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BEETHOVEN'S SYMPHONY 7
ON RECORD**

scoots things along nicely. His music for *Jeremy Fisher* is much more palatable, in the Bucolic English Film Music School; the scores of Geoffrey Burgon (*Brideshead Revisited* and others) come to mind, though here the warm woodwinds and strings are synthesized.

Art Lande, however, steals the show in *Two Bad Mice*, and with a simple acoustic piano. Lande always manages to uniquely combine wryness and poignancy; here, with admirable concision and elegance, he evokes in a few phrases of solo piano the spirits of Scott Joplin, Randy Newman, and the very young Beethoven. All "sound effects" are produced on the piano—scratching of wires, case thumps, etc.

But just when the Storybook series seems to have gotten a bit stuffy and anglophilically smug, along come Robin Williams and Ry Cooder to kick up some very American dust. Thirty seconds into *Pecos Bill* I was laughing out loud. Williams's only problem, as usual, is containing and channeling his own awesome creative energies—he seems to be exploding all over the mike. His characterizations of first Bill, then a John Wayne-esque cowboy, a cougar with an urban black accent, and various old duffers *a la* Walter Huston and Gabby Hayes, are sure and rock solid. Knowing Williams's improvisatory style, it's hard to say where Brian Gleeson's script leaves off and Williams's inventions begin, but who cares? *Pecos Bill* is hilarious, and *not* just for kids.

Ry Cooder plays piano, banjo, fiddle, tack piano, and, of course, bottleneck slide guitar. Cooder is probably the most dependably rich and inventive instrumentalist in pop music today, and his work on *Pecos Bill* proves it once again. The only problem is that there's not nearly enough of it here. *Pecos Bill* is right up there with the Jack Nicholson/Bobby McFerrin Rudyard Kipling tales as the best of this series.

At 30:52 and 33:07, however, the CDs and LPs are pretty skimpy. The music of the two last Potter tales, at least, is interesting enough to have been "suite-ed" after the tales, and should have been. Windham Hill has done an impressive job of mastering in both formats on both releases: I was hard put to find any difference at all between LPs and CDs, and the LPs sound quite good, with flawless surfaces and, for a change in this series, no master-tape print-through. The narration and music of *Pecos Bill* were engineered by different technicians, however, and do not mesh well; awk-

ward pauses abound. But the sound is appropriately clear and open, and quite warm and cozy on the Beatrix Potter tales, as befits the context of Once-upon-a-time. And, like the rest of the series, these are available as videos.

—Richard Lehnert

Popular

JONI MITCHELL: *Chalk Mark In A Rain Storm*
Geffen 24172-1 (LP), 24172-2 (CD). Dan Marnien, eng.;
Joni Mitchell, Larry Klein, prods. AAD. TT: 46:27

When I picked up this album, I reminded myself that, ever since *Blue*, I've liked none of Joni Mitchell's records on the first few listenings. It's always taken a while for them to establish their invariably new and challenging musical languages before I can actually hear what's being said musically. It's always been well worth the effort. But for the first time in almost 20 years, I like an album of hers *less* with each listening. There's a bittersweet tragedy here, that of a meticulous craftsman whose inspiration has flown; she offers us ornate presents, not simple gifts.

Mitchell's musical development has been inexorable, with nary a false step or digression. No album has been like any other. Many thought, particularly in the '70s, that she carried self-expression in the name of art to solipsistic, humorless extremes (she lost many listeners with *Hissing of Summer Lawns*, even more with *Mingus*), but those who stuck with her (yep truly) were seldom disappointed. Though no one has ever questioned her seriousness or commitment to her art, it's also true that few, if any, of the songs she's written in the last 15 years have been covered—as she's slowly edged into full-blown rockdom, she's also left standard meter and melody behind.

Pervasive in her work is a steadily encroaching impressionism. Over the last 20 years, her music, words, and painting have slowly left behind the rigors of established song structure, meter, and outline, resulting now in *Chalk Mark In A Rain Storm*; the very title speaks of blurred lines washing away, Monet-like. We are left with an intensely sensual aestheticism, the work of a dilettante of awesome sophistication.

The "songs" are painterly collages, space-music driftings: highly processed guitar and keyboard sounds waft in, one to five Jonis dance a *vocalise* in space, a word or phrase is

whispered, shouted, moaned, sometimes even sung, and then—as on her previous two albums—the metallic rhythm section kicks in. Even the impressive cameo appearances are sampled and keyed in, more borrowed colors from Mitchell's global Synclavier than actual duets.

That long list of guest singers—Willie Nelson, Peter Gabriel, Wendy and Lisa, Tom Petty, Billy Idol, Don Henley, Iron Eyes Cody (!), Benjamin Orr—seldom get even a whole line to sing; usually just a word or two at a time. Cody, like so many Native Americans before him, is reduced to local color—a little red thrown in to darken the relentless pastels. Regardless of her, I'm sure, good intentions, it's hard to hear rich, white, Southern Californian Mitchell sing "I am Lakota!" The hell she is. I'm well aware of the convention of the dramatic monologue, but in the context of the song's sumptuous sonics, and Mitchell's notoriously self-referential writing style, I just can't buy it. How easily could she have gotten away with singing, say, "I am black!"? She also presumes, in "The Beat of Black Wings," to tell the story of a Vietnam War vet: "This is his story; It's a tough one for me to sing," she sings. I submit that doing *anything* well is tough; that comes with the territory. For the first time, I find Mitchell's confessional tendencies offensive, intrusive, condescending, and unnecessary.

And what to do with such lines as "Stuck in the romantic tradition of acting rough and tough" (from "Dancin' Clown," describing *Rawhide's* Rowdy Yates)? It scans like oatmeal. Increasingly, Mitchell tells without showing, and her work is the weaker for it. True, most of the time she's a good enough singer to make these lines work, but her advances in vocal technique seem entirely at the cost of her songwriting skill. Other than that, though, "Dancin' Clown" is a lot of fun, with Petty and Idol tossing in their two cents' worth from time to time.

Mitchell takes on the media in "The Reoccurring Dream," the most deliberately collage-like assemblage here. Snippets of TV and radio ads are cut in to an equally fragmented pastiche of such lines as "If you use this shampoo, true love will come to you; If you had that house, car, bottle, jar, your lovers would look like movie stars." Joni Mitchell discovers corporate hypocrisy as she graces the cover of her album

looking like... a movie star, *tres Garboesque*. Mitchell, as much a media commodity herself as any food processor you could name, was a lot more honest when she sang, on the title song of 1972's *For the Roses*, "I guess I seem ungrateful, with my teeth sunk in the hand that brings me things I really can't give up just yet." Graceless, perhaps, but pretty self-challenging for a major music entity: at least it's social responsibility worked out in her own life, not a self-righteous attack on the easy targets of huge institutions everyone *knows* are beyond hope. As she questioned herself in the same song—"Now I sit up here, the critic!"—irresponsible criticism is the easiest thing in the world. (Don't I know it!) Having written and sung the intricate puzzlework of "Reoccurring Dream," the germane question is: Has Mitchell trashed her own TV? I have. Revolution begins at home.

Chalk Mark is, on the whole, entertaining and well-meaning enough, but "significance" and "relevance" are here just so many commodities. Without paying attention overmuch to "Black Wing"'s words, you might think her singing of nursing a Mai-Tai on some Hawaiian lagoon. Irony? I wonder. Iron Eyes Cody starts out "Lakota" with a few seconds of unaccompanied chant, but is then just another track sweetening the usual programmed-drum rhythm track. There is no silence or stillness left in Joni Mitchell's music. There used to be a lot. What's she afraid of? *Chalk Mark* adds up to quite a bit less than the sum of its many parts. (Check out Jane Siberry's recent *The Walking*, Reprise 25678, for some of the vulnerability I now miss in Mitchell's work.)

Don't get me wrong—texturally, the music is extremely fine, even rarefied—you'll hear tone colors and juxtapositions of voice and instrument that you'll hear nowhere else. Mitchell's formidable intelligence, here determinedly contemporary and relentlessly tasteful, is evident in each voicing of throat and string. Though Baroquely assembled, there is no fat on *Chalk Mark*; the uninteresting rhythm section excepted, you hear—and appreciate—what she's left out as much as what she's included. Mitchell's voice is loose and fluid throughout, many times improved over the pinched, nasal, breathless instrument it often was in the '60s, though here she uses it more dramatically than musically. Except for the fact that there are no original "songs," as such, the

music is stunningly played and arranged, worthy of Weather Report or Elvis Costello; the album is a sonic treat. Husband Larry Klein, late of Wayne Shorter's band, is a fluid if unremarkable bassist, and shares composition credits (to little effect one way or another, as far as I can tell) on three songs. The sound-stage, though of course entirely synthetic, is much more convincing on LP; the CD flattens it out considerably. The LP sounds more romantic, its slightly darker patina more fitting to the music.

Yes, a lot of hard work has gone into *Chalk Mark*. But you know you're in trouble when the two best songs on a Joni Mitchell album are covers, for crissakes; in this case, "Corrina Corrina" (called here "A Bird That Whistles") and Bob Nolan's old Sons of the Pioneers chestnut "Cool Water." "Water" opens seductively, in classic Mitchell/Metheny/Hejira style, but "Corrina," the final cut, is particularly welcome. Like Dylan's harmonica-and-guitar "Dark Eyes" coming at the end of *Empire Burlesque's* 45 minutes of big-beat synth-pop, "Corrina" 's trio of acoustic guitar, bass, and Wayne Shorter (god bless'im) on all manner of twittering, fluttering saxes is a breath of creek-cooled mountain air. I don't get it—can't these people bear how good something like this sounds? Why not a whole album's worth? So often, it's the seemingly breezy throwaways we toss off in unguarded moments, uncaring of the readers/listeners over our shoulders, that are real and true. "Corrina" works because it's vulnerable. And Joni can almost sing the blues now. Sort of.

It seems rank ingratitude to jump on Joni in a world of Madonnas, Tiffanys, and other bimbos. But we expect little from the latter, and they've never given us reason to expect more. Mitchell has given us a great deal in the past—perhaps too much of what Les Berkley calls her "almost frightening intimacy." Unfortunately, her favorite step is still the Boho Dance. It's all very post-modern (whatever that means) and ultimately trivial. Again, from "For the Roses": "Remember the days when you used to sit and make up your tunes for love, and pour your simple sorrow to the soundhole and your knee."

Yes, I remember. Mitchell apparently does not. The star-maker machinery behind the popular song has triumphed over the woman who gave it a name. —Richard Lehnert

SINEAD O'CONNOR: *The Lion and the Cobra*
Chrysalis BFV.41612 (LP), VK-41612 (CD). Kevin Maloney, eng.; Sinead O'Connor, prod. A-D. TT:42:21

The first thing you notice about Sinead O'Connor is her shaved head. The second thing you notice is that she's got a great voice.

Sinead (pronounced "shin-nayd") is a 21-year-old Irishwoman who writes and sings her own songs. After spending her early teenage years in and out of reform schools, she worked as a cleaning woman, waitress, and even a "Kiss-O-Gram" messenger dressed in a French maid's uniform before being discovered by a record executive and moving to London to record this album.

Some say she reminds them of a young Kate Bush (Sinead hates the comparison). Some think of her as a protege of the Irish rock band U-2 because of her work with them on the soundtrack of *The Captive* (she's not crazy about U-2 either). To me she sounds like a cross between Laura Nyro and a young, unrefined Sandy Denny (listen to "Never Get Old" or "Troy"). She's got a gutsy voice, with an incredible ability to raise and lower it an octave at a time in almost yodel-like fashion.

Sinead produces a young-girl vocal sound on "Just Call Me Joe," croons with a bite on the sobering "Drink Before The War," and rocks on the radio hit "Mandinka." There are times you can hear her Irish heritage, but "The Lion and the Cobra" defies classification.

Production quality is good (despite the overuse of strings on one or two cuts). No clues are given as to how the album was recorded, but there is a little background hiss evident; I figure it's analog all the way. As for LP or CD, it's up to you. I originally heard the LP and was annoyed by the one or two scratches/pops interfering with the music. No such problems of course, with the CD.

An auspicious debut album by a fabulous young talent. Recommended.

—Gary S. Krakow

THE POGUES: *If I Should Fall From Grace With God*
Island 7 90872-1 (LP). Chris Dickie, et al, eng.; Steve Lillywhite, prod. DDA? TT: 43:31

Some might be offended by the cover of this album, with its photo of James Joyce as centerpiece, and the band members' heads superimposed upon the great novelist in clones of that photo. This presumption, however, shows the