

MUSIC

New-fashioned girl

Joni Mitchell, 50, makes changes in her life, work

By MARY CAMPBELL
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Joni Mitchell has a new record, a new record company and a new love. She kiddingly calls herself "the new and improved Joni."

"When public interest wanes in a detergent, they stick a 'new and improved' label on it. I'm the new and improved Joni. I'm going to put it on my albums," Mitchell said.

"At 50, you've worked things out. You know yourself pretty well. I saw a Leonard Cohen quote, 'After 50, the anxiety cells in your brain begin to deteriorate.'"

Her new love is Don Freed and he's a singer-songwriter, currently writer-in-residence in Saskatoon, the Canadian town where Mitchell grew up.

"It's interesting to fall in love with a home boy," she said. "At this age, it is quite exciting. He's a prairie mutt like me — Scottish, French and Scandinavian. He has three Indian bloods, opposed to the one my parents say I'm a liar for saying I have.

"He's working with children, trying to get them to be creative. He has made an album already, 'Young Northern Voices.' It's important work he's doing; it's what we need as we go into the next century."

Mitchell, whose hair is still long, blond and straight, wore a black pantsuit and cap and an enthusiastic expression during a recent interview.

She was married briefly in the mid-1960s to American folk singer Chuck Mitchell. She and second husband Larry Klein, who met when he played bass on her 1982 album, "Wild Things Run Fast," separated three years ago, the day before they began work on her new album, "Turbulent Indigo."

"We worked our way through it in terms of the music," she says. "We're



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TURNING OVER A NEW LEAF: Joni Mitchell has a new album, "Turbulent Indigo," along with a new record label and a new love interest.

both very proud of this album. I think it was made under an unusually difficult situation, which we made the best of. We emerged as friends."

Mitchell and Klein co-produced "Turbulent Indigo," her first album for Warner Bros., a move from Geffen. "How Do You Stop?" — the

one song she didn't write — is the first single. Her last album was "Night Ride Home" in 1991.

Since then, she says, she has written 10 songs, painted 40 pictures, and taken care of such problems as root rot, termites and cracks in the pool of her Los Angeles home. She's

also dealt with a woodpecker pecking through the roof of her cottage in British Columbia and had some bouts of poor health.

Mitchell had polio when she was 9.

"I have some difficulties with my wiring system. I have post-polio syndrome in the early stages. Perhaps it can be held at bay. It's a mysterious thing. We who have had polio have damaged our wires. It's similar to multiple sclerosis in that our bodies don't adjust to extreme temperatures at all. Exposure to air conditioning, changes in temperature and airplane travel are bad," said Mitchell, who would like to tour.

"I went out in 1982 for nine months. I learned the artist is the last to be paid. We had four musicians, each with his own tech, lighting and sound people, truckers and roadies, no brass, no backup singers. We were an entourage of 21, as tight as we could get it.

"You pay the hall rental and the promoter. The leftover is the gross. The manager, agent and business manager take 30 percent. You pay salaries, hotel bills and meals and if there is anything left, the artist is paid. I made less than the roadies. I guess that's why people get sponsorship."

Mitchell has done a few performances this year. She took part in a May festival in Japan, which included Bob Dylan, Ry Cooder and Bon Jovi.

"It was the first of a series they hope to put on in front of wonders of the world," she said. "That was the oldest wooden structure in Japan, a Shinto monastery. International music had not taken place there in 1,300 years.

"The forests were full of little tiny deer that bow. One monk said they taught them to bow. Now it seems to be a tradition. The babies pick up on it. We weren't always needed. We had time to wander through the woods and experience these lovely creatures."

She also performed at the Edmonton Folk Music Festival in August. "It's near where my father comes from."