

Music notes

By Kelly Humphries

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HEJIRA. By Joni Mitchell. Asylum Records. 7E-1087

When I picture Joni Mitchell in my mind, I see a graceful bird, a hawk, gliding effortlessly through the clouds with an angular beak hooking downward toward Earth. Her voice lends those characteristics to my vision because of its airiness and lilting, flitting inflections that can increase or decrease altitude by thousands of feet in a moment.

Her face, in reality, does have a bird-like quality to it. A lean beauty accented by generous lips. Only her straight nose, lacking any downward plunge, detracts from the falcon profile.

Her newest album shows she not only looks somewhat like a creature of the air, but thinks and writes as one as well.

"Hejira" is filled with views of Earth from above. It is a wandering collection of moments from across the world, giving tribute to the vagabond, the hobo, the wanderer.

Starting with "Coyote," she spins the tale of a journey never ending. "Coyote" is a chapter in the story about a hitchhiker led on by a rancher looking for more stock. But the captured prey turns out to be ruled by another, stronger master: "A prisoner of the white lines on the freeway."

Throughout most of the album, Joni is accompanied by Jaco Pastorius on bass, John Guerin on drums and Larry Carlton on lead guitar. Joni plays acoustic guitar on most of the platter, although she also does excellent work when she switches to electric lead on "Blue Motel Room," and rhythm guitar on "A Strange Boy."

Bobby Hall also shows up on percussion frequently, Victor Feldman comes through with some excellent vibes on "Amelia," and Chuck Findley and Tom Scott show up with their horns on "Refuge Of The Roads."

The journey changes from one of place to place to one of when when with a look back into time on "Amelia." Joni really lets her wings spread, making direct references to Icarus and vague references to Amelia Earhart, the Atchison, Kan., aviation pioneer whose plane vanished in the South Pacific in 1937 after she had successfully completed more than two thirds of a round-the-world flight.

The blast back to the past continues with "Furry Sings The Blues," a stroll down old Beale Street, the jazz and blues haven that reared such giants in the music world as W.C. Handy and B.B. King "The Beale Street Blues Boy."

Neil Young complements Joni's voice with mournful harmonica notes on "Furry," adding that much more depression to the loneliness created by Joni's vocals and nostalgic lyrics.

"A Strange Boy" is one of the best cuts on the disc. It's a Peter Pan story about a boy she once knew who refused to grow up. Joni's voice churns along with the rhythm set up by her guitar to bring forth a driving sound contradictory to the boy's age standstill.

Joni Mitchell has produced a smooth travelogue of emotions at stops along the way on this LP, one that seems to lure one into becoming a prisoner of the asphalt. It is fitting she should end the album "west-bound and rolling, taking refuge in the roads."

Clipped By:



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