

edited by Anthony Clarke

A heavy message from Ms Mitchell

JONI Mitchell has decided to be a rock 'n' roller — for the moment. That was the heavily amplified message delivered to the packed Palais on Wednesday night.

She came on hard and strong with a muscular opening bracket of songs whose melodies seemed to merge into one another; the words were lost behind the throbbing power of her band.

She cut an elegant figure on stage in high heels. Her long blonde hair spilled over her black blouse, fastened with a wide pink belt over black pedal-pushers. And it was a stylish performance to match. But what a pity those lyrics had to be sacrificed for the heavy electric sound, especially as Joni Mitchell is regarded as a consummate lyricist, a poet unmatched in pop music.

She played cordless amplified guitar, which she put aside occasionally to concentrate on vocals or sit at the piano. Not far away was Larry Klein, a sharp, fluent bass guitarist whom she married last year. Drummer Vincent Colaiuta punched out rock rhythms with subtle jazz undercurrents. Russell Ferrante was on keyboards, playing rhythm but adding coloration, while guitarist Mike Landau ripped through screaming heavy metal riffs.

It says something for Mitchell's charisma that her audience was willing to accept the uncompromising concert repertoire. A great part of the two-hour performance (broken by a short interval) was a blast from the present, with a few gentle reminders of the past.

'Coyote' struck the first real spark of recognition, and slowed the tempo. But the real magic began when Joni Mitchell sat at the piano to sing 'He played Real Good For Free', a lovely, lilting piece from 'Ladies Of The Canyon'.

This solo spot heralded the most poignant part of the concert, with a few of the favorites the crowd had come to hear: 'Big Yellow Taxi' on guitar; the happy sensuality of 'A Case Of You' and 'Carey', both accompanied hesitantly on a dulcimer; finally, 'Amelia' a soaring anthem to wanderlust and independence, brought the house to its feet and the interval.

The band was back with a vengeance for a second set, crammed with songs from the new LP. Klein and Landau forced the pace on the title track, 'Wild Things Run Fast' and on 'Ladies' Man'.

'Refuge From The Roads', from the 'Hejira' album, slowed the momentum before the outrageous, revamped Leiber and Stoller oldie, '(You're So Square) Baby I don't Care', with Landau's guitar swooping and screaming.

The semi-reggae ballad 'Solid Love' set the scene for her nostalgic 'Chinese Cafe', sung while Mitchell at piano reminisced over 'Unchained Melody', and 'You Turn Me On I'm A Radio' was greeted delightedly: more nostalgia was what the audience wanted. Perhaps St Paul was unimpressed by 'Love', the jazzy rendition of his epistle to the Corinthians, because a stand of lights crashed down onto the side of the stage during the song. But Joni didn't miss a beat,

CONCERT

Mike Daly

although it was an anxious moment.

She lost her words during the solo on her old hit 'Both Sides Now', which may have been a delayed reaction to the incident, and was helped by the word-perfect crowd. She sauntered offstage, still playing guitar as the encore calls began, and returned with the band for a thumping version of 'I Heard It Through The Grapevine'.

And it was over. No more encores, which was justifiable, after two hours and two dozen songs. The saddest aspect of the concert was the inaudible words to songs like 'Edith and the Kingpin' and 'In France They Kiss on Main Street'. If Joni Mitchell had toured solo, every word would have been heard and just as many people would have packed the halls to see her.

THEATRE

Philippa Hawker

Greek plays shine under the stars

ON THE banks of the Yarra at Fairfield, the Epidavros Summer Theatre is staging two classical Greek plays in a temporary amphitheatre under the stars.

'Lysistrata', the Aristophanes comedy about a resourceful woman who was an early and successful practitioner of the cry "make love not war", lends itself to contemporary interpretation.

Played in English, and adapted and directed by Gary Down, it is a slick and snappy production. Lysistrata is an Athenian Olivia Newton-John in high heels and a headband, while her male opponent Kinesias, is an Ocker male with a beer pot and thongs.

The script rhymes "burn yer" with hernia, and introduces a Nana Mouskouri figure as one of the wives. An outdoor setting is not ideal for this style of production, particularly in the musical numbers. But the cast works together well to project a cheerful, accessible cabaret interpretation of the play.

The second half of the evening is a performance in Greek of the Euripides tragedy 'Medea', directed by Nikos Sidiropoulos with Chantal Contouri in the title role. It is a striking contrast to the preceding production, with its stark, histrionic approach. Its cast includes a nine-person chorus choreographed by Lena Zamboura, who was brought out from Greece to supervise this aspect of the play.

Juxtaposing these two plays, in different languages and with completely opposed styles, is a bold move. It is demanding on its audience, but it is a stimulating approach to staging and popularising Greek drama for a wider section of the community.