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**Joni Mitchell jazzes up a subdued MRF crowd**

By R.A. WILBER  
Of the News-Democrat

Those who came to hear the Joni Mitchell who has had a half-dozen pop hits on the a.m. radio stations over the years probably left Thursday night's Mississippi River Festival performance disappointed.

Miss Mitchell did open the evening with "Big Yellow Taxi," her biggest and most recognizable hit, but after that the pop hits were few and far between. Instead, and to her credit, she gave the sometimes unappreciative audience a beautiful evening of jazz-oriented songs from her old albums and her new, and allowed her musicians ample opportunity to display their wares, as the leader of any good jazz group should do.

Such an evening took a certain amount of courage from an artist whose name, for most fans, is more closely tied to a less-artistic but more accessible sound that has been commercially successful not only for Mitchell but also for other artists who have performed her songs (Judy Collins, for instance, had a major hit with Mitchell's "Both Sides Now").

But the courage, frankly, was worth it. And despite the fact that the jazz performed was more down tempo than what most of the audience had come expecting, the evening had to be called a success as most of the people in attendance seemed, in the end, to be appreciative of Mitchell's work.

It marked a double success for the River Festival, too. The audience, counted at about 4,000, was older than the usual MRF crowd, and included a surprising number of families. The toddlers romping about and coming papers from harried parents were a pleasant break from the rough and tumble drinking crowd that has unfortunately marred the MRF in performances past. The addition of the families also seemed to help settle the audience down early for the listening that was required of Mitchell's music. Rowdiness was pleasantly absent.

Further, Mitchell's show was obviously aimed at those who came for an easy evening of musical excellence and not for a rowdy "good time." The MRF schedulers deserve some praise for bringing in artists who are performing music of artistic merit, whether it draws huge crowds or not.

Some of the artistic highlights of the evening, interestingly enough, were provided by the band Mitchell brought rather than by the artist herself. The evening's peak, for instance, came from a long and effective solo by bassist Jaco Pastorius, a one-time member of Weather Report. Using tape loops to accompany himself, Pastorius brought the crowd to its feet with a performance that can rarely be found in a bass guitarist.

Mitchell's other band members, Don Alias, Michael Becker, and Pat Metheny, each received a chance to give similar performances. While they were all well done, some came up to the standards set by Pastorius in the evening's first major solo.

Photo by R.A. Wilber