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## Instant biography insults her music

Joni Mitchell, by Leonore Fleischer,  
Gage Publishing, 79 pages, \$4.50.

ROCK  
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This brief biography-cum-appraisal of Joni Mitchell says almost everything that can be — and already has been — said about the lady and her music, and virtually nothing that needs to be.

Laying down the chronological details of somebody's life and then dovetailing them with what are essentially paraphrases of virtually every song on every album is no way to illuminate the personality or genius of an artist as individual and elusive as this.

All it proves is that Mitchell is her own best biographer, and has been all along. She is, at the very least, a considerably better one than Fleischer. You will learn much more about Joni Mitchell by listening to one song than by reading this entire book.

The book has been researched assiduously, but the assembled information would only mean something important if it were subordinate to some kind of vision of Mitchell's stance and standing. An artist as personal as this deserves to be examined and analyzed from equally as personal a perspective. Mitchell deserves to be dealt with on human terms — the artist *as perceived* by an audience, even if it's an audience of one. It would imply a certain degree of risk on the part of the biographer. Fleischer takes none.

She seems to have intentionally kept herself as uninvolved as possible, perhaps in the interests of objective journalism. The result is dull and irrelevant in direct proportion.

The book is divided into two major sections, entitled Her Life and Her Music. The first reads like an extended version of a publicity bio sheet, the second like a university graduating thesis. Fleischer's paper might warrant a passing mark on some level, but maintaining an academic distance here is insulting as well as unsatisfactory.

To dismiss Mitchell in 79 pages of pedantic and self-evident summary ne-



JONI MITCHELL

... listen to the songs

gates the most vital function of art, which is its quality of communication. Not only is there no person called Leonore Fleischer here, there is nobody called Joni Mitchell either.

There are a lot of Mitchell facts, photographs and quotes, although the quotes would appear to have been garnered from interviews Joni has given to almost everybody except Fleischer. One wonders whether the writer has even met the subject. The bottom-line impression this sophomoric, superficial book gives is that it's actually the most elaborate fan letter in the world.

Maybe it will land Leonore Fleischer a job in a record company's promotion department. More to the point, maybe it will finally get Leonore an introduction to Joni.