

is arguably Norman Smith (who isn't exactly a household name). Such an acknowledgment wouldn't have prevented them from rightly claiming that *Please Please Me* is a fine scholarly achievement.

### Notes

1. The "other relevant data" include snippets on American pop records and on major nonmusical historical events. The site is listed in the book's bibliography as "Thompson, Gordon. 1995. *1960s British Rock and Popular Music: A Selective Chronology*. <http://www.skidmore.edu/%7Egthomps/britrock/60brchro/index.html> (accessed August 2007)."

2. <<http://www.skidmore.edu/~gthomps/grtdata/grt-blog.html>>. Accessed May 2009.

3. The Beatles' half-hearted attempt at recording the song can be heard on the Beatles *Anthology* Volume 1, Capitol Records CDP 7243 8 34445 2 6, 1995.

4. As Thompson's statement could be read to suggest, an even more complete account of 1960s British pop would result from including close studies of people representing the other professional types he lists—that is, not just producers, engineers, music directors, songwriters, and musicians, but also corporate executives, publishers, journalists, and contractors.

Lloyd Whitesell. *The Music of Joni Mitchell*. New York: Oxford UP, 2008.

### Reviewed by Lori Burns

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She is revered for her extensive career as a singer–songwriter, spanning forty years and covering a range of musical styles and genres. In this monograph by Lloyd Whitesell, Joni Mitchell's musical craft is given a thorough and much deserved analysis. From the folk idiom of her early career, through the collaboration with jazz giant Charles Mingus, to the mainstream pop contributions and her more recent experimentation with digital sound technology, Mitchell's music and lyrics are analyzed and interpreted with the goal of illuminating her song craft. Through his analysis of musical structure and formal content, as well as vocal expression and poetic meanings, Whitesell reveals the individual compositional elements that contribute to the artistic statement of each song. These elements are viewed as tools in the creative toolkit that Joni Mitchell used to build her rich repertoire of songs.

Mindful of the values he is invoking with his analysis, Whitesell explores the concepts of high art and popular art, suggesting that Mitchell, through her technical skill and compositional subtlety, crossed over between these two categories: “Close musical analysis can unlock hidden aspects of song construction and lead to a more precise grasp of technical innovations and the idiosyncrasies of an original style” (10). Without adhering to a single theoretical approach, Whitesell develops and draws upon an impressive toolkit of his own, in order to address what he hears in the music and receives in the poetry of Mitchell’s songs. The result is an analytic study that is not ideological in its foundation, but rather responsive to the style and content of each individual song-writing period. This approach does mean that his analytic assumptions are not laid bare, and that some of the tools are applied without critical reflection, but it also means—very appropriately—that the focus of the work is clearly on Joni Mitchell’s music, rather than on the methodology itself.

One of the first tasks undertaken by Whitesell is the summary of Mitchell’s productive and extensive career (Chapter 2). Breaking down her musical work into four periods (’66–’72, ’73–’80, ’81–’88, and ’89–’98) followed by a period of retrospective projects and compilations, he provides general interpretive commentary about the albums produced in each period, and offers more detailed analyses for selected songs that are particularly emblematic of each period. The first song analyzed from the first period is the opening song, “I Had a King,” on Mitchell’s debut album, *Song to a Seagull* (1968). This analysis reveals Whitesell’s approach and sets the tone for the analytic passages that are offered throughout the study. Establishing first the formal poetic structure and thematic content of the lyrics, he then identifies the features of the musical development of this text in the gestures, content, and textures of the vocal and guitar setting. The analysis considers melodic, harmonic, contrapuntal, formal, rhythmic, timbral, and expressive elements, integrating all of these musical parameters into interpretive relationship with the lyrics. The following brief passage captures the spirit of the interpretation: “Rhythm conjoins with gradations in timbre, as in the chorus, where the guitar’s soaring melody repeatedly falls to a forceful downbeat, the rhythmic constraint emphasized with a percussive touch” (18). Throughout this chapter, passages that describe harmonic and melodic content are illustrated nicely with Whitesell’s own transcriptions.

The career survey closes with a fascinating account of the song “Woodstock” as it evolved from its roots in 1969 (although it was not performed at the festival), through its release for voice and keyboard on the

album *Ladies of the Canyon* (1970), to a rock-band arrangement on the live concert album *Miles of Aisles* (1974), an electric guitar version on the live concert album *Shadows and Light* (1979), a mellow and varied arrangement on a concert video *Painting with Words and Music* (1998), and ultimately an orchestral arrangement on what Mitchell originally deemed her farewell project, *Travelogue* (2002). The multiple versions of this iconic song provide Whitesell with the opportunity to summarize Mitchell's musical journey across her career as well as to reflect on contrasting musical meanings as they are conveyed through stylistic development and genre treatment. The reader will be drawn into this lively musical discussion and will undoubtedly engage with the analytic and interpretive notions as they cover the full range of Mitchell's expressive strategies.

Whitesell dedicates Chapters 3 and 4 to the poetry of Joni Mitchell's songs, considering the range of dramatic expression that is evident in her lyrics. Whitesell's approach here is to establish a framework for poetic interpretation and to categorize some persona types and then to review the thematic content of the poetry. Borrowing the concept of modes of enunciation from Gérard Genette, Whitesell defines dramatic, narrative, lyric, and political modes of *poetic address*, followed by realistic, mythic, aesthetic, and philosophical modes of *poetic representation*. He also considers the perspective and role of the *poetic speaker*, as well as the style of *poetic language* that is employed by the speaker. Each of these categories is illustrated with examples of lyrics from Mitchell's repertoire.

With these poetic categories as his theoretical foundation, Whitesell then explores how these strategies of poetic expression are given life through musical voice. In an effort to delimit his interpretive framework for vocal persona, he identifies a list of nuanced parameters that can describe the qualities of a poetic speaker. The identified parameters are character, expressivity, manner, elocution, tone, and timbre, each of which is nuanced by opposing interpretive values, for instance "character" is qualified as vivid versus impersonal. Vivid character is illustrated with the brash personality of the poetic subject in "Raised on Robbery," and impersonal character is illustrated by the haunting effect of the song "The Dawntreader" (61). Not intending these values to be applied with theoretical formalism, Whitesell means rather to suggest a framework of analytic parameters that are suggestive for the interpretation of the *musicopoetic* voice. Of course, as any analyst would discover in applying this framework, the interpretive results are subjective and dependent upon a number of receptive contexts. However, the purpose of this framework is to spark the analytic imagination and to

locate the interpretive perceptions within an integrated model. Declaring that the complete analytic method will be put into action with the analysis of the song “The Tea Leaf Prophecy,” Whitesell then offers several pages of analytic commentary on the poetry and music of that song. Here the reader would presume that the analysis would draw upon the poetic modes and persona parameters; however, the analysis does not always establish which analytic parameter is at play, and the previously defined framework could be made more explicit in the analytic presentation.

Having given his full attention to the poetry for two chapters, Whitesell turns in Chapters 4 and 5 to the harmonic, melodic, and formal aspects of Mitchell’s song craft. Readers with a particular interest in harmony will appreciate the thorough table (120–25) classifying songs, organized according to the album, by harmonic category (modal, polymodal, chromatic, polytonal, and pedal point). Whitesell offers analytic examples in each category, developing the analysis to include elements of harmonic progressions and modulations, chromaticism, as well as contrapuntal and formal treatment of the harmony. The references to specific harmonic content are based on pop chord abbreviations (e.g., A9), but we read also chord function labels (tonic and its Roman Numeral symbol I) as well as scale degree references (3). The chord progression listings that account for phrase harmonic patterns (e.g., the chart on p. 144, with its cumbersome notational content) do not serve the reader well, because the graphic presentation is difficult to read and does not facilitate the reader’s understanding of the harmonic patterns under discussion. In the analysis of the poetic-harmonic connections, there is a great deal of information to process and the reader would be wise to have the songs at hand in order to follow along in a meaningful way. Indeed, this would make for very fine analytic material in the teaching of harmony, as the form of presentation necessitates a practical engagement with the charts provided, the prose descriptions of the important musical and lyrical associations, and the songs in either notated or recorded form. That engagement would surely reward the reader or student of harmony, as many details are brought forward in the text, and as many others would be discovered along the way.

The chapter on form demands the same sort of attention and affords the same potential rewards, as Mitchell’s song structures are explained and grounded in the repertoire through references to the formal structures of songs by composers such as Goffin-King, Bob Dylan, Lennon-McCartney, and Paul Simon. There is much to be learned in this account of formal and phrase design. Some very interesting analytic ideas come through in the

discussion of melodic contour, and here the reader is provided with clear transcriptions of the vocal lines, lyrics and chord symbols, allowing full verification of the descriptive account through the graphic representation of the musical and lyrical events. We witness in these analyses the full accumulation of the analytic elements that have been presented throughout the book, synthesizing the elements of poetry and music.

To close the study, Whitesell pulls the camera back from the details of the songs, and examines their contexts within the larger assembly of collections and albums. Here, he reflects upon the coherence and integrity of the collection as a song cycle or concept album, exploring the poetic links as well as the musical links that bind the songs of a collection together. The albums *Song to a Seagull* (1968), *Hejira* (1976), and *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter* (1977) are interpreted for their internal coherence and thematic links.

This study of Joni Mitchell's music will be of great interest to scholars in popular music studies, especially to those who are engaged with the interpretation of song and the craft of popular song composition. The book title will attract the attention of a broader readership, and portions of it will be accessible to the faithful followers of Joni Mitchell's career. However, a full appreciation of Lloyd Whitesell's work is only possible if one can enter into the detailed exploration of poetic and harmonic language. For those who make this effort, they are certain to gain tremendous insight into the art and craft of a legendary popular artist.