



• JONI MITCHELL—perhaps the most talented writer in contemporary music.

Now Joni is down to earth

JONI MITCHELL: "Hejira" (Asylum). Another exquisite album from the lady who is arguably the most talented lyricist in contemporary music. It marks a return in her writing to the eternal problems of her relationships, which she abandoned temporarily for grander themes on her last album "Hissing of Summer Lawns."

This may not have that album's studied brilliance, but it is far more approachable and listenable.

The long "Song For Sharon," reflections on her younger days, her hometown and the marriage trap, typifies the album.

And "Blue Motel Room" is a straightforward, warm love song, with her growing ability as a jazz singer in evidence.

I find her one of the most reliable talents in music, as well as one of the most thoughtful writers. "Hejira" is an album that will not disappoint one of her followers.

THE EAGLES: "Hotel California" (Asylum). I had feared the Eagles were starting to lose their bite.

Their pleasant harmonies, and their cheerfully mellow music, were starting to get a little sugary-sweet, a trifle soft-centred.

"Hotel California" changes all that — and Joe Walsh, their new addition on guitar, is the man responsible.

The album has punch. It is dynamic and forceful, and it restores the Eagles to the peak they reached with "Desperado."

Even the slower, gentler songs seem better constructed and more businesslike.

And faster tracks, like the excellent "Living In The Fast Lane" prove the Eagles are back. Country rock at its best, and highly recommended.

FRANK ZAPPA: "Zoot Allures" (Warner Brothers). Uncle Frank back again with another bag of musical tricks — and the most conventional

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album he has done in years.

Most of the album is built around ordinary rock numbers — and his prowess as a guitarist, always criminally underrated, shines forth.

His wicked, leering sense of humour runs riot on two tracks, one of which, the marathon "The Torture Never Stops" is very funny in a deranged kind of way.

As a Zappa fan, I confess to being a little disappointed. I'm used to brilliance and nothing less from



• FRANK ZAPPA — has he lost his ability to outrage?

Frank, who to me is one of the most original and inventive figures in rock.

All we have here is a competent collection, which really fails to compare with his earlier, classic work.

He also appears to have lost his ability to outrage and shock. I await his next album hopefully.

QUEEN: "A Day At The Races" (EMI). Doubtless this will be a huge seller, and you can understand why.

Of all today's groups,

Queen pay more attention than any to recorded detail. Their productions are immaculate, the songs imaginative and commercial.

In Freddy Mercury they have perhaps the most potent rock figure since Mick Jagger, and the group have a fine understanding with each other.

"Day At The Races" is a marvellous technical achievement, no doubt of that.

It's just that I can't bring myself to like it. I admire it, but I have no warm or fond feelings towards it.

Trouble is, you see, it all sounds a bit clinical, a bit too perfect, and it couldn't possibly be reproduced away from the technological aids of a studio.

Having said that, I like "Somebody To Love" as much as I liked "Bohemian Rhapsody," a beautifully crafted, polished piece of work.

"Tie Your Mother Down" has them sounding like a rather polished version of Status Quo, while "Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy" is jaunty and good fun.

I just long for a bit of spontaneity, a little more relaxation, a feeling that everything wasn't quite so calculated.

Queen fans will, of course, rush out in their millions to buy it. And the obvious amount of hard work behind it deserves success, I am bound to admit.

But it isn't an album I'll be playing in six months' time.