

Yale Daily News no. 82 February 4 1974: Joni: Only somewhat sincere

# *Joni: Only somewhat sincere*

By NANCY NELSON

We all ostensibly lament the passing of the righteous spirit of the sixties. But when the commercialization process touches someone as close-to-heart as **Joni Mitchell**, you can only shake your head and question whether glitter compensates for loss of heart. Sadly enough, judging from her Woolsey Hall concert last Saturday night, **Joni Mitchell** has not weathered the process gracefully.

An uneasy feeling of Hollywood cool pervaded the performance. Much of the pristine quality of Mitchell's earlier work has been clouded by new tricks.

She has picked up on sensuous guitar-playing since the old days, when the song meant more than the accompanying act. Her old songs were about damaged souls, broken hearts, and celebrations

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# Joni

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of diverse men and sundry mornings. She still sings of broken hearts, but most of her new songs concern tainted fame, celebrity parties and fantasies of a proletarian past.

## Drowned

Worse yet, the deceptive simplicity of her earlier work has been drowned in excessive orchestration. Her back-up group leans ineffectually towards jazz while **Mitchell** is still writing her melancholy melodies in minor keys. The fusion between voice and instrumentation is no longer there.

**Mitchell** started out as a private performer, playing in the intimate setting of the coffeehouse circuit for years before making the bigtime. Her music was rooted in a folk tradition, but it had the stained-glass overlays of intriguing harmonies and an intense personal involvement.

And there was the voice, shimmering, immediate, and direct. The musical setting was simple; the rich vocal line and uncluttered accompaniment merged into communicative song. "Woodstock", "Gallery", and "All I Want" stand out in this tradition.

One would like to blame the metamorphosis of Mitchell's style on the invidious influence of Tommy Scott, who leads the tour warm-up and back-up band. He also admirably fakes female back-up vocals, and plays all-purpose woodwinds (presumably not for free).

## Reorientation

The net effect of Mitchell's changes is a reorientation of her original style, retaining the basic, bittersweet melody and overlaying it with foreign instrumentation. The only time this worked in her favor was in a parody of 60's rock and roll, "Raised on Robbery." The song moved into a catchy category of its own rather than trying to elaborate on old themes.

## Acoustic Interlude

The disturbing new tone was momentarily forgotten when **Mitchell** came on stage alone and played an acoustic set. The interlude was unassuming and effective. "A Case of You" and "Cold Blue Steel" recaptured any recalcitrant loyalty in the audience. Unhappily the solo set was brief and only accented the general superfluity of the back-up ensemble.

It is unfair to ask a performer to be consistent, for consistency is all too often an excuse for creative stagnation. Yet mere change without an accompanying sense of growth is, in **Joni Mitchell's** case, a disappointing alternative.