

Joni Mitchell – Song To a Seagull (1968)

Written by bluelover

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Side 1: "I Came to the City"

1. *"I Had a King"* – 3:37
2. *"Michael from Mountains"* – 3:41
3. *"Night in the City"* – 2:30
4. *"Marcie"* – 4:35
5. *"Nathan La Franer"* – 3:18

Side 2: "Out of the City and Down to the Seaside"

1. *"Sisotowbell Lane"* – 4:05
2. *"The Dawntreader"* – 5:04
3. *"The Pirate Of Penance"* – 2:44 [play](#)
4. *"Song to a Seagull"* – 3:51 [play](#)
5. *"Cactus Tree"* – 4:35

Personnel

- * Joni Mitchell - guitar, piano, vocals
- * Stephen Stills - bass on "Night in the City"
- * Lee Keefer - banshee
- * Produced by David Crosby

Joni Mitchell's debut release is a concept album. Side one, subtitled "I Came to the City," generally exhibits songs about urban subjects that are often dour or repressed in some way. "Out of the City and Down to the Seaside," by contrast, is a celebration of nature and countryside, mostly containing selections of a charming, positive, or more outgoing nature. What sets this release apart from those of other confession-style singer/songwriters of the time is the craft, subtlety, and evocative power of Mitchell's lyrics and harmonic style. Numbers such as "Marcie," "Michael From Mountains," "The Dawntreader," and "The Pirate of Penance"

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effectively utilize sophisticated chord progressions rarely found in this genre. Verses are substantive and highly charged, exhibiting careful workmanship. "Song to a Seagull" has graceful and vivid lyrics about the joys of freedom set to a haunting, wide-ranging vocal line. Conversely, "Cactus Tree" explores the downside of a no-strings-attached approach to life, the fear of committing to a relationship (ironically wedding these words to a hopeful melody and pulsating guitar texture). "Marcie" utilizes poignant, twisting music set to desolately lonely lyrics about a jilted woman; the recurrent use of red and green imagery in the verses is especially clever. Character studies such as "I Had a King" and "Nathan la Franeer" are painfully bleak in contrast to the lithe domestic scene of "Sisotowbell Lane" and the winsomely reserved love song "Michael From Mountains." Unusual in her oeuvre are the overlapping dialogue prose manner of "The Pirate of Penance" and the jaunty honky tonk stylings of "Night in the City." Mitchell sings in a light, gossamer, at times diffident manner; vocal harmony is sparingly employed here. David Crosby's production is simple and effective. This excellent debut is well worth hearing. --- David Cleary, AllMusic Review

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