way of satirizing herself is related to her

way of describing life in general; she's trying to strike, savagely if necessary, into the sub-surface of decisions and behavior. "You spend your sentences like they were currency," one of her characters tells a close-mouthed friend. Then she says, "Talk to me. I'm always talking." Then she goes "pikwark pikwark" like a chicken squawking. She's trying to move the popular song beyond prettiness—or at least conventional ideas about prettiness—and the album is rich, like a complicated painting. I'll play it a lot more times and keep finding new stuff in it—but I still think that too much of it is pitched at the head and not enough at the solar plexus. N.C.

RECORDING OF SPECIAL MERIT

RICK NELSON: *Intakes*. Rick Nelson (vocals, guitar); Stone Canyon Band (instrumentals); other musicians. *You Can't Dance*; *One X One*; *I Wanna Move with You*; *Wings*; and six others. Epic PE 34420 \$6.98, © PEA 34420 \$6.98. © PET 34420 \$6.98.

Performance: **Believable**
Recording: **Excellent**

If someone had told me in 1958 that I'd ever be praising a Ricky Nelson record, I'd have flattened that unlucky but accurate prognosticator, for I was convinced then that I couldn't stand Ricky Nelson—or any other teenager, except, on rare occasions, myself. But we've both changed. His voice and taste have matured, and the important thing about him that *hasn't* changed is his knack for finding a tune that's catchy. Now, even in 1958 I was fair enough about it to admit that I admired Nelson's ear for a catchy tune. The lyrics he sings nowadays are more mature, but a good percentage of the tunes are still catchy. And his back-up, the Stone Canyon Band, reflects the same combination you can hear in Nelson: signs of independent thinking along with clear tracings of roots in the middle of commercial pap-rock. For me, Nelson's career seems a triumph of where one has gotten to over where one came from, and I like to see that in a peer. There's good, clean music here, with my favorite parts coming in *One X One*, which has a fine, slow, catchy melody that shows some very nice stuff you probably didn't suspect Nelson could do with his voice. Nelson wrote only two of the songs, so he's still mainly following his ears. Long may they endure. N.C.

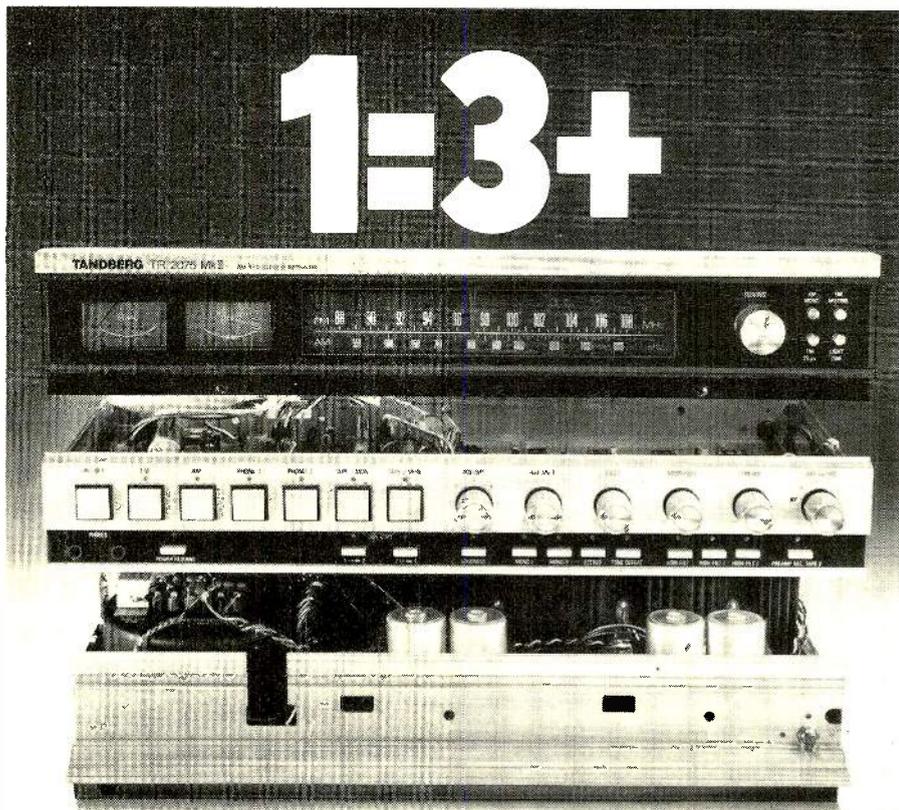
RECORDING OF SPECIAL MERIT

ESTHER PHILLIPS: *You've Come a Long Way, Baby*. Esther Phillips (vocals); Joe Beck (guitar); Randy Brecker (trumpet); Ron Carter (bass); other musicians. *Love Addict*; *You've Been a Good Ole Wagon*; *Somewhere Along the Line*; *In a Soft and Subtle Way*; and four others. Mercury SRM-1-1187 \$6.98, © MC8-1-1187 \$7.95, © MCR4-1-1187 \$7.95.

Performance: **Gutsy**
Recording: **Good**

The title of this album and the exceptionally attractive cover photo announce that Esther Phillips, one of the most individualistic artists around (although she has been unevenly represented on disc), has made some changes for the better. She has shifted record companies, moving from Kudu, a CTI subsidiary, to Mercury, and, more important, she is re-

(Continued on page 118)



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