

# Diggin' For GOLD

Our regular look at the more arcane corners of record collecting. Includes **Label Of Love** and **Sound and Vision**

## TIN EARED

JONI MITCHELL

### Turbulent Indigo

(Reprise 9457862,  
digipak with promotional "ear", US, CD, 1994) £300

Fans of Joni Mitchell know that the songwriter, singer, instrumentalist and producer considers herself a visual artist above all else. "I was a painter derailed by circumstance," she's often told reporters. Indeed, a staggering 21 Joni Mitchell albums bear her painting or photography on the cover. Among the most striking is *Turbulent Indigo*, her 17th album. As always, Mitchell was closely involved in its packaging and design. She and collaborator Robbie Cavolina crafted three editions of the album as part of an extensive marketing campaign that featured promotional matchbooks, postcard sets, and more. No item has become as sought-after among super-fans as the first edition US CD of *Turbulent Indigo*, set apart by its evocative orange cover, eye-catching digipak design – the first of its kind for a major label – and a small tin trinket that ties the package together.

It all speaks to a central theme of the album – in particular, its title track, an ode to genius, to Vincent Van Gogh and the creative struggle, and a reflection on the changing role of art and the artist in culture. "The title song of the new record comes from a conference of the Canadian Council of the Arts that I spoke at in the early 90s," Mitchell explained to Timothy White a couple of months before the album's release. "The name of the conference was 'Making Van Goghs'. They said they wanted to focus on indigenous peoples, ethnic groups, and women. I opened my talk by saying you cannot make Van Goghs, that artists can be encouraged – or even groomed – but not manufactured. Art is the result of experience, and Van Gogh's despair and suicide are not what you'd want to duplicate." The album's artwork was painted by Joni Mitchell at a time when she felt her music was maligned and undervalued. It continues the theme by depicting Mitchell as Van Gogh, paying tribute to the misunderstood painter's *Self-Portrait With Bandaged Ear*.

Crate-diggers should note that there are three CD editions of this late-career classic. The version that pops up most frequently online and at second-hand shops is the third edition, housed in a standard jewel case featuring the portrait against a blue background. In this edition, the six-panel booklet folds out to reveal paintings and lyrics. But the first two editions of *Turbulent Indigo* feature a special tri-fold digipak design with more of Mitchell's artwork plus a deluxe, bound booklet of lyrics. Here, the cover



painting is set against an orange background (a design reprised on the *How Do You Stop* CD single). The elegant presentation earned Mitchell and Cavolina the Grammy Award for Best Recording Package in 1996.

The orange digipaks were originally pressed in small batches, totalling around 75,000 copies. But the first batch contained more treasure: a small, tin, ear-shaped trinket tucked inside one of the pockets – a clever addition that furthers the commentary on art appreciation that runs through *Turbulent Indigo*'s music and design.

In an interview with the CBC prior to the album's release, Mitchell mentioned that the ear would be included in the first 10,000 copies of the digipak edition, a fact confirmed by Cavolina. But in the 10 years that this Joni Mitchell fan has been keeping an eye out for the ear on the used market, only a small handful of copies has turned up. Maybe the ears remain unnoticed, tucked away behind booklets inside so many first editions. One thing is for sure: the ear edition of *Turbulent Indigo* remains an elusive collectable that keeps Mitchell's most fervent fans scouring eBay and flipping through the CD racks, digging not so much for gold as for tin.

**Sam Stone**