

ROCK MUSIC

by GARRY RAFFAELE

JONI MITCHELL HAS HUMANITY

I HAVE, as you may know, a radio program with that beloved of stations, 2CA.

As a result of that I often find myself the target of comment about how bad it is, how good it is, how mediocre it is and how everybody or nobody ever listens to it.

Sometimes even requests. And last week, perhaps one of the most rewarding, from a lady I hardly know but who has a smile to charm your soul. What she asked was a program completely involved with Joni Mitchell.

Now that may not seem much to you, especially if you have not the good taste to see that Miss Mitchell is currently the major modern solo performer. But to those of us who have held her in deepest respect for almost five years now, such a demand was a joy.

What it showed, I think, is that the work of Joni Mitchell, complex and poetic in its application, has about it

the touch of humanity of realism, of tangibles even though her melody is often twisting and strange.

Her brief appearances in the hit parades have been rewarding, if only because that brought a sparkle to an area of music overladen with crud.

We discussed the scheme again, that lady and I, and it appears possible, what with the work Mitchell has done with James Taylor, David Crosby and others. It may just get off the ground.

I quite realise this is impinging on other spheres of influence but

The television performance of the Modern Jazz Quartet (ABC) last week, was a small piece of great delicacy and moving music.

I had remembered the group from a concert in Canberra almost a decade ago now.

They had aged — Connie Kay, Percy Heath, John Lewis and Milt Jackson. But their music was still dew drops distilled from the

American negro tradition of the blues.

The essence of "good"

The essence of "good" music still remains, whatever the style. And rock critics must needs at what went before.

It was in fact Muddy Waters's concert — and one had to review Muddy Waters.

But I had written that I had hoped that the Australian support act (now mandatory) would not be a total disaster. And indeed it was not.

The man was Phil Manning, formerly Chain's lead guitarist and last Friday night a solo artist. The transition is most difficult — to move from a corporate existence wherein the guitar is one voice in a band, one putting his energy toward the whole. Now Manning is the total centre and that makes demands that are not at all the same.

At the Canberra Theatre on Friday night, he became

the singer-guitarist. The guitar he can handle. The comparison came to mind — Manning with Eric Clapton. Surely Manning is the prime Australian player of that instrument. And he has moved from the area of tortured blues wailings — that is no criticism in my terms — to a much more controlled, evocative style, characterised by soul-warming harmonies.

As a guitarist, he is an awesome, exciting, dramatic, magnificent musician.

After all that, he is a mediocre singer. There were times at the theatre last week when he almost made it, but inevitably he fell back into a white nothingness. The voice has little sense of any regular beat and little obvious understanding of lyric.

The man is a shatteringly beautiful guitar player. That is all he needs to be.

He will give what he has to give much better in another group, where he has the support of other musicians, and the services of a competent vocalist.