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All That Money Troubles Joni Mitchell

By RAY CONNOLLY



JONI MITCHELL feels her newly-found success as a performer is "ridiculous. They don't pay the birds to sing in the trees."

"The money you get paid as a singer is all out of proportion. In America they pay you to sing — but they don't pay the birds to sing in the trees. So it really is ridiculous. But I don't want to give to charity just to appease my conscience. I really want to be sure to do some good with my money — although I do get pangs of conscience when I'm buying jewels and there are children starving in Biafra. Really I'd like to help with the balance of nature. It would be good to help clean up some river or something so the fish could live in it again. I really want to do my part to make the world get better. My music is how I like to help people; with my money I'd like to help the land."

This is Joni Mitchell talking: she's Canadian, and a poet, a singer and a fervent anti-pollutionist.

I met her this week and, when there was a lull in the conversation, she played me what she called a little bit of her Ecology Rock and Roll — a track from her new album where she sings a biting refrain that goes "We paved Paradise and put up a parking lot."

"That really happened," she says. "When I was in Hawaii, I arrived at the

hotel at night and went straight to bed. When I woke up the next day, I looked out of the window and it was so beautiful, everything was so green and there were white birds flying around, and then I looked down and there was a great big parking lot. That's what Americans do. They take the most beautiful parts of the continent and build hotels and put up posters and all of that and ruin it completely."

Joni is 26 and responsible for writing one of the most sensitive songs of the sixties, "Both Sides Now." She wrote it during the period of her marriage break-up three or four years ago, but it didn't become generally well known until the Judy Collins recording was issued about a year ago.

"I was brought up in Alberta and while I was at college began singing at small night clubs. When I was 20, I went back east to Toronto to try to sing for my living. I was working steadily until I met another folk singer from Detroit. And we were married and went to live in Detroit, which is really a very decadent and internally decaying city — very unstimulating. And then my marriage was dissolved, when I was 22.

"It's difficult to maintain a relationship

when you're married to your career, like I was to mine, and he was to his. We tried to work as a duo, but our ideas didn't go together. We held each other back in our modes of expression by trying to compromise.

"My husband and I had an understanding about it, and the people who were most upset were my friends in Canada. In many ways Canada is more like England and they don't accept divorce and separation as easily as they do in the States."

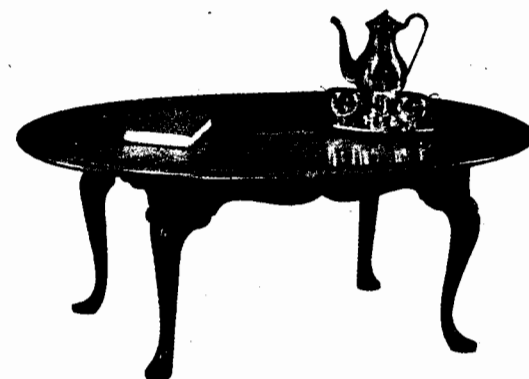
She's a strangely attractive woman — a mixture of Scottish, Irish and Norwegian blood, with the Norwegian a clear winner in the shape of her face, but it's more an attractiveness, generated by her gentleness and awkwardness than anything physical.

She says: "I don't like talking about my life. It seems to me that what you may say at one time may be quite different from what you might say two weeks later. I hardly ever do interviews. I don't care if I need them for my career or not.

"I remember when I was about 14 I was going to a prom one time and having my hair dried at the hairdressers and they gave me a movie magazine to read and it was all about the marriage of Sandra Dee and Bobby Darin breaking up.

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She Began Composing While Crippled with Polio



Joni and Arlo Guthrie last year at the Mississippi River Festival for a National Educational Television program on ecology "The Sounds of Spring."

Continued

"And I thought 'what a bummer it must be to have a life that is so public — to have people know things which really are privy to strangers.' To read all those things doesn't appeal to me personally, so I don't like to contribute to that kind of reading."

Her singing voice has a keening, luting, untrained ring about it, but her imagery is acute and rich.

"My mother was a romantic woman," Joni says. "She encouraged me in old-fashioned things. I kept pressed-flower scrapbooks. So the images I use are peculiar to my childhood." And they inspire songs like "Tin Angel":

"Letters from across the seas,
Roses dipped in sealing wax
Valentines and maple leaves
Tucked into a paperback."

"I think I'm both poet and singer. My words can stand up by themselves without being sung and I'm working on a book of poetry now which I hope to have finished by the summer."

She turns inward to herself to write her songs. The lyrics, full of imagery and laced

with complicated inner rhymes, are voyages of self-discovery. Her bittersweet "I Had a King" reflects her aborted marriage:

"I had a king dressed in drip-dry and paisley
Lately he's taken to saying I'm crazy and blind"

Two albums and a series of concert tours of the States have left her quite well off and she now owns a house in Laurel Canyon, near Los Angeles. But she feels her public life is so full that she has to short-change her friends. Her particular friends at the moment are the members of the Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young supergroup (they share the same manager) and she's knitted scarves for them all. Coming over in the plane the other night, she began knitting herself a sweater which promises to outshine anything Joseph of the Coat of Many Colors might have ever owned.

"I met Mia Farrow last night," she says. "I think we're going to be friends. I admire her as an actress and she likes my music. When I was younger and she was in Peyton Place, people used to always mistake me for her because she had long

hair too at that time and we have a similar ancestry."

Somehow she speaks with a bald naivete which disarms. Her shyness bothers her because it means that she can't feel at ease in parties as she'd like to, and she gets very nervous before going on stage, but she thinks, too, it's the reason for her gift. "My mind isn't quick and sharp in certain ways. Not on social levels, anyway. And now because of my stature as an artist I tend to intimidate people, and then because of that they try to intimidate me."

She was an only child and her creative interests were always encouraged. But at nine she spent half a year in hospital with polio ("I had to learn to walk again") and passed the time by singing to a captive audience of a little boy of six in the bed across the room. From then on she began to get more interested in writing.

The conversation lags and she makes for her immediate and automatic escape: Would I like to hear some more music? And yes I would, and this time I catch the phrase "Pull up the trees, put them in a tree museum, and charge the people a dollar and a half to see them."

Joni Mitchell — ecologist extraordinary.
