

NEW POP: Peter Carr

Nobody like Joni Mitchell

Girl singers can roughly be divided into three categories. There are the pop girls, who keep us finger snapping and smiling for undemanding three-minute stretches. There are the singer-writers of interest, from Joan Baez through quite a few honest performers to the self-indulgent semi-pop Melanie. And there is Joni Mitchell. Her work has an effortless beauty that makes it almost an

impertinence to review her new album *Blue* released this week by Kinney. Her songs have a universal power of communication. Everybody knows "Both Sides Now": it has been sung by countless singers, some in worthwhile tribute, others in tasteless but profitable pastiche.

If you trouble to listen, it is always her originals which stand supreme. There is an emotional complexity in her work which is

only fully realised by her own extraordinary voice. It is that voice, swooping from a high vibrato-laden falsetto to a deep masculine softness that is disliked by the few people I know who can't take Joni Mitchell. Even they don't dispute that it gives her work a dramatic force beyond the power of her imitators.

After half a dozen hearings, I can't yet say how I would place this album against the body of her work, but it does contain some splendid songs. "My Old Man," contains one repeated couplet, "We don't need no paper from the City Hall keeping us tied and true," as obsessively memorable as "Don't it always seem to go..." in "Big Yellow Taxi."

I can imagine hundreds of hopefuls sharpening to imitate the tiny swoops that carry her voice through these lines. The song is an illustration of the economy and precision of her writing. Her old man is out and she's down—"The bed's too big, the frying pan too wide." It is a perfect statement in nine words.

Although many of her supporters will disagree, I think, too, that the carefully chosen side-men enhance the songs. "Carey" is a song of a dream to be shattered, a night of Mediterranean warmth. Russ Kunkel on percussion and Stephen Stills on guitar drive along while Joni adds three separate voices. It is a strong performance and the starkness of "Blue" which follows, is made the more effective.

James Taylor also contributes tastefully on three tracks. On "California," which opens side two, his guitar is muted but muscular, and as the lyric moves into a homesick chorus, Sneaky Pete adds melancholy steel guitar.

Songs where simple self-accompaniment is effective are "River" and "This Flight Tonight." On the first Joni sings of Christmas—"I wish I had a river I could skate away on." Her piano counterpoints the melody with echoes of "Jingle Bells." In "This Flight Tonight," it is her more familiar guitar chording that supports the fragile vocal, her full open tuning intelligently double-tracked.

My favourite song, though, is "Little Green" addressed to a child, called Green so "the winters cannot fade her." It is a gentle treatment for voice and guitar, and is truly beautiful. This album can only assure Joni Mitchell of her supremacy in a category of one.



- F.C. & S.J.M
- ACROSS**
- 1 A friend went to the ancient place, but not in a professional capacity. (7)
 - 5 Our railways move at only an easy pace through thorny vegetation. (7)
 - 9 In the materialistic sense like a king of Lydia, 6th century B.C. (2, 4, 2, 7)
 - 10 Quite obviously what a good dribbler does. (6)
 - 12 Rubbish! This is a lottery. (6)
 - 13 An exclamation of surprise when we're left with just one "headlight" around fifty. (3)
 - 15 Untidy form of cult, yet barely visible if you see what I mean. (6)
 - 16 A commercial magnate who is not coy about his other title. (6)
 - 17 A first-class hair-piece staged a historic comeback south of Egypt. (5)
 - 18 When it is composed, wickedness and folly are held up to ridicule. (6)
 - 19 Just a small amount of a very light confection. (4)
 - 21 Vindicate one's honour with this healing balm. (5)
 - 22 A single fellow is the epitome of youthful beauty. (6)
 - 24 Refrains from using the tyres he has in reserve. (6)
 - 28 T i p p e r a rewards validation point! (8, 6)
 - 29 Moved like a finger which expressed reproof or derision. (7)
 - 30 Supplicated earnestly. (7)
- DOWN**
- 1 Yield without constraint in this form of "desert." (7)
 - 2 The atmosphere in the hotel has been much improved by it. (3-12)
 - 3 The part in which a Sussex cellist can appear to be superior. (5)
 - 4 Bay with spots of grey and white. (4)
 - 5 Brook gives us a sign with the finger. (4)
 - 6 A capital place to visit in Italy, with a spicy fragrance. (5)
 - 7 How Georgie makes his greatest effort just prior to scoring? (4, 4, 7)
 - 8 This is a case of the Orient being in earnest. (7)
 - 11 Having a sing by the headland, but shrinking from notice because of this. (7)
 - 12 A form of toaster which turns like a wheel. (7)
 - 14 Bella's peculiar tag. (5)
 - 18 Believe credulously in "getting the bird." (7)
 - 20 The 8 down part of our capital. (4-3).
 - 23 I join Wood in the best conceivable setting. (5)
 - 25 The scoring of 20 points in one card game means animosity. (3)
 - 26 Shake the dust from that large-headed nail. (4)
 - 27 With an East-ender this excursion would be put poor stuff. (4)

SOLUTION IN MONDAY'S POST

QUIZ ANSWERS

1. Swiss financiers controlling international monetary funds. 2. Jacobite rebellions in Scotland in 1715 and 1745. 3. Munich. 4. Galileo. 5. Thirteen. 6. No; they are tides that spring or rise higher than other tides.