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**A NEW LOOK FOR SINGER JONI MITCHELL**  
And a New Sound of Melancholy Aloneness

## Joni Mitchell's Latest Album 'Not Best, But Her Bravest'

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**HEJIRA: Joni Mitchell**  
Elektra-Asylum-Nonesuch Records

Here is a brief prescription for understanding Joni Mitchell's new album: Lose everything that you think really matters and go stand out on the highway. Feel no regrets.

Take this stance daily for as long as it takes to realize that this is the way you've really felt all your life, and wonder about the spaces between things this feeling suggests.

Hum softly to yourself.  
Now you have it.

**THIS IS NOT MITCHELL'S** best album, but it is her bravest. "Hejira" refers to the flight of Mohammed across the desert to avoid persecution and, as the title suggests, the songs are about traveling as running away.

The songs are long. The shortest, "A Strange Boy," runs four minutes and 15 seconds, and the longest, "Refugee of the Roads," lasts six minutes and 37 seconds. The length means you won't be hearing

these tunes on AM radio unless you have insomnia; they are simply too long to fill in space between commercials.

**THIS ALONE WOULD MAKE** the album a work of bravery, but it is the confrontation of the subject of flight as refuge in itself that makes the disc a testimony to Mitchell's courage.

Each song is a confrontation between Mitchell and her truest inner feelings, and each is in some way about the loves she claims to have never really felt.

While in earlier songs like "Free Man in Paris," Mitchell had an "unlettered and alive" life-style to remember wistfully while fighting the musical wars, the new mood is a melancholy aloneness not always pleasant to hear.

"We all come and go unknown," she writes in the title song. "Each so deep and superficial, Between the forceps and the stone."

**THERE IS LITTLE CONSOLATION** given and at this point in her life, Mitchell seems to be saying the best we can hope for is the cleansing of movement itself when love finally dies.

Musically, the album is a falling off from earlier outings, although some critics are

praising the new, simple style as blessed relief from backup and orchestration.

For my money, however, everything sounds the same, and the only saving grace is that at least the one sound fits the mood and lyrics of the album.

One song in particular has musical credentials worth mentioning: "Furry Sings the Blues."

Neil Young plays a haunting harmonica in this tune that weaves through the lyrics in a most pleasing, if somewhat brooding, fashion.

**MITCHELL'S LYRICS THEMSELVES** are much easier to understand in the simple setting of two guitars, drums and occasional vibes. This is nice, because her jazzy, innovative phrasing is probably Mitchell's best feature as a performer.

So there you have it, an album that is nothing to write home about and nothing to rush out and purchase. It is worth the price, however, if you are a true fan and wish to add another disc to the Mitchell collection which, for all its flaws and sadness, is the best body of work done by a female musical artist today.