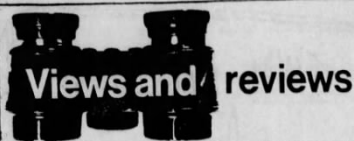


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## Views and reviews

### Music

Joni Mitchell  
Michael Anthony

Joni Mitchell opened a 16-city summer tour before 15,000 people at the St. Paul Civic Center Arena Sunday night with a concert that has rarely been matched locally for professionalism, quality and sheer enjoyment.

Everything — lights, sound and music — was working just fine Sunday night, despite the fact that large touring shows tend to be a bit ragged on opening nights. (Perhaps the 7-course Italian dinner backstage provided before the show for musicians and crew by the promoters, Greathall and William Semans, and catered by Mama D, of Sammy D's, had something to do with it. This is something we'll never know.)

The program began with a 40-minute set by Joni's back-up band, the L. A. Express, a solid, versatile, five-man unit specializing in jazz-oriented rock ("electric pop," it might be called) and headed by the highly talented Tom Scott, a reeds player and arranger on several of Joni's albums.

The presence of the band — and the tasteful, unobtrusive filler they provide when Joni sings — coincides with the emergence the last year or so of Joni Mitchell, the entertainer. It's not necessarily a new Joni Mitchell. But the image is no longer that of the coffeehouse folk-singer-composer softly spinning her web of images to the accompaniment of acoustic guitar. If she was once shy of performing, you'd never guess it now.

Her music changed, too, a while back. The romantic, poetry-lead, wispiness of her first two albums, "Joni Mitchell" and "Clouds," gave way, with the release of "Ladies of the Canyon," to a more economical, more clearly autobiographical style. And though she still occasionally tries to sing above her range (as does Neil Young), her vocals became more relaxed and, as a result, more expressive.

The outcome of these changes is a powerfully appealing performer with a great ability to communicate the wide range of emotions and images that permeate her songs and one who knows how to handle an audience as well.

Though the crowd throughout was generally quiet to the point of "Morning Vespers," there was an occasional "I love you, Joni" shouted from the balcony. To one such she replied, "I never know what to say to that. Maybe you don't squeeze your toothpaste tube in the right place. I mean, things like that can ruin a perfect relationship."

With the exception of two new songs, "Jericho" and "For Love Or Money," introduced during the second half, the songs during her two hours onstage from the opening "Free Man In Paris" to the encores, "The Last Time I Saw Richard" and "Twisted," were familiar gems from the albums.

"Carey," a calypso-rock tune about an affair on Crete, received an even more exuberant treatment than the recorded version, while "For Free," about an itinerant clarinetist, concluded beautifully as Scott moved into the second spotlight, playing his clarinet. Most of the second half featured Joni alone, playing dulcimer, piano and guitar.

"Twisted," Annie Ross's scat tune, sung and played (the band having returned) in raucous fashion, almost got away from Joni, but it was a perfect way to close the evening.

With the musicians off, the final event was a fight over a dozen roses which had adorned the stage and which someone threw to the audience. It was mostly girls who won — females seemed to be in the majority Sunday. As one teenaged girl leaped into the air, catching a flower, she shouted, "Tell Joni, thank you for the rose."