

# Joni Mitchell releases Hejira

Ex-Canadian Joni Mitchell is a singer-songwriter who has continued to perfect her individualistic craft long after achieving the visible signs of commercial success and economic comfort.

Her self-absorbed work now is approaching the point where it takes the methodology of a scholar studying the classics to decipher any sort of consistent meaning in the words and music.

The title of Mitchell's new album, Hejira, is a word that means the flight of Mohammed from Mecca in 622 AD or in modern usage any sort of flight.

Travel is the recurrent theme of Hejira and interpreting the title the travel is running away.

In the song Coyote, Mitchell is "a prisoner of the white lines on the highway." In Amelia, she "was driving across the burning desert." In Blue Motel Room, Mitchell has "got road maps—from two dozen states" she's "gone coast to coast just to contemplate."

There is a flight from home, love, fear, all of humanity, etc. But the songs are not totally negative because some of the running away also is a reaching out toward new experience.

There is a slight return to the romanticism of the earlier album Court and Spark and a turn away from the more cynical outlook on life of last year's Hissing of Summer Lawns.

The individual cuts on Hejira are not songs so much as word poems set to finely orchestrated musical accompaniment.

The music often is a mood-setting device of little melody but it is a successfully absorbing vehicle for Mitchell's intense vocals. Her singing is completely confident, and more relaxed than it has ever been before.

She and Larry Carlton play finely tuned electronic and acoustic guitars while Victor Feldman contributes keyboards, John Guerin plays drums and Max Bennett and Jaco Pastorius divide the bass tracks.

Seldom are there more than four instruments combined to produce the musical accompaniment for any one piece.

The immediacy of this album's more serious stuff is in the lyrical content with the music taking a secondary importance.

However, repeated listenings reveal the care and consistency with which Mitchell and her

studio team have built the drifting foundation of the rhythm and bass tracks and the subtle layering of vocal and instrumental textures which accent the drama of Joni's ideas.

Hejira is not all poetry although even the lighter musical moments contribute to the thematic concentration evident throughout.

This album becomes a relatively straightforward thinly-veiled chronicle of Mitchell's personal experience.

But whether listeners will continue to be interested in Joni Mitchell may depend on how much they can concern themselves with, or take away from, this woman's personal universe.

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