

## Joni Mitchell classic not joyful, but popular

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WASHINGTON

Joni Mitchell's 1971 song *River* has been recorded by more than 100 other musicians and appeared on more than two dozen Christmas albums — but it's far from a typical, cheerful holiday tune.

"I've known it from the time it was written, and I've always loved it," says James Taylor, who included it on his *James Taylor at*

*Christmas*.

"Most Christmas songs are light and shallow, but *River* is a sad song. It starts with a description of a commercially produced version of Christmas in Los Angeles . . . then juxtaposes it with this frozen river, which says 'Christmas here is bringing me down,'" Taylor told *The Washington Post*.

"It's such a beautiful thing, to turn away from the commercial mayhem that Christmas becomes

and just breathe in some pine needles. It's a really blue song," he said.

Mitchell didn't respond to the *Post's* requests for comment, but her friend Linda Ronstadt said the author probably hadn't paid much attention to her song's holiday status.

"She always has her eyes on the future and doesn't really look back," Ronstadt said.

Ronstadt put *River* on her holi-

day album *A Merry Little Christmas* in 2000.

"I'd wanted to record it for years, and I just couldn't figure out where to put it," she said. "I'd never heard it in the context of other Christmas songs, but I always wondered why that was."

Neither she nor Taylor have discussed the meaning of the song with Mitchell.

*Associated Press*

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