

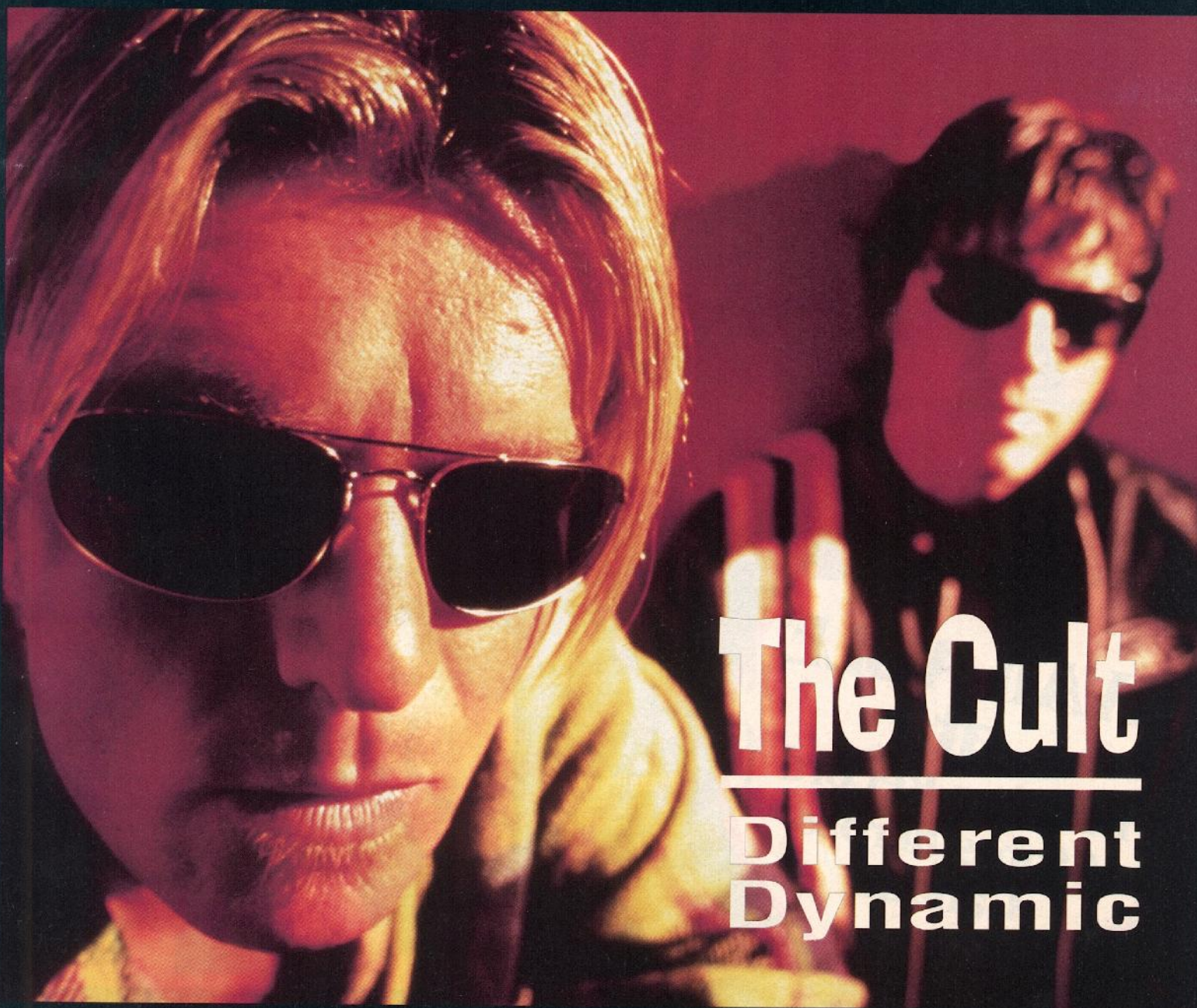
ACCESS

The Rock Radio Magazine

NOVEMBER 1994 Volume 1 · No.4 FREE



Page and Plant: Un-Zepped! - Joni Mitchell - Collective Soul



The Cult

Different Dynamic

In ACCESS

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Robert Plant

Cover: The Cult - Courtesy of Polygram
Collective Soul - Courtesy of Warner



Romance Is My Optimism

By Wolfgang Dios

Hard to believe the foremost 'lady of the canyon' is now 50 years of age. But even at 11:00 at night — in the grey anonymity of a high rise hotel suite far above Toronto's Yorkville district — Joni Mitchell is charming and gracious, wearing a long grey and mauve dress with black lace-up leather boots, rings of jade and silver adorning her fingers. Occasionally, she rather anxiously twists her long, tawny hair behind her ears with both hands. Though she chain-smokes, her eyes are pensive and calm. As the Warner record representative mentioned, the relatively late interview time is due to the fact that "sometimes she can't sleep well, and likes to stay up".

The setting is somehow appropriate. Twelve floors down, Yorkville is of course that trendy street of extravagant boutiques and pricey restaurants where, in the mid-60's, the counterculture briefly blossomed in folk clubs and outdoor cafes. Mitchell, however, harbours no false nostalgia for days long gone.

"I lived in Yorkville in '64 and '65," she says, "but I didn't actually play there very much, just the basement of the Penny Farthing. Canadian acts performed in the basement, while the imports were upstairs. Also, the musician's union in those days was quite powerful and I didn't have the \$160. necessary to join. One club manager said, sure he'd hire me...as a dishwasher. It seems to be hard for Canadians to recognize talent — I got no recognition at all, until I went south. Here, I was nothing...but as soon as I was down there, I was treated as something quite special. I still," she admits, "get a bit of resentment for that. For not having stayed in Canada, though I've maintained a residence in Vancouver since the early 70's. There's a kind of resentment built into the Canadian mentality — in some ways it's good, because it encourages modesty, but the downside is that if you stick your head too far above the crowd, someone will be only too happy to lop it off for you."

Canada, she feels, still does not sufficiently honour its own. Indirectly, this attitude of a country towards its own artists, led to the title of her latest (and 17th) release, *Turbulent Indigo* (Reprise/Warner). "The colour blue is always associated with sorrow, grief, depression, melancholy...the

title song is based on the brush strokes of the painter Van Gogh, during his later years; when the strokes were swirling, broad and turbulent. Countries are known largely through their artists, and it's through artists such as Van Gogh that we become aware of other cultures. A few years ago, the Canadian Council Of The Arts asked me to speak about the relationship between the arts and education at their annual gathering in Saskatchewan (where Mitchell was born). A section of this crowd felt I wasn't qualified to speak: 'we don't need some rock star to tell us anything...someone who left and prospered out of the country'. Several artists walked out on me. When they left, they looked just like the Smith brothers on those cough drops, you know?" Mitchell laughs.

Because of the title, comparisons with her seminal 1971 folk-rock album, *Blue*, are inevitable. But where *Blue* was electric, with a riveting emotional immediacy, *Turbulent Indigo* is more thoughtful and reflective; a meditative, though still impassioned journey through both personal and social concerns. Her voice has also matured — becoming richer and huskier, with fewer of those renowned soprano flourishes. While there was a heedless, melodic exuberance to her earlier work, now the emphasis seems to be more nakedly on the words; the kaleidoscopic images that seem to cascade through her lyrics.

An apt example is the song 'Yvette In English', which she co-wrote with old friend David Crosby. "David was about to embark on a solo album, which he wanted me to produce...and

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STING
1984-1994

FIELDS OF GOLD

12

CLASSICS DIGITALLY REMASTERED

If You Love Somebody Set Them Free

Fields Of Gold

All This Time

Fortress Around Your Heart

Be Still My Beating Heart

They Dance Alone

If I Ever Lose My Faith In You

Fragile

Why Should I Cry For You

Englishman In New York

We'll Be Together

Russians

+2

BRAND NEW HITS

When We Dance

This Cowboy Song



fascinated by my open tunings.

"When I was first signed to Reprise (the label she has now returned to), it was not an enthusiastic signing. I only had one real supporter there — Andy Wickham. The remainder were businessmen and businessmen don't hear, they look...and what they saw was a folk singer at a time when folk singing was no longer fashionable. What was in style was folk-rock. Now, this was just after Crosby had been kicked out of The Byrds — and they were folk-rock. So Crosby just set up a mike and pretended to produce me to make the record company happy."

Even though Mitchell subsequently produced most of her own albums, initially she was reluctant to take credit for this. "I didn't put myself down as producer for the first few albums because my father was a grocer, and the word producer reminded me far too much of produce."

The arrangements on *Turbulent Indigo* are spacious, with guitar, soprano sax and percussion drifting in and out over a wash of sound. Silence in music, believes Mitchell, is important. "I think of albums as a single form. And in my songs, the meat of the text comes first — often just voice and guitar — and is repeated twice. Then there comes a harmonic change, where you can add additional instrumentation, and possibly a third melodic theme in the last section."

Though many of the best songs on *Turbulent Indigo* are highly poetic narratives, the opening track 'Last Chance Lost', is a lament on lost opportunities within a relationship. Some of the most powerful works here are the social commentaries: 'Not To Blame', about the prevalence of wife beating; or 'The Magdalene Laundries', which originated in a newspaper article she read about nunneries in Ireland. "In Ireland, almost every city had a nunnery, and in each nunnery was a Magdalene laundry. Fallen women were incarcerated there. Some prostitutes, but also single women who drew the attention of the local parish priests. It was like a witch hunt. And just this year, a nunnery outside of Dublin sold 11 acres of property. While they were plowing up the land for development, they uncovered over 100 nameless graves with small, anonymous crosses. Magdelene graves." Mitchell pauses, obviously deeply affected. "That song is at the end of the first side (on the cassette) because I felt nothing could follow it. How could these disciples of Jesus, if they understood who Jesus was...how could they be so heartless? I know," she adds, "there are sisters who do the work of the good heart...but so few seem to have the true calling."

Turbulent Indigo "has actually been recorded for over a year, but we had to wait while the lawyers worked out a better deal," says Mitchell, referring to her departure from the Geffen label, and return to Reprise.

And no longer does Mitchell live in the canyon (Laurel Canyon, in the Hollywood hills, where many musicians have their houses). Now she resides "...in Bel Air, in a beautiful old Spanish home. It's over 130 years old, and for a while we thought it was haunted".

Mitchell has remained resolutely romantic and mystically inclined. "Following synchronicities reminds me of how mysterious the world is. Romance is my optimism. I have a lot of joy in the course of a week. And no, my sense of wonder hasn't gone away yet." She looks around, but there is no wood immediately to hand. "Knock on marble." **A**