

RECORDS

Album is all **Joni**, despite heavyweight sidemen

□ Chalk Mark In A Rain Storm Joni Mitchell (Geffen/WEA): Not as heady nor as musically challenging as her best work, Mitchell's new album is built largely on primitive percussive feels (African and American Indian) and is overlaid with great slabs of meandering synthesizer chords that only occasionally suggest melody or conventional song structure.

For all that, this is extremely unaggressive music, at times downright lugubrious; no single player — not even Billy Idol's usually abrasive guitarist, Steve Stevens — intrudes or wobbles the brittle fabric of these delicate, dreamlike songs.

What holds them together is Mitchell's wispy voice and the intensity of the little dramas the



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songs contain. Insulated now from the gritty real-life scenes that made her earlier work so unusual, the Canadian-born songwriter is still able to startle with the vividness of her images and the depth of her passion.

Co-produced with her husband, bassist Larry Klein, *Chalk Mark In A Rain Storm* features a crew of powerful sidemen and guests, including Willie Nelson, Idol and Stevens, Tom Petty, Peter Gabriel, British synth-whiz Thomas Dolby,

jazz saxophonist Wayne Shorter, Don Henley, Prince's former band members Wendy Melvoin and Lisa Coleman and The Cars' Ben Orr.

Few of these extras make outstanding contributions to the music; most are buried deep in the mix. Nelson, Idol and Petty make cameo appearances as characters in a couple of Mitchell's typically well-populated songs (Nelson in a sinister remake of the classic 1936 country fantasy, "Cool Water," now an anti-pollution anthem, Petty and Idol as a pair of strutting studs in "Dancin' Fool"), but to less than stunning effect.

Shorter's wail in Mitchell's new version of the ancient country blues piece, "Corinna, Corinna" is far more effective, as is Gabriel's strong counterpoint in "My Secret Place," arguably the least

appealing song on the album.

Ironically, Mitchell didn't need these heavyweights on this album. It remains very much her own work, obsessive, deeply introspective. That's not to say *Chalk Mark In A Rain Storm* isn't quite accessible; it may be too transparent, in fact, for its own good.

In "The Beat Of Black Wings," for example, Mitchell needlessly complicates the compelling confessions of a murderous young British soldier with an abortion story, introducing a psychological non sequitur. "Tea Leaf Prophecy," a telescoped soap opera scanning the lives of a young couple during the Second World War, seems unable to resolve its central query: does love liberate or enslave?

Still, there's enough clever work here to keep both Mitchell's fans and newcomers to her music fascinated. This is quirky, unusually bright stuff; far from her best, but better than most of what passes for intelligent pop.

□ *Walking A Changing Line* Ian Matthews (Windham Hill/A&M): Matthews, a founding member of the 1970s British folk-rock band Fairport Convention, failed in a couple of worthy attempts to launch a solo career during the dying days of the singer-songwriter movement and has spent much of the past decade working as an artist and repertoire director for the West Coast division of a major record label. During Fairport's annual reunion weekend at Cropredy outside London last year, Matthews was suddenly seized again with the passion to perform, and to record music of substance; the world, he was convinced, was ready again.

Abandoning his well-feathered Los Angeles nest, he sought out long neglected American poet-songwriter Jules Shear, and

secured 10 songs for a unique experiment that has ended up — rightly or wrongly, on the Windham Hill label, generator of much unimportant soporific new-age music.

Walking A Changing Line is neither soporific nor unimportant. In fact, it's likely one of the most compelling records of the past 10 years. Shear's aching, difficult songs, which bear all the earmarks of true genius, are perfectly suited to Matthews' pure, steady tenor. He anchors them in a way no other artist — not even Shear himself — has been able to. And he gently, deliberately opens them like a skilled surgeon opens flesh, revealing myriad organic miracles.

Few great songwriters have been rendered as well by impassioned interpreters; Randy Newman was by Harry Nilsson, Leonard Cohen was by Jennifer Warnes. This is Shear's time. *Walking A Changing Line* is a dazzling fusion of the poet's vision and the singer's craft, a profound, moving, illuminating work and an instant classic.

Brash Brass softens the blow

□ Bach: Art of the Fugue *The Canadian Brass* (CBS Digital CD LP): The clown hats are off and the jokes have been retired; this is the Canadian Brass on its best behavior, presenting a strictly serious, white-tied, crisply articulated performance of Bach's final masterpiece.

Johann Sebastian did not actually live to complete his *Kunst der Fuge*. The last of the 14 fugues in his comprehensive survey of the techniques of fugal counterpoint was left incomplete on his deathbed, so that he could dictate his final work, the chorale prelude *Vor deinen Thron tret ich hiermit*.

That final chorale prelude forms the conclusion of this album, but preceding it comes the meat of the meal and the Canadian Brass have seldom sounded so scrupulous in preparing it.

Since Bach wrote most of the *Art Of The Fugue* on four staves, without indicating any specific instrumentation, musicians through the centuries have felt free to play it in a variety of versions, whether for full orchestra, solo harpsichord, or even, as the Julliard String Quartet demonstrated in New York a couple of years ago, for four strings.

The Canadian Brass developed



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its association with the music in the 1970s, working with the late Toronto pianists Reginald Godden and Glenn Gould, the latter of whom urged a recording.

It's a pity Gould did not live to hear the recording, taped at the Church of St. Mary Magdalene, using Arthur Frackenpohl's transcription, but given his open-mindedness regarding Bach interpretation, it seems entirely appropriate that the album has been dedicated to his memory.

□ Saint-Saens: Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso; Havanaise. Sarasate: Carmen-Fantasy. Chausson: Poeme. Ravel: Tzigane. Itzhak Perlman, violin, with the New York Philharmonic, conducted by Zubin Mehta (Deutsche Grammophon Digital LP): Not much is missing here. Together with a few pages of Wieniawski and Paganini, these are the standard showpieces with which violinists traditionally wow the peanut galleries in con-

cert halls around the world. And as today's foremost wower of peanut galleries, in the violin fraternity, Itzhak Perlman was bound to record them all sooner or later.

He has, in fact, recorded some of this music before, but the combination of up-to-date Deutsche Grammophon engineering and the high-powered accompaniment of the New York Philharmonic make this album a hard one to resist for connoisseurs of fancy fiddling.

□ Beethoven: Violin Sonatas Nos. 4 and 5. Gidon Kremer, violin, with Martha Argerich, piano (Deutsche Grammophon Digital LP): Together with Itzhak Perlman and Anne-Sophie Mutter, Gidon Kremer apparently sits on Herbert von Karajan's list of the top three violinists currently before the public. Of all of them, Kremer is the most individual in his choice of repertoire and manner of playing. Even to find him recording two standard Beethoven sonatas is a little unusual.

But then, the opportunity to work with Martha Argerich, who probably belongs on a list of the leading pianists of her generation, was hardly one to be missed. The two musicians set sparks off

against each other. This is no solo plus accompaniment performance but rather a collaboration of peers.

□ Beethoven: Symphony No. 6; Choral Fantasy; Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage. Maurizio Pollini, pianist, with the Vienna State Opera Chorus and Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Claudio Abbado (Deutsche Grammophon Digital LP): Yet another Beethoven symphony cycle is in progress, this time teaming up the Vienna Philharmonic, which played so well for Leonard Bernstein's cycle, with Claudio Abbado. The Italian maestro secures similarly impressive playing and offers an equally stimulating approach to the music, but what makes this particular disc from the cycle so welcome is the inclusion of two complementary scores.

Beethoven's setting of Goethe's poems, *Meeres Stille und Gluckliche Fahrt*, scarcely finds him at his best, but the music certainly does not deserve the neglect into which it has fallen. And with a pianist of the calibre of Maurizio Pollini at the keyboard, even the widely criticized *Choral Fantasy* sounds less pompously rhetorical than usual. They know their Beethoven in Vienna.

THE RECORD

TOP SINGLES

WEEKS ON	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Charts for the week of Mar. 28 are based on rack and retail accounts compiled by the weekly trade newsletter, <i>The Record</i> .
8	1	1	Never Gonna Give You Up Rick Astley (BMG)
12	2	2	Pump Up The Volume M.A.R.R.S. (PolyGram)
9	3	3	Father Figure George Michael (CBS)
6	8	4	Got Outta My Dreams Billy Ocean (BMG)
8	5	5	She's Like The Wind Patrick Swayze (BMG)
8	6	6	I Got Weak Belinda Carlisle (MCA)
10	9	7	Just Like Paradise David Lee Roth (WEA)
12	4	8	What Have I Done... Pet Shop Boys/D. Springfield (Capitol)
10	7	9	Hands Up Sway (A & M)
12	11	10	Hungry Eyes Eric Carmen (BMG)

TOP ALBUMS

WEEKS ON	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Album
27	1	1	Dirty Dancing Soundtrack (BMG)
28	2	2	Lonesome Jubilee John Cougar Mellencamp (PolyGram)
17	5	3	Faith George Michael (CBS)
19	3	4	Kick INXS (WEA)
28	7	5	Bad Michael Jackson (CBS)
9	8	6	Whenever You Need Somebody Rick Astley (BMG)
19	4	7	Tiffany Tiffany (MCA)
6	6	8	Blow Up Your Video AC/DC (WEA)
8	10	9	Good Morning America Soundtrack (A & M)
4	9	10	Now And Zen Robert Plant (WEA)

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