

ART «» ENTERTAINMENT

RECORDS

Joan is alive
and well, but
record's a dud

MIDWINTER AWAY
By Joan Baez
Portrait Records, CBS

Joan Baez has a new album out, the first of a new label distributed by CBS Records, and she has just done a national tour to promote it.

It would be easier to review the concert and the album separately—to praise one and pan the other. But it would also be to miss the point of the whole venture.

Publicity that obviously bears Baez's blessing announces that she has changed in the last few years, both as a person and as a musician, and that she does not want to be locked into the mold of her "image" of the '50s or even the '60s. The new Joan is not "involved" in politics, not traditional in her repertoire, not acoustical in her arrangements. So all right, she's got a right.

The concert format (in Chicago, and by reports in other cities as well) was designed to project the new cool, hip, hard-edged Joan without losing her

hold on the audience that loved her the way she used to be. The first half of the program was Joan alone on stage, barefoot and casually beautiful, singing a melange of her old favorites, accompanied only by her guitar. The only thing "new" was the patter that went on between songs: a few mildly shocking jokes ascribed to her seven-year-old son, and a lot of not absolutely absorbing autobiography.

The singing was great. The audience—a full house with all ages and conditions represented—loved what she gave them and shouted for more. And as she began to respond to the response, the hard edges began to blur and the old almost magical empathy was there.

The second half of the concert was backed by a rock group that was acceptable in its own terms, but terrible as an accompaniment to Baez. When they got time off for good behavior and did a few uninhibited numbers of their own, Joan did a little disco dancing. Some of her devotees felt it was "marvelous" that she could



Left: the old acoustical Joan; Right: the new, amplified and accompanied.



Photos by Tania Osborn

move her feet. Others, among whom were most Chicago critics, thought it embarrassing.

The songs were all but submerged in this treatment. But toward the end, as a favor to the balcony (which seemed to be political territory and had been begging audibly for "We Shall Overcome" and "Joe Hill") Joan gave them a new version of the latter. She belted it out like Ethel Merman, and the band ran over what was left of the melody. It was not for the nostalgic.

Then, as a final encore, Joan came out on the apron and asked the audience to join her a *capella* in "Amazing Grace." That did it. The house sang and swayed, and some of the older people wept.

If she learned anything from the concert experience, it was too late to influence the album, which

is called *Blowin' Away* and might as well.

Everything about it is irritating, beginning with the cover, which bears a brassy portrait of what could be the leader of the Girl Space Scouts of America. All the songs are backed by an anonymous band. Nothing is added by their contribution, but it does seem harsh to ignore their existence in the credits.

Most of the songs are by Baez herself and are not very good. She is not a bad lyricist, but she apparently has no critical faculty and doesn't know when she's off the track. Also there is entirely too much autobiography, some of which is in bad taste and some of which is dull. One such number, "Time Mag Rag," makes it because it's good for a laugh, partly at her own expense and

partly at the easy target of a *Time* magazine interviewer.

The best Baez song is "Miracles." The most moving is a plea for gay rights called "The Altar Boy and the Thief"—the one number, incidentally, in which the old champion of beleaguered causes takes a position on anything remotely controversial.

The last song of all, "Cry Me a River," comes closest to the quality that made Joan Baez a great popular singer. It fits her voice and proves that the voice and the warmth that infused it is still there. *Blowin' away* is not going to attract a following for the new Baez, but it ends with a signpost toward the direction in which the lady should look for her friends.

—Janet Stevenson

Exodus disappointing
but not a disaster

EXODUS
Bob Marley and the Wailers
Island Records

This is the group's first release since the attempted assassination of Bob Marley during the Jamaican national elections last year. Although it features a few excellent songs, *Exodus* doesn't compare to the brilliant *Natty Dread* or *Rastaman Vibration*.

What's missing is the intensity and passion that have characterized all of the records that Bob Marley and the Wailers have released in this country. Most of the cuts on the first side of this album have catchy melodies and feature the always excellent Wailers rhythm section, but Marley's vocals and lyrics lack the tension and bite we have come to expect from him.

Exodus is not without redeeming features, however. The title cut and "Guiltiness" are vintage Marley and make fine additions to the group's repertoire. "Exodus" reflects the promise of African Redemption, a main tenet of the Rastafarian movement of which the Wailers are members. The lyrics call for oppressed blacks to leave Babylon and return to the land of their ancestors—Ethiopia—for some Rastafari, Africa in general for others. The blend of these words with a powerful driving beat leaves quite an impact. "Guilt-

ness" is a promise of retribution for the rich and the powerful. It mixes a marvelous melody line with lyrics of considerable force. The chorus goes

Woe to the downpressors,
They'll eat the bread of sorrow.
Woe to the downpressors,
They'll eat the bread of sad to-morrow.

It's possible that the problems with *Exodus* are the result of its being made too hastily, before adequate material was available. Circumstantial evidence for this comes from the fact that the usual care this group takes with its album covers and liner notes is noticeably missing from *Exodus*. There are no lyrics provided with the album except for the title song, a break from recent practice. Rumor has it that Marley and the Wailers will be coming to the U.S. sometime this summer; if this is so, they (or Island Records) may have wanted a new album out to accompany a tour.

Whatever the reasons for it, *Exodus*, though not a disaster, is a disappointment. Let us hope that this is only a temporary aberration and that the next album by Bob Marley and the Wailers will completely reaffirm their talent and commitment.

—Bruce Dancis

Bruce Dancis is an editor of *Socialist Revolution*.

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FILM

A challenge to Haley's Roots?

THE OTHER FRANCISCO
Directed by Sergio Giral
Produced by the Cuban Institute
of Cinematographic Art

At about the time Alex Haley signed his multi-million dollar contract to turn *Roots* into a TV series, *The Other Francisco*—a Cuban feature film—entered the U.S. These two works offer radically different views of slavery in the New World.

One of the most potent myths in the literature of colonialism is the "benign" impact of slavery in the Spanish territories of the New World. *The Other Francisco* documents the cruelty of the institution, stripping away the embroidery that adorns the master/slave relationship in conventional writing on the subject.

The film opens with the dramatization of a novel, written by a philanthropic slave-owner—the clear that the lot of the slaves was determined not by personal passion, but by economic forces. *The Other Francisco* illuminates the pressures of the industrial revolution in other parts of the

**Cuban film views
slavery in the
Americas in
more realistic
terms.**

story of a love affair between two slaves, Dorotea and Francisco, who are separated by a lecherous white overseer, culminating in the rape of Dorotea by her master and the anguished suicide of her lover.

Having been seduced into this 19th century sentimental romance we are unprepared for the sudden transition to "objectivity." The camera zooms out; the narrator's voice becomes hard and flat; the mood is abruptly changed; the story is retold with graphic brutality.

This time through it becomes world on the society of the Caribbean islands: only the wealthy growers could afford the new labor-saving machinery; the high price of slaves bankrupted the smaller planters; the transition to

modern production—the flowering of the sugar empire—was achieved by the destruction of traditional society.

And from the moment Africans set foot on the shores of the Americas they resisted their masters through flight, sabotage and—as the last frames of the film suggest—violent uprisings. This resistance was crushed by the white overseer—the *mayoral*—employing not the gentle admonitions of Scripture (although the Catholic church owned numerous slaves and mills in Cuba), but the sword and the lash.

There are lingering questions that neither Haley nor director Giral have adequately posed. If Haley has over-romanticized the lives of Afro-American slaves, Giral errs on the side of economism, reducing the slaves to the status of "products" of colonialism. In *The Other Francisco* we get little more than a glimpse of the lives of Cuban slaves. We cannot be satisfied to view Africans in



Above: Alina Sanchez as Dorotea, abused by her master.
Below: the foundation of the sugar empire.

the Americas as their masters did—as commodities whose lives were defined in terms of their relation to the sugar economy.

Despite these shortcomings, however, *The Other Francisco* is an important work. It is available to interested groups through Tricontinental Film Center (333 Sixth Ave., New York, NY,

10014). As the debate over the nature of slavery in the Americas develops, this film from Cuba will offer a significant challenge to Haley's views.

—Mac Margolis

Mac Margolis is a student in the Intercultural Studies program at Trinity College, Hartford, Conn.



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