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Joni Mitchell awarded honorary doctorate

McGill Music Faculty's lavish praise second only to essentially everyone else's, even foreign monarch's



Kat Neville and Kieran Fox

Joni Mitchell through the ages -- and presented artistically.

SHAWN POST
CULTURE WRITER

After receiving her Doctorate of Music degree at the Faculty of Music's 100th convocation ceremony on Wednesday, Dr. Joni Mitchell will be able to return home to California and add some more clutter to her award shelf. The 60-year-old Grammy-winner has already been appointed to the Order of Canada, been inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, won Billboard's Century Award, and among many other accolades, received the Polar Music Prize from Swedish King Carl Gustav XVI. It seems as if everyone else, including the Baltic nobility, has given recognition to Joni's immense talent and cultural impact before McGill University finally got around to doing so.

Dean of Music Don McLean was visibly proud while discussing the reasons for awarding Joni Mitchell her doctorate, speaking with the highest adulation of her "major creative talent" and "complexity of harmony." When he first heard her music as a youth, he says he was struck by the genuine and sophisticated nature of her material. As the opening speaker of the Joni Mitchell Symposium McGill hosted before the convocation, he was able to share his respect and admiration with others similarly struck by Joni's music. The Symposium attracted varied speakers from all over Canada and the United States, and stood as a testament to the universal appeal that Joni Mitchell has always had.

For those of you who've never heard of Joni Mitchell,

take *Nellyville* out of your Discman and hit yourself in the face with it. For those of you who have, your knowledge is most likely limited to her earlier work as a folk singer in the late sixties and early seventies. Her jazz, classical and world music influences are often overlooked, as they were released alongside music from Huey Luis and The News, typical sol-diers of the zeitgeist in the dark ages of the 1980s. It's truly a shame that the outlets of popular media largely ignored her personal growth and development as an artist.

Not just the idealistic flower-child hippie with an acoustic guitar she's often portrayed as, Joni Mitchell is a true musician. She's held her own in collaborations with such monumental musical figures as Bob Dylan, Herbie Hancock, and Stevie Wonder. The Who's Pete Townshend said that Mitchell's *Travelogue*, orchestral versions of her old songs released in 2002, is not just a testament to the greatness of her own work, but to the greatness of modern American orchestral music itself.

Beret-adorned and looking rather similar to the album cover of *Hejira*, Joni Mitchell emitted an unquestionable presence as she listened to the McGill Jazz Ensemble play arrangements of her songs. When she was finally awarded her degree to a riotous standing ovation, she approached the podium and said in perhaps one of the worst Bugs Bunny impersonations ever: "Now, when people refer to me, they'll have to say....ahhh, what's up doc?" She couldn't have said anything more becoming. Maybe it was a bit corny, but amid all the pomp and circumstance of the ceremony, Joni Mitchell was as much herself as on any other day.