

Mitchell weaves her musical magic again

By ERIC SCHAFER
Rock Reviewer

Joni Mitchell is so special, original, unique, subtle, wonderful ... please phone in your own adjective for her because I've run out of them. With her deft grace and ability to put across a forceful message in a gentle format, she has once again crafted a small masterpiece with her new album, *Chalk Mark in a Rainstorm*.

As usual with Mitchell, you get something new each time. The folk message with the jazz instrumentation is still her dominant genre, but this time around it's less folksy, less jazzy and more a unique blend all her own.

And speaking of unique blends, when you've got a supporting cast of Peter Gabriel, Ben Orr, American Indian actor Iron

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Eyes Cody, Tom Petty, Willie Nelson, Wayne Shorter, Wendy & Lisa, Billy Idol (!) and his guitarist Steve Stevens, you know you've come up with something very interesting.

There aren't many people with the brains and guts to even attempt what Mitchell does with *Chalk Mark* — let alone pull it off — but she does. Basically, she "cast" so many musicians of various stripes on her record because she felt her new songs had such vivid characters in them that she wanted to represent them with voices other than her own. The effect is startling and, due to careful arranging

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Chalk Mark in a Rain Storm by Joni Mitchell (Geffen Records).

Joni Mitchell Chalkmark in a rainstorm back up vocals Ben Orr

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and producing, quite successful.

Each cut is strikingly different in arrangement and subject matter. The album opens with *My Secret Place* a beautiful duet with Gabriel about new-found love. *Lakota*, which features Iron Eyes Cody on vocals, is about the continuing persecution of the American Indian by the U.S. government.

Dancin' Clown features Mitchell as narrator, Billy Idol as a bully and Tom Petty as a shy boy. *Cool Water* is from Mitchell's childhood, a folk song "my neigh-

bors sang when they got drunk." Willie Nelson guests here.

By far the most profound cut is the anti-war *The Beat of Black Wings*. This brutally frank song features "Killer Kyle," a confused young American soldier who's just beginning to realize how much the world has lied to him. From the officers who exploit him down to the girlfriend who "killed our unborn child/without even grievin'!" he feels as valuable and as permanent as "a chalk mark in a rainstorm."

It is such fragile, tentative beauty that Mitchell never fails to capture with her music. I think she's our best female songwriter.