

An Editor's Note

Another Poet-Musician

A few weeks ago I wrote about listening to some contemporary music and being struck by the fact that I was listening to not only imaginative melody, rhythm and harmony, but very lovely poetry as well. In response to this, my daughter, Libbie, introduced me to one more evidence of this charming phenomenon on a recent visit. She played for me an album by one Joni Mitchell, an artist I'd never heard of before.

And artist is an appropriate word. Miss Mitchell is much more than a delightful performer with her guitar and her voice. She is as well one of the wonderful musician-poets I had written about.

Hers is one of the albums that includes a most useful new practice; the inclusion of the complete lyrics to all the songs, in this instance all poetry written by the performer. In her verses there is a most sensitive appreciation of the uses of language to evoke mood and fuller dimensions of meaning.

The free lines and meters are matched by a kind of liberated musical vehicle for which the word "song" is quite inadequate. The instrumentation is quiet and unobtrusive, but on the third or fourth listening I became aware that here were most thoughtful arrangements prepared as settings for Miss Mitchell's imaginings.

I would guess that the background arrangements were her own as well

as the melody lines. She is credited with the artwork for the cover, letting one understand that she is a versatile creative person.

Her poetry is difficult to sample. Each of the mood-story-songs is a unity of words, music, voice and instrumentation. A few lines may give a clue, though:

"Michael brings you to a park
He sings and it's dark
when the clouds come by
Yellow slickers up on swings
Like puppets on strings
hanging in the sky
They'll splash home to suppers
in wallpapered kitchens
Their mothers will scold
But Michael will hold you
To keep away cold
till the sidewalks are dry"*

The punctuation, or lack of it, is the author's. It might not pass a high school English assignment, but it serves her purpose well. The fragment above is part of "Michael from Mountains," a sweetly sad ballad kind of thing.

This being what at least some teens are listening to, I will put to rest my fears for the decline of literature and the take-over by boobery and cheap commercialism. As long as Joni Mitchell's kind of poetry is in the air and appreciated enough to make a saleable record album, we are not about to be totally swamped in crudities and barbarities.

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