

# Joni Mitchell soothes with tender songs

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**T**HE CONCERT ARENA was her canvas, and on Thursday night, Joni Mitchell painted brightly colored, swirling panoramas of her life on it.

She took her audience from *Woodstock* all the way to the *Chinese Cafe*, where she sang:

"We're middle-aged. We were wild in the old days. Birth of rock 'n' roll days . . . Nothing lasts for long."

The show offered a retrospective of the 39-year-old performer's career, which had obviously been followed closely by many of the estimated 5,000 people at Reunion Arena.

From the moment her shadowy figure was visible as the concert began, the crowd cheered. Many stood up at the end of the

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## POP MUSIC

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best songs — and there were quite a few during the two-hour show. Some were moved enough by the music to interact with Miss Mitchell by clapping or spontaneously singing words to songs.

**MISS MITCHELL** seemingly waited for the perfect moment to start a song, as if she wanted to get in the proper groove. After the first couple of songs, she and her four musicians were in perfect synchronization.

In those moments, she became more than an artist, as most performers who merely practice their craft are called. She was an *artiste*, who elevated concert performing to another dimension. She took it to a higher plane.

She captivated the audience with the rise and fall of her voice, strumming of her guitar and her unique approach to singing. Her music smoothly rocked along, with the musicians providing fluid flourishes. The musicians, who include her husband Larry Klein on bass, drummer Vinni Colaiuta, guitarist Michael Landau and keyboardist Russell Ferranter, played on the 32-city tour after recording Miss Mitchell's latest album, *Wild Things Run Fast*.

Miss Mitchell spoke to the audience  
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**Joni Mitchell's vivid, fragile songs won the crowd Thursday night at Reunion Arena.**

# Tender, loving songs from Joni Mitchell

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through her singing and rarely stopped to comment on a subject. She still appeared to be a shy, almost self-conscious, performer who can't relate well to a mass audience except through beautifully expressive music.

The only frustration was the difficulty in hearing every word to less familiar songs. It was like trying to eavesdrop on a conversation and being able to hear one out of every three words. One wanted to hang on every word to appreciate the imagery used to describe her life and loves.

The older folk-influenced material stood up as well or better than later songs, which were a hybrid of folk with jazz or rock. (*You're So Square*) *Baby I Don't Care* was interpreted with jazz and rock 'n' roll.

SHE DESCRIBED these mixed compositions that defy categories by saying, "I approach music like a painter going into another artist's salon. You like some things but don't go and rip the guy off. It takes a while for some things to pass through you to come out in some other form."

Too bad that much of today's music doesn't stand up as well as some of Miss Mitchell's songs, including *Both Sides Now* and her two stunning encores. She brought her own interpretation to Marvin Gaye's *I Heard It Through The Grapevine* and the crowd responded by swaying soulfully to the beat of the music.

*Woodstock*, the final song, ended with the audience still clapping in time as Miss Mitchell strummed her guitar and slowly moved to the side of the stage and then was out of sight. The audience wanted more, but it's inconceivable how anything else could have topped that song.

Earlier Thursday afternoon, Miss Mitchell talked to reporters as music from her albums played softly in the background. Larry Klein, whom she married on Nov. 20, 1982, sat beside her and occasionally offered comments.

The conversation turned to an interesting discussion of how Miss Mitchell views a concert audience. Because most shows are seen through the eyes of a critic, it provided an interesting turnabout to hear her observations.

The stage lights don't allow her to see many people except for those on the first couple of rows. She thinks of the visible people as "the eyes of the creature and the rest goes back."

From Miss Mitchell's vantage point, she said that she approached a show by thinking that 40 of her most die-hard fans are sitting in the first couple of rows.

IF THE CRITIC sits in the front row center, scrutinizing her during the performance, she said it "can bring down the vibes."

She laughed when she described the critic. "Every culture has one. He's usually a guy with a goatee." The critic's wife sits next to him and usually falls asleep or covers her ears, she said.

The most difficult audience is often in Los Angeles, where many entertainers begin tours. The critics are out *en masse*, and the audience demands a lot before it is impressed.

"Houston has been a hard audience," she said because they like rock 'n' roll and have been known to yell out "boogie" in the middle of a show.

She laughed when a reporter suggested that she book ZZ Top as the opening act in Houston.

Foreign audiences have proved interesting, she said. In Italy, they demand encores by singing football cheers. In Verona, it was two-note melody, which sounded like "Hee-Haw, Hee-Haw" as the audience clapped in time.

"JAPANESE WERE very polite and clap three times and call out songs in broken English," she said.

"England has been a good audience, but people are kind of going crazy. They wrecked a hall once," she said, added that the crowd wouldn't leave after the house lights came up at the end of three encores. Miss Mitchell said she came out to the piano and "noodled around" until they left peacefully.

Large audiences used to scare her until she stopped thinking in terms of being scared.

She hasn't toured in three years because of the time she wanted to devote to painting, writing songs and recording. And then she decided it was time to go out into what she describes as the great "black hole" of the concert hall and do what she does so well.