

## AT GREEK THEATER

# Joni Mitchell—An Artist in Transition

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Times Pop Music Critic

Can it really be five years since Joni Mitchell's last concert here?

Mitchell's music is such a welcome part of both our FM radio diet and other singers' repertoires that she seems to be always with us. The irony is that it's mostly the songs of five years ago (and beyond) that we hear—tunes with the poetic grace and melodic sheen of "Both Sides Now," "Help Me" and "For Free" among the many.

During her peak "Ladies of the Canyon" (1970) to "Court and Spark" (1974) period Mitchell set a standard of songwriting excellence that may be unmatched in the modern folk/rock era. Only Bob Dylan, Randy Newman and John Prine have shown the consistency and power of her work during that stretch.

Returning to the Greek Theater Wednesday night for a sold-out, five-day stand, Mitchell used few of the songs from her early period. Instead, she concentrated on material from the more recent, eccentric, jazz-flavored works like "Hejira" and "Mingus."

The result was that Mitchell was more a bandleader at times on stage than the folk-oriented singer-songwriter found in her early concerts. Her lyrics were sometimes buried in the arrangements, and she frequently turned the stage over to one of her five top-grade musicians—a long conga solo from Don Alias, a bass solo by Weather Report's Jaco Pastorius, or a saxophone solo by Michael Brecker.

While her integrity was never in doubt, the overall tone was less compelling than Mitchell's earlier appearances. She remains an artist in transition, one who has yet to regain fully her creative balance.

Mitchell's spontaneous defense on stage Wednesday of the new Bob Dylan album could be applied to her own performance.



JONI MITCHELL

... a youthful optimism.

Times photo by George Rose

When someone in the audience shouted out the name of Dylan's controversial, religious-accented "Slow Train Coming," Mitchell praised the LP, calling it a strong statement of faith.

Similarly, Mitchell's refusal to stick by her established folk form demonstrates that she is upholding her own artistic faith. She all but defined her own course Wednesday in these lines:

*You know it never has been easy  
Whether you do or you do not resign  
Whether you travel the breadth of ex-  
tremities  
Or stick to some straighter line*

Like Dylan, Mitchell has been a restless  
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