

Joni Mitchell's New Album Most Artful

By CARL ARRINGTON
Knight News Wire

It's always thrilling to listen to the work of an artist like Joni Mitchell, who is inspired by the whispers of her muse rather than the gusts of tradewinds.

Joni's latest collection of songs on Asylum Records is called "Hejira." It isn't likely to be the year's best-seller but it is easily the most artful.

This is her eighth studio album and Joni-philes will hear this as a progressive leap toward jazz that she touched on in the "Court and Spark" album and more fully explored in last year's haunting "Hissing of Summer Lawns." Those who are expecting to hear more of her simple, freewheeling folk style, however, will be surprised if not dismayed.

Joni has already shown herself to be head-and-vocal-cords above her rock peers in pioneering spirit. The music she provides in "Hejira" makes the songs of independent peers like Joan Baez and Carole King seem cold and stony.

What makes each of her albums so exciting is that she stubbornly refuses to stick with a single musical mode any longer than she holds on to lovers — and by her own admission that isn't very long. During a concert a few years ago, she answered a fan's request for an old tune by saying, "Would you ask Picasso to re-paint his Blue Period?"

Such independence is bound to be perplexing to a rock audience that is used to easy labels and prosaic consistency. Here is a gentle defiance of what she has called "the star-maker machinery." She bows not to current trends and "Hejira" is strong evidence that will not so much as give a curtsy to the Top 40.

Once again, on this album her voice and style defy duplication. Before, she settled for tuning her guitar different from everyone else in the world; this time her vocal stretches make imitation impossible.

Her voice is stronger than ever. It goes from her high-flying soprano to the more earthy lower register. Her pace makes the vocals seem like kites being tossed around in a fierce jazzy storm.

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