

# Joni's trek from Canada to Laurel Canyon

By SUSAN GORDON LYDON  
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HOLLYWOOD — Joni Mitchell lives in Laurel Canyon, in a small, pine-pannelled house lovingly cluttered with two cats, a stuffed elk's head, stained glass windows, a grandfather clock given her by Leonard Cohen, a king's head with a jeweled crown sticking out from the brick fireplace, votive candles, blooming azaleas, a turkey made of pine cones, dried flowers, old dolls, Victorian shadow boxes, colored glass and an ornamental plate from Saskatoon, Sask., where she grew up.

She lives there with singer Graham Nash who used to be with the British group, The Hollies.

It's a lovely house, sunny and friendly and filled with the easygoing good spirits of the Laurel Canyon music scene.

With her long blond hair and wearing a peasant blouse and sailor pants, Joni looks younger and less mysterious than one might expect from hearing her songs.

Her face, lacking the forcefulness and luminescent quality it takes on when she performs, looks like a forthright farm girl's, with freckled pale skin, watery blue eyes, and prominent teeth and cheekbones. She speaks softly and gently, with great earnestness.

The night before, she had completed two cuts for a second album, an almost unheard of feat for her.

Though she's only become famous in the past year and a half—since Judy Collins included some of her songs on her album, *Wildflowers*, and her own excellent album, *Song to a Seagull*, was released—Miss Mitchell, who is 25, has been performing for a long time.

During the folk boom, she was singing in small coffee houses in Toronto.

In 1965 she married Chuck Mitchell (the short marriage she describes in I

Had a King) and went with him to live in Detroit, where Tom Rush heard her sing and included one of her songs, *Urge for Going*, in his repertory.

Her reputation was high with other folk singers, but she had a hard time getting work. "The year Dylan went electric," she said, "the folk clubs started closing all over the country. It was like an epidemic. The only people being hired were people who had records out. I was always bringing up the rear. In those days, if you only played acoustical guitar, club owners treated you as though you were a dinosaur.

"Now everybody's branching out and there's room for all styles. People are playing where they feel their music. I feel my music with a solitary voice and a solitary guitar."

Her music has a haunting, unearthly quality produced by the strangeness of the imagery in her lyrics, the unexpected shifts in her voice, and the unusual guitar tunings she uses. She is one of the most original and profoundly talented of all the contemporary composer-performers—Gordon Lightfoot, Leonard Cohen, Tim Hardin and Buffy Sainte-Marie, many others—who have evolved folk music into art-rock.

It's more than mere coincidence that she, Miss Sainte-Marie, Lightfoot and Cohen are Canadians.

"We Canadians are a bit more nose-gay, more old-fashioned bouquet than Americans," she said. "We're poets because we're such reminiscent kind of people. I love Leonard's sentiments, so I've been strongly influenced by him. My poetry is urbanized and Americanized, but my music is influenced by the Prairies. When I was a kid, my mother used to take me out to the fields to teach me bird calls."

Miss Mitchell is a gifted painter, too. She did the paintings for both her album

covers, and the imagery in her song lyrics is that of a person whose orientation is more visual than verbal: "Colors go waltzing in time," from *Night in the City*, for example, or "The sun poured in like butterscotch and stuck to all my senses," from *Chelsea Morning*.

"I hardly read anything at all," she said. "I would rather paint or play the piano or write a song. I'm taking four months off at the end of the summer, because I haven't had much time to write new songs. A lot of the songs on the new album are old ones. I want to do more songs for the piano; that's where I'm moving now. The piano gives me a new melodic sense, as the guitar tunings used to.

"I'm more prolific with melodies than with words, but quite often I write poems and then set them to music.

"I guess I'm primarily an artist; what I like best is making new music. It's like going into a trance; I sit down with a melody and reminisce. I find it easier to think about my feelings in retrospect. The way I'd like to work from now on is to go into a studio as soon as a song is finished, when the feeling of the song is most intense. You should record songs when you believe them the most.

"Most of my songs are about myself, songs of personal experience. It's very important to me how I sing them. I just played in Saskatoon, my home town, and it was a tremendously emotional experience. When I sang *Both Sides Now*, it was like singing the words for the first time. But it's funny—after a song's been written, it becomes a whole different thing; you don't own it any more. I love to hear men sing my songs, because they're written from a feminine point of view, and men bring totally different things then."

Joni has been working on the new album since December, but she decided



—Globe and Mail, Harold Robinson  
Joni: "Canadians are different."

only recently to take over the production of it herself. "I was working with a producer, and we were pulling each other in opposite directions," she said. "I was working within this framework of sound equipment, and the sound was fantastic, but I felt stifled. Now the sound isn't so good, but at least I know I'm doing what I want to do."