

Record Review: The Hissing of Summer Lawns

Mitchell experiments with a different drumbeat

By BILL GLADSTONE

Many of the cuts from Joni Mitchell's new album, *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*, sound upon first listening, totally unlike anything she has done before. It is only after repeated listening, as

familiarity emerges, that one is able to recognize that much of this new album fits within the context of her previous works, both musically and thematically.

Back when Mitchell was singing songs for seagulls, no one could have ever suspected that her

music would ever have evolved into the beautiful jazz formations that are present on this album.

The departure into jazz that was signaled in *For The Roses*, and extended in *Court and Spark*, is even more evident in *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*. Musically

speaking, this album is the most sophisticated she has ever done.

She proves once again, by her astoundingly intricate and beautiful harmonies, that the human voice is still the best musical instrument. It's just too bad that there aren't any more of those beautiful vocal bridges, such as the one in *Harry's House-Centerpiece*.

Thematically, Mitchell has always relied primarily on a handful of themes, and those themes are well represented in *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*.

She is still searching for perfection, and still trying to erase the guilt of *Original Sin*. And L.A., being "the city of fallen angels," is still the scene of her primal vision. The title song, *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* (yes, that's a serpent allusion), says nothing that she has not said earlier, but it's her stunning insights and poetic abilities that make it sound as if it's all for the first time.

A helicopter lands on the Pan Am roof
Like a dragonfly on a tomb
And business men in button-downs
Press into conference rooms
Battalions of paper-minded males
Taling commodities and sales
While at home their paper wives
And their paper kids

Paper the walls to keep their gut reactions hid.

Lyrics like these (in *Harry's House Centerpiece*) prove that she has lost none of her poetic sensitivity. Her lines do not show her to be as fragile and vulnerable on this album as she has been previously, however, and one suspects that she has surrendered some of her more acute sensibilities to the cool perfection of jazz.

The *Jungle Line* explores the primitive world of jazz through both the lyrics and the music. The "warrior drums of Burundi" provide strong African rhythm to this piece, and on it, Joni Mitchell plays a Moog synthesizer. Musically, I find it the most disappointing cut on the album, followed by *Shadows and Light*, a self-indulgent piece with interesting harmonies but a poor melody, and only minor instrumental accompaniment.

The other pieces, however, are Joni Mitchell at her best. There are a few cuts, as always, ready to be packaged for the AM market, but even these display the keen rhythms, superb lyrics, outstanding vocals, and, despite Tom Scott's absence, impressive musicianship, that have become her trademark.

MORE RECORDS

By EVAN LEIBOVITCH

10cc/100 cc (London)

100cc is a collection of the group's greatest hits, many of which were pretty big in Britain, but didn't get any exposure here. Put together in this way, the album is an excellent exhibition of the versatility of the group musically. The vocals are also exceptional, and on a cut called *Rubber Bullets*, the harmonies at times are like the *Beach Boys*, only better. The highlight of the album is the general lightheartedness of the lyrics, about subjects ranging from *Lassie* to prison guards (having a tear gas of a time). The individual albums were above average to start with, and this collection of their best is a fine

introduction to this highly underrated group.

Commodores/*Movin' On* (Motown)

It's hard to make a comeback from an album such as the Commodores' *"Machine Gun"*, probably the classic R&B collection. Having kept the style that made their name, is the biggest asset in this second follow up. In the last one, *Caught In The Act*, they let their guard down and became downright boring. With this album, however, they regain their poise. It's not as original as *Machine Gun*, but the horn arrangements are funkier, and the vocals smoother. Each of the Commodores, has a crack at writing music for this more relaxed and loose album one of the better R&B picks this

year.

Station to Station/David Bowie (RCA)

Now the glamour guys of *Yonge Street* can rejoice. (You know, the cool folk who spend their spare time hanging around discos with shag haircuts, or jamming a V-8 into the front of a Honda Civic). Anyhow, their hero, David Bowie, has finally rid himself of that disease called *Main-Man*, and assembled a musically competent album at last. It's a good soft rock assembly, containing unusual sound effects, strange lyrics, and a bit too much synthesizer. However, the vocals are above average, showing that the guy had some talent underneath the gimmicks. Mind you, I still wonder if he shaves his eyebrows.

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