

LIVELY ARTS PAGES

Joni Mitchell Does It Right

By Philip Elwood

During last Friday night's Joni Mitchell concert at Cal I realized why Miss Mitchell's songs became so tedious at the Judy Collins performance the week before. Miss Collins, it is obvious, just doesn't handle the Mitchell material (like "Chelsea Morning," or "Midway Song") with the musical imagination and emotional depth which the blonde Canadian lyricist gives to her own compositions.

Miss Mitchell's presentation was a beautiful, tender, personal evening of song. She has a voice quality of remarkable distinction and a rhythmic sense that defies categorization. If her lyrics aren't often very profound, they do (at least) evoke the flavor of folk informality and social commentary.

There is a yodel-like inflection to Joni Mitchell's vocals and a good deal of falsetto soprano; her own guitar accompaniment is competent and restrained. Since she doesn't write much in the way of melody, the Mitchell renditions are primarily in a multi-tonal poetic talk-song style.

There is a touch of Baez and Collins in her voice, but Miss Mitchell is a more personal stylist than either. And she is, in effect, her

own folk-song inspiration, which means she probably will have a longer career and contribute more to American music than either Baez or Collins.

Her selections in Zellerbach Hall included "Circle Game," "Both Sides Now," "Blue Boy," "Morning Morgantown," and most of the numbers on her only (and superb) recording, including the magnificent "Cactus Tree" and "Marcie."

Her duet with Graham Nash on "Let's Get Together" was a bright way to involve the crowd on a sing-along although by that point in the concert Miss Mitchell's voice was tiring, resulting in wavering pitch and less effective lyric interpretations.