



John Laycock

Joni Mitchell puffs elegant smoke-rings

Joni Mitchell's a class act, we all know that. But just how much of an act is she?

Her new album, *Hejira*, on Asylum, leaves me more bewitched and bewildered than ever.

And let me warn you right now that this review is going to run heavily to "I" and "me". I have felt a personal entanglement with Joni that goes back to Mariposa folk festivals when she was still Joni Anderson, doe-eyed and a bit buck-toothed and loved by everybody.

No more reminiscing, now; I know her music, not her.

And yet her music has always spoken personally, whispering intimate news of her individual landscape. I never know whether to scoff or sigh. Maybe a bit of both.

Such ethereal trembling of the spirit! Such cloud-lined musings! Can she really flutter through your mind on the wings of angels?

Of course I'm suspicious. Purposeful mysterioso, obscuring life in poetic fog, strikes me as a cop-out.

And so the warning bells go off at such a title: *Hejira*, indeed. Why name an album for Mohammed's flight from Mecca? Has she lost the promised land? Is she promoting dictionary sales?

Yet Joni has a reporter's need for the specific, for accuracy. Her music glistens with the telling detail, the keen observation, the acute sensitivity to surroundings. So does the new album.

Maybe even more so, for at times the songs threaten to become paintings.

Prowling her part of the world, she records incident, story, in tones of diamond crystal. Amazing how such accuracy can become epigrammatic. The puzzles wind within puzzles.

But what, dammit, is she saying?

The trouble is, I can hear her talking to me — for a while. A couple of tunes, maybe, say, from *Coyote* to *Amelia* to *Furry Sings the Blues*. But gradually the signal fades. Those flared nostrils, those elegant phrases, those high cheekbones, those ever-so-attenuated blinks of light — they blend, weaken, cut out.

She's too classy, I guess, to pack a punch now.

Occasionally, she used her music to push the poetry into shape. Now the words just drift along on the tunes.



Joni Mitchell

They are graceful and lithe, just the thing to come from such a gorgeous creature. But a little, uh, pinched, you know? I understood her better when she'd drop *Big Yellow Taxi* or *Help Me, I Think I'm Falling*

into an album, encapsulating grins as well as smiles.

I leave it up to you. Either Joni Mitchell, understands secret spaces in your mind, or she spins gilt cobwebs. Me, I'm inclined to accept a bit of both.

Museum names curator

MONTREAL (CP) — The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts has announced the appointment of David Bellman as chief curator of the McCord Museum.

Renowned for its collection of Canadian historical artifacts and documents, the McCord Museum is administered by a joint management committee of McGill University and the Museum of Fine Arts.

Mr. Bellman, 27, was formerly education officer with the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria. Educated at the University of British Columbia and the Universite de Paris, he also worked as assistant curator of the University of Calgary Art Gallery and as a visiting lecturer in art history at the University of Saskatchewan.

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