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By JAMES RIORDAN  
"Hejira," Joni Mitchell (Asylum).

I like this album. Joni Mitchell has a knack for laying down these haunting melody lines that just fly me away. Listening to "Hejira" over and over will melt you out very nicely. It's one of those lay back and relax kind of albums that's really fine once in a while.

You probably won't fall all over this album the first time you hear it because it's got some strange melodies and equally weird arrangements. Around the third time you hear it, however, all this strangeness falls right into place and really sets a mood.

"Hejira" is similar to the direction Joni took in "Court and Spark," but it's less pop and more rambling like her last album, "The Hissing of Summer Lawns." If you were a Joni Mitchell fan in her folk days, don't buy "Hejira" expecting to hear songs like "Both Sides Now" because they aren't there. The influence of those days is still there, but you have to listen closely to hear it, and that's fine. If an artist, especially one who is a good songwriter, isn't allowed to progress in his style, quite often his talent dies of boredom. Joni keeps her music fresh both to herself and her public.

There are flaws in the album but they don't really detract from its overall success. Occasionally Joni stuffs in too many words, resulting in great lyrics but

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a choppy melody, but I'm sure she's aware of that. Another flaw is that some of the songs sound similar to one another — while that's not exactly kosher, it does enhance the album's whole mood better than a sudden change of pace.

The songs on the album are all good and some ("Coyote," "Song for Sharon," "Fury Sings the Blues," "Blue Motel Room") are excellent. Joni Mitchell is one of the best songwriters around, and there're few, if any, female writers who can approach her ability to deal with personal life in an objective way. In fact, what I like best about Joni's songs is that most of them seem to have really happened. Once most writers attain success and quench that initial thirst to communicate, they lose their ability to write the type of personal songs that propelled them to stardom in the first place.

Joni Mitchell has yet to lose her touch. Before attaining star status, she wrote about yearning for success, and now she writes about dealing with success; the romance is just as strong because the honesty is still there. She continually lays open her life for us to examine through her songs — this makes her one of

the most interesting artists in contemporary music.

"The Light of Smiles," Gary Wright (Warner Brothers).

Gary Wright has proven that "Dreamweaver" was no fluke. The "Dreamweaver" album was out for a long time before a few radio stations decided to play the title cut single. It sold like crazy, as did the second single off the album, "Love Is Alive."

Gary should have no problem getting airplay for "Light of Smiles," and there are some good single possibilities here also. "Watersign" starts the album on a very classy note. Although the lyrics aren't really great, the musical changes and the melodies are superb, especially on the chorus.

The entire album is a mixture of the "Dreamweaver" soft style and the harder rock style of "Love Is Alive." The songs are new though, and Wright has again managed to pull off both styles without either sounding forced or unnatural. This ability makes him a very commercial product. The serious album artist who also sells a lot of singles is a record company's dream. Heavy tracked multi-keyboard solos keep the albums selling, and the "Dreamweaver" sweetness cranks out the singles. That's good. I can stand a Gary Wright single because he does it tastefully, and that's all I can ask from an AM radio.

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