

RECORD REVIEW

Joni Mitchell, Tom Waits chart their own paths

By Rich Tozier
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Despite an occasional gem of historic significance worthy of a time capsule, the live album is likely, more than not, to be just something to throw at the hungry consumer, a compilation of tried and true material to keep the artist in plain view until the next round of fresh stock can be issued from the studio, that lab where "creativity" takes place.

But studios take time and money, and, even with the aid of the most careful production touches, a studio session may still fail to recoup its great investment.

The success or failure of Joni Mitchell's new live twofer, *Shadows and Light*, will depend as much on what's in it as what listeners bring to it. Although she does tinker with some of the lyrics, all the songs are familiar. Recorded in September of last

year on the heels of her daring *Mingus* — indeed, a cluster of songs here originate from the *Mingus* set — *Shadows and Light* will have to be taken as a step more sideways than forward for the normally novel Mitchell, whose previous four albums (beginning with *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*) seem to have been made, fortunately, for her own indulgence, without regard for what the mass public may think — or buy. Meanwhile, the curious will probably have to wait yet another year to find out how she's able to follow such a chancy act as *Mingus*.

Shadows and Light, then, trades if not in innovation, then in the only basic strength of the recorded concert: the captive chemistry of the moment, the interaction of the headliner, the band and the audience. All those elements gelled that night, thanks in no small part to Mitchell's support, her most

sympathetic since Tom Scott's L.A. Express. On hand were finger-popping bassist Jaco Pastorius, guitarist Pat Metheny, saxophonist Mike Brecker, percussionist Don Alias, and the Persuasions, a rhythm and blues vocal group usually heard a cappella.

Alias and Pastorius have worked with Mitchell before, Pastorius' bass almost taking a duet role to her vocals on the *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter* album. Tenor-for-all-seasons Brecker may not be as special a voice as Wayne Shorter was on *Don Juan and Mingus*, but he can burn deeply and freely, as he does here in "The Dry Cleaner From Des Moines." The Persuasions and Mitchell simply raise hell together with a rollicking update of Frankie Lyman and the Teenagers' classic "Why Do Fools Fall in Love?"

Mitchell's vocals, typically venturesome, transform her oldest



Tom Waits

material; "Woodstock" is an anthem here which shows no signs of age under her treatment. Is Mitchell a jazz singer? That, I sup-

pose, would depend on what one means by "jazz." Mitchell is as Mitchell does, and will have to be defined in her own terms.

Not to be outdone by singularity is Tom Waits, who is back, in *Heartattack and Vine*, for another stab at making an art of being a burnt-out case. Backed by a bluesy band that plays like Booker T. & the MG's might have sounded the morning after a rough night, raspy-voiced Waits serenades us with more songs about being down and out in L.A., Mexico and New York. He occasionally strikes a poignant chord with a line like "if you chew tobacco and wish upon a star, well you'll find out where the scarecrows sit, just like punchlines between the cars."

Like a beat poet who came along a quarter-century too late, Waits works this turf compassionately, as though such outsiders as winos, prostitutes, bums and drifters really mattered. Thing is, they do.