

# Joni Mitchell: Three Years Later

BY KEN WIEDER

You should have seen the looks on their faces! The people walking down 50th Street on Wednesday, February 6, could not understand why there was such a sea of smiling faces surrounding Radio City Music Hall at one o'clock in the afternoon. Their inquiries were answered by "Joni Mitchell is playing tonight," but that wasn't enough to purge the puzzled looks from their faces. After all, the concert would not be starting until eight in the evening, and it was 20 degrees outside!

My feet numbed and my legs



Joni Mitchell (Photo by K. Wieder)

fatigued from the six hour wait, I hurried down the aisles to discover the second row seats my friends had found. Gazing up at the huge domed ceiling above my head, I could feel that this would be like no other concert before it; as it turned out I was right.

The show started with a group called "The L.A. Express." The group featured Tommy Scott on sax with John Guerlin on drums, Max Bennett on bass, plus a pianist and a guitar player, all of whom play on Joni's new album. They played some really nice jazz and then introduced Joni Mitchell.

She came on stage in a dazzling low cut dress and started with "This Flight Tonight" from the album "Blue." It started off her set nicely, but then she let the crowd down with a few new songs and disappointing version of "Woodstock" and "You Turn Me On, I'm a Radio." She did "Just Like This Train" from her new album "Court and Spark" and then left the stage for an intermission.

At this point I was a little disappointed. It was like a new Joni Mitchell with all her sadness and joy turned to bitterness and indifference looking down from the stage with an almost evil expression on her face.

Joni returned 30 minutes later, this time alone and wearing a different dress. Starting with



Warm expectations eased the wait. (Photo by K. Wieder)

"Big Yellow Taxi" and "Peoples Parties," the concert went uphill all the way. She played beautifully "All I Want" and "A Case of You" on her dulcimer, then spoke about the time she bought some land and decided to get back to nature. Her story was

a prelude to "For the Roses" in which she sings about the conflict she goes through—fame and fortune and living her own life in peace and solitude. Next she did a big city song also from "For the Roses." It's called "Cold Blue Steel and Sweet Fire" and is

about a junkie.

Joni went over to the piano and played a version of "Blue" that brought tears to my eyes. This was the sad, sensitive Joni Mitchell that I had waited so long to see. She followed with "For Free" with Tommy Scott sounding in with his clarinet to finish off the song. The rest of the band followed him on as Joni did her classic "Both Sides Now" emphasizing the fact that she has changed. She then picked up the tempo with "Help Me," "Free Man in Paris," "Trouble Child," and finally, "Raised on Robbery," before walking off stage; but not for long.

Amid the shower of roses and applause she returned for her grand finale of "Blonde in the Bleachers" and "Twisted." As she left the stage for the last and final time a frantic girl yelled out, "Please don't make us wait three more years, Joni!" Let's hope that she doesn't.



Bravo, Joni! (Photo by K. Wieder)

## Big Mama Thornton Earns Name

BY ALAN INGBER

A name can sometimes be quite heavy. A gunfighter tagged "quick-draw" must be ever alert to the possibility of a challenge. A champ must constantly defend his title. And a blues belter named Big Mama must really know how to sing. (I once knew a high school girl who carried the same name; but her reputation had to be altogether differently maintained.)

"Look kids, we're naked," cried Big Mama's band as they

but looking beautiful. With just a piano, upright bass and drums, the band ran through two blues that were so un-gimmickally beautiful they were almost painful. Come on, step from behind that fuzz tone and fight

### BAM

like a man. Flawless! Great God, even Charles Atlas must have a pimple.

Big is Beautiful! Enter the Queen, dressed in robes so comically outlandish that only a sovereign could make them fit with dignity. Big Mama is truly stunning, for even weight when carried with pride can be a beautiful thing. And her face, shrouded by bushels of silver gray hair and a floppy felt hat was strikingly thin and chiseled by comparison. As she began her opening monologue, I seriously wondered why she never considered the field of stand-up comedy. With a sense of timing attributed to any great comedic genius, she had us rolling in the aisle. However, as her mouth harp wailed the introductory notes to her opening blues, it was obvious why she chose this particular road to travel.

"Rock me all night long," was the purred invitation as her voice oozed through the speakers in fits of orgasmic ecstasy. Toying with her words, her harp responded with pleased squeals. Several couples, answering the call, dove uncontrollably to the floor in violent fits of passion. The rest listened in awe. Rumpelstiltskin, move over. This awkwardly arranged frame of nearly 200 pounds was singing and blowing the sweetest blues I've ever heard. Big Mama, spinning straw into gold.

She sang them all. Ball and Chain, which she originally wrote

for the late great Janis. Hound Dog, which Elvis so royally ripped off. And Red Rooster, a Willie Dixon tune that Big Mama so skillfully adapts, it becomes her own personal statement, as she humorously imitates the different barnyard noises described in the song. Even her attempts at sentimentality are not embarrassing, as so many performer's are. Her dedication of Stormy Monday to T-Bone Walker who lies very sick in some hospital, was not self-consciously over-indulgent, but a soothingly beautiful tribute. Even her dedication of Sweet Angel to a cripple named Ralph who "had enough spunk to come out and enjoy himself even though he is handicapped" was rather well done. It should have been, for Big Mama only sings the "nat'chel blues."

Finally, her mannerisms are the ribbons of this bulky but beautiful blues package. Her plastersene face molds into a thousand different expressions as she uses them to punctuate the lyrics. Exaggerated frowns break into quizzical stares that melt into cheek to cheek semi-toothless grins in a moment's twinkling. Grunts, moans and high-pitched cackling trail off the end of one verse and start another, collecting the lyrics in a sometimes inaudible but always understandable net. And kids, can she boogie! Like a dancing bear she gracefully lumbers across stage with gyrations so vivid that it would make any frequenter of O.B.I. West drool in envy. Sidesteps followed by sporadic halts, as if giving her body a chance to catch up with her movements. The total effect is devastating, like watching a jerky movie camera that seems to stop at all the right moments.

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## Dylan Magnetism Fills Coliseum

BY JEANNE BOUZA

I was brought up in the mystique of Bob Dylan. Having an older sister of the "hip beatnik" generation, I soon learned to sing along with Dylan and know his songs as done by Joan Baez and Peter, Paul and Mary. His effect of the following years of my generation of rock music and protest cannot be under-estimated.

Although I was too young to see Dylan in concert, when he was still on tour and appearing at coffee houses, I always kept the future in mind for "when I'm older!" But eight years ago, that dream seemed to have become an impossibility with Dylan's involvement in a serious motorcycle accident and the resulting cancellation of all future concert tours. However, a few months ago, Dylan announced a "comeback" concert tour to include four shows in the New York City area. To my joy and surprise, one was at the Nassau Coliseum.

I arrived around 8 o'clock on January 28, 1974 for the first scheduled concert featuring Bob Dylan in the New York area in eight years, to find the parking area of the Coliseum already half full. While waiting with great anticipation for the concert to begin, I had the opportunity to observe the crowd and to absorb the atmosphere. Neither the prelude to the concert, nor the end, were as positive as the concert itself. The Coliseum managed very adeptly to create a circus-type atmosphere through the continual cries of the food hawkers throughout the show. I really do think that the Coliseum could have done just as well without the continual interruptions of adolescent food sellers. But whatever negative aspects existed that night were overpowered by the magnetism of Bob Dylan.

Casually walking on stage amid the cheers and claps of an adoring audience, he started the

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the Brooklyn  
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series

preceded her onto the Brooklyn Academy of Music's stage to a round of respectful applause.

A Big Mama Thornton concert is anything but a happening, and usually only true devotees are present, constituting a quietly friendly but appreciative audience. Unlike most rock concerts, the artist was not barraged with song titles the audience wanted to hear performed (a gross injustice to any entertainer with a preconceived idea of what she or he is prepared to communicate). Big Mama and friends were simply allowed to do their thing, which they did, beautifully.

Getting back to Big Mama's naked band, it is quite easy to see what is meant. Most musicians dress their music as one would hide an ugly naked body, behind layers of clothing; in this case blaring electronic instruments raving at ear piercing annoyance. Big Mama's boys were the Charles Atlases of the music world, barely wearing a stitch,