

Gentle Joni of the mythical mood in folk-rock

By MARILYN BEKER

JONI MITCHELL is a gentle lady—the kind you would find in a medieval castle.

She has long blond hair, delicate high cheekbones and an album of myth-like folk songs that was just released in Canada last week.

The album is dedicated to a man named Mr. Katzman. "He was my Grade 7 English teacher," says Joni, "and he taught me to love words."

Miss Mitchell is appearing at the Riverboat until April 28. On stage and off there is a special glow about her, especially when she talks about her music: lovely and lilting it concerns childhood fantasies, kings and queens.

Her voice has deepened a shade, her guitar playing has improved since her first performance before a large crowd at the Mariposa Folk Festival several years ago; but she's still the same Joni whose songs have been recorded by such folk stars as Tom Rush and Judy Collins.

Joni wasn't "discovered" as a performer until that Mariposa concert. Before then, Bernie Fiedler, who is now proud to feature her at the Riverboat, used to say to her, "Joni you can wash dishes in my club but you can't sing here until you've done something."

Now Joni has definitely done something. At 24, she's just

bought a house in California's Los Angeles Hills. "It's a real ranch house on a street called Lookout Mountain," she beams. "The house is the ugliest green but I'm going to put shingles all over it and just let them fade in the sun. That's where I'm going to start writing for my next album, scheduled for recording in July. Now I'm looking for a piano. I've decided to start composing on that."

Joni usually composes on a guitar. "I taught myself guitar from a Pete Seeger instruction book," she says. "I get the melody first and then I write out three sets of lyrics before I'm satisfied. Usually I think the melody is too pretty for the lyrics."

Also, she's working on a type of mythology "for romantic adults."

"I draw pictures," she says, "and then the drawings dictate. As I draw, characters develop and then I give them strange names"

"I could have started recording earlier last year," says Joni, "but I wanted to have complete freedom to do what I wanted with my music."

"I wouldn't have had the respect I do now if I had recorded last year. But since Judy Collins did two of my songs the record company respected me. Even in this session there was talk of jazzing up my arrangements, but I couldn't do that. I did that with Circle Game, my

first big song, but it wasn't me and it didn't sell on record because of that."

"I like simplicity. I never believed in hard sell even when I was working in stores. I always believed if you had a good product people would buy it. My music is really sock-it-to-me-softly music. I did the album alone with a guitar and I'm glad."

"The arrangements on the record were do-it-yourself arrangements," she continued. "The spaces were important, just like they are on this drawing." She points to the filmy cover drawing she did herself. "Like those empty spaces in the picture, they are important. I wrote the album as a continuing story in two parts. I purposely wanted it to flow. It sounds fatter than any folk record you've ever heard, I think."

"I had to wait a long time for people to let me have my own opinions, and it was hard. But now I can tell everybody." And she points to a corner in her album cover. There, beside a figure of a flying dove, in brown ink, are written the words "Love Life."

"I think you should," she said grinning. "I think you should enjoy it. All of it. Even the depths of sorrow." And then the lady nodded earnestly as the silver necklace hanging over her print blouse jangled softly.



Joni Mitchell: pleased that she is earning respect as an artist.