

# Joni Mitchell's musical territory still just-this-side

## Pop releases

**Joni Mitchell: Shadows And Light** (WEA). When folk singer Joni Mitchell first ventured into jazz, on the *Hissing of Summer Lawns* album, she admitted she was "dog paddling around in the currents of black classical music."

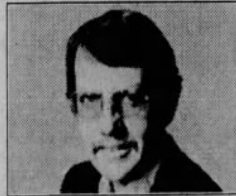
Now, after four more albums — including a brave and flawed tribute to the late Charles Mingus — Mitchell has reached the point where she can do the breast stroke, so to speak. But she still doesn't know how to dive.

More precisely, she still doesn't know how to jump into a tune and phrase with the spontaneity of an Ella Fitzgerald or a Sarah Vaughan. She still puts most of her emphasis on lyrics, whereas jazz tends to stress other musical values. Instead of improvising, she embroiders.

This double album was recorded in Santa Barbara last September, while Mitchell was touring in support of her *Mingus* LP. Four of the 14 cuts are from *Hejira* — her lonesome highway album — three are from *Mingus*, two from *Missing*, two are from the days when her songs were still being recorded by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, two are instrumental solos, two are new and one, *Why Do Fools Fall In Love*, was first recorded by Frankie Lyman and the Teenagers.

That's quite a variety of mate-

## RECORDS



**BRIAN BRENNAN**

rial but I'd trade it all for another LP like *Court and Spark*, her most powerful album of the 1970s.

Too much of this one is directed at the intellect rather than the emotions, and only the interaction of Mitchell's voice and the marvellously eloquent bass of Jaco Pastorius takes it out of the realm of the musically prosaic.

Much of the album is based on Mitchell's peculiar notions for the advancement of the "popular song" which call for experiments with alienating combinations of dissonances. These would be easy enough to take, if she were Cecil Taylor or Archie Shepp and knew where the music was going. But she's out of her depth in these murky musical waters.

**Barbra Streisand: Guilty** (CBS). The front cover shows Streisand with her cat's-got-the-cream smile snuggling into the arms of falsetto sultan Barry Gibb. He looks as uncomfortable as Kristofferson did in Streisand's home movie, *A Star Is Born*. Both are dressed in Bee Gee white silks.

One wonders what brought these two pop icons together for this LP. Could it be their mutual love of disco? Or does Streisand want to become a Bee Gee? It certainly can't have had anything to do with compatibility of musical styles. This is the greatest mismatching of talents since Cher recorded *Allman and Woman* with ex-husband Gregg Allman.

The weakest songs are the two on which Streisand sings duets with Gibb. She fares better on the solo numbers but is defeated by the material, which was written by Gibb and/or his two brothers. Without those trademark falsettos, the Bee Gee compositions sound very nondescript indeed.

\*\*\*

**Sharon, Lois & Bram: Singing 'n Swinging** (Elephant Records). Children's records normally fall into two categories: cutesy ones with patronizing adult voices and music box accompaniment, and gimmicky ones with chipmunk voices and synthesized instrumentation. The former usually appeal to adults and bore the hell out of kids. The latter appeal



**FORMER FOLKY JONI MITCHELL**

**...has bravely sailed uncharted waters**

to kids and drive adults to distraction.

And then there are the children's records made by Sharon, Lois & Bram, which don't fit into either category. Yet they succeed in appealing to both generations. Kids like them because the songs are worth singing after school and adults appreciate them for their imagination and musical quality. The Muppets are the only other musical act I can think of with the same kind of wide-ranging appeal.

This is the third album by Sharon, Lois & Bram, a Toronto-

based trio, and it's a very professional production. The sidemen include some of the busiest musicians in Toronto, the arrangements are geared to give maximum impact to each song, and producer Bill Usher employs the same studio pop techniques that he has used with success on records by the Irish Rovers, Bruce Cockburn and Valdy.

There are 25 songs on the album. Some are done *a capella* and run for only 20 seconds. Others are set to the accompaniment of piano, bass, drums, guitar and other small-band instru-