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Mitchell Magic Not Merely Vocal

By CLIFF RADEL
Enquirer Reporter

Joni Mitchell is magic. For two hours and five minutes Tuesday evening her music cast spells over the capacity crowd of 7500 at the University of Cincinnati's Armory Fieldhouse.

She walked on stage wearing a black pantsuit and black hat. The coat's padded shoulders and the hat's broad brim which she had pulled down close to her eyes, made Mitchell appear like a model for an Art Deco mural.

Her angular features— high cheekbones, gaunt cheeks, straight mouth, feline eyes— and alabaster complexion enhanced her aura of 1930s-chic.

Even though she opened with the rousing "Help Me," she maintained her aloof, other-era persona. While John Guerin's hard-driving drumming set the pace for the five-man backup group, the L.A. Express, Mitchell's deadpan expression made her seem oblivious to everything but her own internal tempo.

BESIDES CREATING MYSTIC,

Mitchell's physical restraint had at least two other results. It forced the audience to direct its attention solely to the lyrics. And, secondly, her lack of an animated stage presence served to accentuate any movements she might use to emphasize a word or phrase.

Employing minute gestures to underscore the lyrics was in keeping with Mitchell's 1930s air. Billie Holiday's stage presence, developed in that long-ago decade, set the standards for Mitchell's performance.

Holiday was a master of subtlety. A slow wave of the hand, a slight rhythmic lift of a shoulder, these were some of her tricks. Alone they were meaningless. But when they were coupled with the artistic magic Holiday had, and Mitchell has, they bore the weight of mountains.

Mitchell's gesture on the last line of "In France They Kiss on Main Street" demonstrates her mastery of mixing verbal and nonverbal communication. The last line, "And they were rolling, rolling, rock 'n' rolling," calls for a slowly ascending glissando on the last word.

AS HER VOICE raised in pitch, her right hand did too. It looked as if her hand was literally lifting the

note out of her. At the moment her hand and the note simultaneously reached their apexes, the music stopped.

Mitchell displayed another facet



Joni Mitchell
... magic-maker at UC

of her artistic vitality by varying her composition's melodies, and occasionally the lyrics, too, from their recorded versions. She also used solo accompaniments and various combinations of the L.A. Express to add to her wide range of musical sorcery.

"Cold Blue Steel and Sweet Fire" opened with Mitchell accompanying herself on guitar. She was soon joined by David Luell whose limpid soprano sax solo intertwined with her lyrics.

With Mitchell vamping on guitar at the song's end, Luell, still playing, walked off stage. He created an eerie mood as his unamplified instrument could still be heard from the wings.

Like any talented wizard, Mitchell had new material for her audience. She sang four yet unrecorded songs, including "Fury Sings the Blues." The song was inspired when Mitchell visited Beale Street in Memphis last week and was touched by the razing of some of the area's fabled buildings.

WHO KNOWS, perhaps during her stay in Cincinnati, Mitchell will visit the nearly demolished Cox and Shubert Theatres.

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