



Lucy Grundy's Tator

By Linda Carpenter

female pop flop

The world of popular music is not wholly relegated to the foolish and offensive; but, on the other hand, these factions are quite impressively represented. And of the handful of women in the field, most fall into these categories.

Talent, skill, wit, guts and intelligence in art and lifestyle are not what make a female pop star. The audience that can expect these things from Dylan, the Band, the Beatles, and the Stones obviously does not applaud Joni Mitchell, Janis Joplin, Janis Ian, Mama Cass and Judy Collins for the same reasons. These women are not consummate musical artists (name one who is a brilliant instrumentalist), and neither are most of them human beings of special interest.

While there is, indeed, a market for good music, good songs and interesting practitioners of both, these do not account for the popularity of someone like Joni Mitchell. Her stardom results from public taste, taste formulated and manipulated by the mass media. This generation of neo-Romantics is hot for the artist who trades upon Sensitivity. The world of poetry has accordingly provided us with Rod McKuen's greeting-card wet-dreams, the world of pop music with Leonard Cohen, from whose forehead Joni Mitchell sprang, full-grown and sniveling.

Not only is Joni Mitchell a very bad--almost supremely bad--poet, but she plays a pretty bad guitar (albeit in quasi-impressive open tunings), and she painted a picture of herself for an album cover. One imagines her sitting pensively at a piano in a room strewn with girlish clutter, while the spring rain pitter-pats against the window pane. Choked with sentiment, she puts pen to paper and writes: "Rolls and flows of angel hair/And ice-cream castles in the air/And feathered canyons everywhere...."

The more you hear of her work, the more you begin to suspect that such drive isn't simply the work of a defective. "He Played Real Good for Free," her phony country and western number, is an index to her problem. It is an uneven and embarrassingly patronizing attempt to do something she cannot: be funky, stop mincing, stop being verbose and sentimental and self-pitying.

In all fairness, she can certainly sing. But good singing about whining is not necessarily something one wants to hear.

Janis Joplin provides an alternative to Joni Mitchell's passive delicacy. But she has no innate or acquired musicality--something I expect in a singer--trading instead on pseudo-blues tricks: her device of approximating extemporaneity by simply screaming or tastelessly mushing up the lyrics--what the hell did she do to "Summertime?"

Janis refers to what she sings as "the blues," but it is an hysterical mockery of blues tradition and blues style. Just listen to Big Mama Thornton, Memphis Minnie, Ida Cox, Bessie Smith--those women were musically sensitive and inventive. Raw, formless, nonmusical emotion is not blues.

More importantly, those formidable women had dignity--something Janis Joplin never heard of. Stamping, grimacing, shaking her ass, yelling, "I NEED A MAN TO LOVE ME!" she is a mesmerizing sight, but so are newspaper photos of Charles Manson. It is less annoying than Joni Mitchell's self-conscious sentiment, perhaps because Janis is active and aggressive. It is nice, in a way, to see a female Elvis let loose--but Elvis could sing, and his gyrating was not helpless defiant misery, it was calculated. You have to be a far greater artist than Janis to wave your pain at the folks so that it is not mere exhibitionism.

Why be so harsh? Why expect so much? Why care that Janis Ian is the world's most pretentious teenager? If Mama Cass is a big zero, so what? Why isn't it enough that Buffy Saint-Marie and Julie Driscoll really sing the hell out of a song once in a while? What should Judy Collins have besides a nice voice?

It matters because these women are the best sellers in the field. These women are promoted by the forces that govern pop music because they, and their images, sell. Their images rest on the myth of female inferiority: women are overly sentimental, their poetry precious and self-pitying; women do not make good musicians though they're often pretty and sometimes even have nice voices. The music industry capitalizes on the false image of the "softer sex" and reinforces it with each sale. Women like Janis Joplin who do not fit the stereotyped image "make it" by imitating a man. It is no wonder that many women in the field feel that the avenues of foolishness and offensiveness are the only ways open to them.

By Laura Hummel

advice column

Advice columns are one of the most obvious ways the Establishment press keeps the status quo. In these columns deviant behaviour is severely criticized and the individual is advised to consult either clergy or psychiatrist. The Women's Liberation Collective has written their response to an exchange of this sort.

Dear Ann Landers:

I was the eldest in a large family. Because there were so many of us, Mother had to depend on help from the older children--mainly me.

My earliest memories are of messy diapers, runny noses and crying brats. All I ever wanted was to be free of it. I swore I'd never have any children. Never.

Then I met and married a wonderful man who said he didn't care about children either. All he wanted was me. We were very happy for several years, at least I thought so. Now he tells me his ideas have changed. He wants a family. Every time he mentions the subject I have an attack of nerves.

Shall I have a child (at age 30) and despise it, or stick to my position and take a chance on losing the man I love?--Betrayed

Dear B:

Your feelings about children are grossly immature. I suggest counseling. You'll probably lose the man either way if you don't grow up and stop being so self-centered.

Dear Betrayed:

The world has enough people in it. Don't feel guilty about not wanting any children. People should be able to choose whether they want to be parents and society should provide means for women to feel fulfilled without children. Women's Collective