

THE ULTIMATE MUSIC GUIDE

JONI MITCHELL

UPDATED
DELUXE
EDITION

EVERY ALBUM
REVIEWED

CLASSIC
ENCOUNTERS,
REDISCOVERED

A Case Of You
JONI MITCHELL
THE FULL STORY

ARCHIVES
VOL 1:
THE VERDICT

HER **30**
GREATEST
SONGS

THE 2020
COMEBACK

FROM THE MAKERS OF **UNCUT**

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“She’s the best writer of us all...”

JONI MITCHELL’S 30 GREATEST SONGS

An all-star panel – including ROBERT PLANT, NICK MASON, LAURA MARLING, GRAHAM NASH, RADIOHEAD, FATHER JOHN MISTY, REM and many more – tackle the daunting task of identifying Joni Mitchell’s greatest songs. On the way, her many friends and collaborators share secret memories of a singer-songwriter for the ages. “I’m a huge believer in Bob Dylan,” argues DAVID CROSBY, “but Joni’s a better musician. I don’t think there’s any question about it. She’s certainly 10 times the singer Bob ever was, and as good a poet in her own way.”



Contactsheet
from a photo
shoot for *Vogue*
magazine, 1968



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DOUG GRIFFIN/TORONTO STAR VIA GETTY IMAGES; NIAL REDDY; PIETER VAN HATTEM

"I DON'T THINK THERE'S a singer-songwriter in the world that hasn't been affected by Joni," David Crosby tells *Uncut*. "You want to be that good, we all did. We all do." As Crosby attests, in a career spanning almost half a century of music, Joni Mitchell has proved enduringly influential. During her artistic prime, she ploughed indefatigably through a wide variety of styles – from stark confessionals to jazz – in an astonishingly short period of time; her sophisticated work transcending the conventional songcraft of her many like-minded peers. Lately, there have been encouraging signs of activity. In 2014, she curated her own retrospective boxset, *Love Has Many Faces*, while in January 2015 she was unveiled as the face of a new Saint Laurent ad campaign.

On this occasion, we have chosen to look back at some of her greatest songs with help from a panel of her collaborators, friends and famous fans. Along the way, we hear tales involving picnics with Eric Clapton, hand-knitted sweaters, a birthday cake in the shape of a guitar, car journeys across Canada, late-night visits to bowling alleys and one eye-watering early morning encounter with the Flying Squad. One former paramour, we learn, admits he still sends her flowers every year for her birthday. But critically, one of her more recent collaborators shares with us a remarkable piece of fresh information regarding her current activities. "I think there's always a chance of new music," they reveal. "She was writing a few months ago..."



In Toronto, 1968

1969

1 BOTH SIDES, NOW CLOUDS, 1969



PHILIP SELWAY, RADIOHEAD:

I think if you've got an interest in songwriting, Joni's one of the best reference points and guides in that respect. You can't go far wrong, can you? My favourite, because it happened twice, is "Both Sides, Now". It was on *Clouds* originally, and then it was the closing track on [2000's] *Both Sides Now*.

The first was in her acoustic phase, you know, *Clouds* and *Ladies Of The Canyon* and *Blue*, and it's such a strong song performed with just vocal and acoustic guitar. If a song can stand up in that way, and still have that power behind it, when there are no tricks to hide behind there... It either stands up in its own right at that point, or it sounds insipid. To me, on that version on *Clouds*, it sounds amazing, it's the perfect culmination to that record.

And then Joni returned to the song again when she did *Both Sides Now* in 2000, where she revisited some of her older songs. To me, she's almost like Ella Fitzgerald on that record and I found it really interesting, having "A Case Of You" from *Blue*, and also "Both Sides, Now", just comparing the two tracks; the younger Joni Mitchell, and then the wisdom and the depth that comes through in the version on *Both Sides Now*. When you hear the later version, you genuinely believe that she's really had the life that backs up the sentiment in the song. Her voice has dropped in pitch, and for some people that would be a huge worry, but actually she's used that to her advantage. It's like the before and after of songs, and it feels in some way like the two versions are bookends in her work.

1970

2 MORNING MORGANTOWN

LADIES OF THE CANYON, 1970



MIKE HERON, THE INCREDIBLE STRING BAND:

The first time I heard "Morning Morgantown" was up in Scotland on late-night radio. I was fascinated. We'd actually met her through Joe Boyd. Joe had been involved with Dylan's appearance at the Newport Folk Festival. He had a long connection with those people. When we recorded *The 5,000 Spirits Or The Layers Of The Onion*, he sent a copy of the album to the Newport committee. They were putting on a festival of new names on the block. They had Joni Mitchell and Leonard Cohen. They booked us for it, too. That was November 1967. So when we met her, she hadn't yet made her first album. We sat around, me and Robin [Williamson] and Joni, and we swapped songs. She sang a few of her songs, and we sang a few of ours. She said she really liked what we were doing. I was flattered! Robin and I were into open tunings, so we were taken as much by her guitar-playing as her beautiful voice. I followed her career since. *Hejira* was her standout album really. I was listening to some songs earlier, and her piano-playing is remarkable. I don't know if anyone else was doing that kind of piano-playing at the time. It's not really Carole King, but it's not too jazzy at that point. Listen to *Ladies Of The Canyon*. Songs like "Rainy Night House", for instance – I think she set the template for that kind of piano-playing.

3 WILLY LADIES OF THE CANYON, 1970



GRAHAM NASH: "Willy", to this day, breaks my heart when I hear it. But her artistry is such that she takes a personal situation and turns it into a world situation. The relationship

she's talking about can apply to anyone who's listening. That's the art of writing a great song, taking a simple thing and making astounding music from it.

There are so many great songs for a start. I really believe that in 100 years from now, when people look back on the '60s, the great writers will be Bob Dylan, John and Paul, and Joni. I like "Amelia", I think it speaks directly to your heart, and there is not much in the way of production. She concentrates on the lyrics and the melodies of her music and she wants to find the shortest path from your brain to your heart. She consistently does that. If you listen to "For The Roses", for instance... my God! Listen to "A Case Of You": holy shit, it goes straight to your heart! I love "River" on *Blue*, too. She influenced me, as well. There's a couple of songs I've written in tunings that I learned from Joni, particularly "Lady Of The Island". I got tunings from Crosby, too, because he's a maniac that way. Hey, you know it's her birthday today? I've been sending her flowers on her birthday ever since the day we parted. Let's wish Joni a happy birthday today.



"Give us some respect": addressing a restive audience at the Isle Of Wight Festival, August 29, 1970

4 RAINY NIGHT HOUSE LADIES OF THE CANYON, 1970



JOHN GRANT: Choosing my favourite song is an easy one for me – on “Rainy Night House”, I just felt completely understood. I feel like she is very special, to understate the issue greatly. The combination of the songwriting craft and the level of vocal ability mixed with virtuosity on the guitar, and the choices of sounds and backing vocals and everything, is overwhelming. I was working in a record shop in Denver, I think, when I was introduced to her. I didn’t think it was for me and I didn’t get into her until much later. I think the first record I heard of hers was *Blue*, in California. I had a boss at the record store and he told me I needed to get *Blue* and *Court And Spark*. I was trying to get my own band going and I wanted to be like Radiohead. Later, when I moved to New York, and was working on my first solo record, Tim Smith, the former singer of Midlake, gave me a bunch of Joni Mitchell albums. The first one was *Ladies Of The Canyon* and I listened to it while walking around Brooklyn, and on the subway, and just fell deeply, deeply in love with her.

5 WOODSTOCK LADIES OF THE CANYON, 1970



HENRY DILTZ, PHOTOGRAPHER: I first met Joni at Mama Cass’s house, when she had a picnic for Eric Clapton. He’d come to town with Cream and didn’t know anybody, so she

“‘Willy’, to this day, breaks my heart when I hear it...”

GRAHAM NASH

invited him to meet some friends. One of them was David Crosby and he brought this new girl with him he’d found in Florida and flown to LA to record her first record. We were all sitting out under the trees and Joni sat there and played the whole album. Eric was spellbound. He was staring at her fingers, transfixed by her tunings. I would see Joni around at friends’ houses for dinner, or the Troubadour. One day, we went round her house down the hill from me on Lookout Mountain Avenue. She was leaning out of the window, with her elbows on the sill, relaxed, talking to my partner, Gary Burden, which allowed me to shoot about 50 pictures of her over 10 minutes or so. But “Woodstock” is a special song to me, partly because I was Michael Lang’s photographer at Woodstock. In all, I spent two-and-a-half weeks at Woodstock, photographing the building of the stage onwards, to the festival itself. Joni couldn’t make it, of course, and was stuck in her hotel room. So she

wrote the song; this idyllic metaphor for the concert rather than the reality.

6 THE CIRCLE GAME LADIES OF THE CANYON, 1970



LINDA PERHACS: So many folk singers were sticking with a pattern from the past, and men had more opportunity at that time to get contracts than women – we forget this. So when Joni

Mitchell came aboard she broke all those rules. One thing that opened the door for me was that Joni was doing so well on Warners that Universal wanted somebody in that kind of position on their label. So do I owe her a thank you? We all owe her a thank you!

There was Joan Baez, Judy Collins and a few others, but they were following more traditional lines. Joni just came right out front and said, “I’m gonna do it my way.” She was so doggone good that you couldn’t argue with her. I love everything she does. I love the early albums, because those were the ones I was first familiar with and first struck by. Songs like “The Circle Game”. People who create are out there to open new avenues, and Joni Mitchell is definitely one of the strongest we had last century. I never met her – I was in Topanga Canyon, and she was more in her community of people in Laurel Canyon, a lovely little haven, but very close to the city. Not everybody may agree, but I never feel a personality that strong doing something so well is a first-timer at it, there’s a history as a soul.



Recording with James Taylor for Carole King's *Tapestry*, 1971

1971

7 CAREY BLUE, 1971



MATTHEW WHITE: “Carey” is like a journey. It’s so personal, so intimate, so free, so independent – and very cleverly produced. There’s this really unique way that ’70s guys produce records, where there doesn’t seem like a lot of production going on, there doesn’t seem like there’s a lot of decisions being made, and it’s because they were so good at making records. But Joni is such an incredible singer – no-one can sing like that; you can try but you can’t. “Carey” has such a cool tempo. It’s kind of an ‘up’ song when so much of that record is a ‘down’. I just feel like it captured a moment of her life that was so fresh, and so fun. It’s funny, because *Blue* is so stereotypical – it’s a famous album or whatever, but it’s famous for a reason. When I was on tour last, all I listened to was *Blue* and Kendrick Lamar’s record *Good Kid, Maad City*. I liked listening to them back to back. They represent complete opposites on the musical spectrum in a lot of ways, but they’re both so beautiful and well made and well crafted. But “Carey”, I probably play this one throughout my house and in my car more than anyone else. It’s really groovy and minimal in a lot of cool ways. It gives you so much with so little.

8 BLUE BLUE, 1971



VASHTI BUNYAN: The first time I heard Joni play, I recall a borrowed cottage in the Lake District – winter 1968. The room with the TV in it had no heating. Wrapped in coat, jumpers and scarves, I watched a speckly black-and-white image of a young woman at a piano – playing a song that made me forget being cold. I was overcome with admiration for her being able to play and sing alone in front of an audience. I don’t remember the song – I only know it was as heartbreakingly beautiful as she was and that I have carried that image with me always, like an old photograph. And so now I choose a piano-led song of hers from 1970 – which was probably

when I next heard her. “Blue”... how well it conveys to me an era – and an LA canyon culture – one that I didn’t ever know, but which I feel I can hear so clear through the words of this song. She moved on into jazzy styles I had less feeling for at the time, which only goes to underline the courage with which she left her – in her label’s opinion – more commercial songs behind. She never gave up doing what she wanted to do. But when I hear her voice – from whichever decade – it is with an immediate recognition. Many may try to imitate her, but what is the point? It seems to me that to try to sound like someone else is no real compliment, but a waste of a musical talent that could be going its own way. Own way – that would be much more like her.

“Joni managed through personal experiences to embody the pulse of the times”

LEERANALDO

9 CALIFORNIA BLUE, 1971



LEERANALDO, SONIC YOUTH: Joni managed through her personal experiences to embody the pulse of the times in so many ways. “California” is one of those songs which I always come back to. She’s not quite wearing the pearls and perms that would come with the *Court And Spark* era, but it’s certainly got this slightly jet-set vibe – there’s a verse set in Paris, one on the Greek Islands, and one in Spain. But deep within all this travelling is this unsettling sadness about the war and the fact that on those fronts nothing is really changing – she’s travelling around the world, but the war is the thing that’s on her mind, and going back to her adopted home in California.

There’s something about the lyrics to this one – it sends chills up me. It’s not saying anything very directly, but it says so much in such economical means.

When Sonic Youth was working on *Daydream Nation*, I wrote “Hey Joni”. It stemmed from an odd comment that Thurston [Moore] made – he mentioned “Hey Joe” while we were working on the song, and it gave me the inspiration to flip it around. Although the song wasn’t really about her, I always thought by putting her name in the title I was professing my deep love for her music.

I don’t think she was a touchstone for the group, tuning-wise, but definitely something about those rich modal tunings she was using left a big impression on me. Back then, it was really hard to sit down and figure out what her tunings were – now you can look on the internet. So what Joni was doing was very mysterious, it’s hard to figure out. I wonder if there are any Sonic Youth tunings that actually overlap with Joni’s?

10 RIVER BLUE, 1971



LINDA THOMPSON: This is a beautiful, dark song, with an amazing lyric and melody. I particularly love that minor-key “Jingle Bells” bit at the top and bottom of the song. That lyric, “I wish I had a river I could skate away on...” Who says that? People often use rivers in a lyric, and water in general, for washing them clean, drowning in and even walking on. But skating away on... It’s a most evocative picture.

I remember exactly where I was when I heard that song and the record *Blue*. I was living at the Chateau Marmont in Los Angeles, with my darling friend Joe Boyd. He was head of film music for Warner Brothers then. He came home once with a test pressing of *Blue*. I remember being aghast with admiration and envy.

I met Joni once. Around *Blue*, she was managed by Peter Asher, and I worked for Peter for a while. She was with James Taylor at the time, and he often came by the office. She came once with one of her paintings, and a sweater she had knitted, and asked me to give them to James. Next time he came by, I gave them to him and relayed Joni’s message. I guess they were on the rocks, because he told me he didn’t want them. I’m upset to this day that I didn’t take both items home. They probably got thrown away!

11 A CASE OF YOU BLUE, 1971



JIMMY WEBB: I saw Joni the first time at the Troubadour in 1967. She looked like an angel and out of her mouth came *cinéma vérité*: real life, real pain, real suffering and sometimes joy and excitement. She found this voice to reveal things that were not previously thought of as fitting, proper or even interesting subjects for songs. That got me thinking about my own songwriting. I was privileged to be round her a lot and heard many songs before they were finished. I heard the whole of the *For The Roses* album when I was staying in London making my *Land’s End* album and she ➤



spent time with me. I had the chance to look over her shoulder and witness her methodology. She would take out her big Martin guitar and start playing these wildly interesting chords. The form of the song was constantly changing, she'd take out her notebook and have multiple versions completely written out. There was a tremendous amount of preparation. I love "A Case Of You". It's a revelation. I wish I could have written the lyrics to that song. There's 10,000 ways to tell somebody you love them and that song is one of them. The metaphor is perfect and it has a lovely air and a beautiful melody. That's my kind of stuff. She's an interesting combination of world-weary and totally innocent. I loved her and love her still.

1972

12 URGE FOR GOING B-SIDE OF "YOU TURN ME ON, I'M A RADIO", 1972



MARK LANEGAN: "Urge For Going" has got that kind of wistful, sad thing that I'm always drawn to. It's so devastatingly great, and it's one of my favourite songs. It was one of those things

I heard about through other people or read about. I remember seeing her in *Creem* magazine in the '70s, but I didn't actually get to see her in concert until, I think, the late '90s, so it took many, many years between when I first heard and became a fan and actually saw her perform. And it was a good one, too. She was on tour with Bob Dylan and Van Morrison. What I remember most about her set was how very charming she was on stage – and really funny. Yeah, man. That was some tour...

13 COLD BLUE STEEL AND SWEET FIRE FOR THE ROSES, 1972



JOE BOYD: We met at the Newport Folk Festival in '67. She and The Incredible String Band were both on the bill on the Sunday afternoon. There was an evening of just drinking and smoking dope and sitting under a tree in the balmy Rhode Island summer and listening to Joni and Mike [Heron] and Robin [Williamson] swap songs for about three hours. She didn't have a record deal, but George Hamilton IV had a hit with "Urge For Going". She wanted to sort out a European publishing deal, so she came to London to stay. I was sharing a flat with a guy who was kind of involved in the underground, and the morning after she arrived we were all woken up by the Flying Squad. Joni was pushed up against a wall, frisked and threatened by the British bobbies in plain clothes. Anyway, I introduced her to Essex Music, and while she was here, The Incredible String Band were playing at the Speakeasy. She came and did a short set at the beginning of their show, and blew everybody away. Then she went back to America, and the rest is history. I guess my favourite song is "Cold Blue Steel And Sweet Fire". The lyrics look like they're about heroin. That was a period where there was an awful lot of drugs in

Laurel Canyon. There's lines like, "Hollow gray fire escape thief/Looking for sweet fire, shadow of lady release". But one of the most amazing lines, it's so brilliant, is "Do you want to contact somebody first?/Leave someone a letter/You can come now, or you can come later". It's so bureaucratic, it's almost like signing you into the prison after you've been arrested, you know? She's playing guitar with James Burton on that track. There's this weird swing, it's a really complex rhythm track. And the use of the saxophone foreshadows things that she got into later on, doing much more musically complex material.

14 FOR THE ROSES FOR THE ROSES, 1972



JEAN GRAND-MAÎTRE (ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, ALBERTA BALLET): When we came together to talk about the ballet, *The Fiddle And The Drum*, it was during the Iraq invasion and she was really pissed off about it, and about Earth's ecological destruction. So a lot of the songs we selected were dark, but "For The Roses" is a much more poetic song. The orchestral version in the ballet is deeply

"She looked like
an angel and out
of her mouth
came real life,
real pain..."

JIMMY WEBB

melancholic. It's about the plight of the artist. When we invited her to create a ballet, we thought it was a long shot, but I didn't know that she loves dance. I think she enjoyed it because it made her do something new, and that's what she's always wanted. I call her the Stanley Kubrick of music, because she's made a masterpiece in every genre, just like he did. I was at her birthday party in LA last year, and she's got more energy than ever. Her mind never stops, it's a locomotive of thinking and feeling. She questions herself, and doubts herself, and criticises herself. I think there's always a chance of new music. She was writing a few months ago – but there was the event at the Hammer Museum in LA, so I think she put that on hold to finish the *Love Has Many Faces* boxset. The ideas are always there. As a Canadian, I can say she's one of the most important artists that our country has ever produced.

1974

15 HELP ME COURT AND SPARK, 1974



MIKE MILLS, REM: As with most people, your favourite songs are the ones which were played while things were happening in your life, and this came around at an interesting period in my life. "Help Me" was a song that always seemed magical and beautiful, and it showed what you could do that was non-traditional and yet very melodic and effective. When I heard this it must have been '74, so I would have been 15 or 16 – I was just discovering heartache, so the song made a lot of sense to me! Some of *Court And Spark* was kinda baroque, and that's what I enjoyed, the songs could be non-traditional but melodic, catchy and hummable. I know more about her singles than I do about her deeper tracks, but this was one song which impressed me with how you could have a radio hit with something that was complicated – complicated arrangements, songs and unusual melodies, and yet they were able to be big hits on the radio. She, like REM I think, didn't care about having hits. She made the songs she wanted to make and if radio was going to move in her direction then I think she was fine with that, but I don't think she was out for hit singles.

16 SAME SITUATION COURT AND SPARK, 1974



LAURA MARLING: My dad gave me *Court And Spark* when I was 11 or 12, along with a few others. He really liked this song, apart from anything because the melodies were so strange. He bought me a guitar and I remember sitting down in a room with him trying to learn a few songs, one of which was "Same Situation". The record had such an important effect on me. It's sort of a concept album in that it has a thread that follows all the way through and all of the songs connect into one, which is pretty rad for that era. I don't know what it is about that song, it hit me the most. It's funny, I feel that Joni Mitchell resonates in a special way with women; not exclusively, of course, but that song is so perceptive in the way it articulates specific thoughts and feelings.

17 FREE MAN IN PARIS COURT AND SPARK, 1974



FATHER JOHN MISTY: I have a really distinct memory of being in high school, driving around late at night around Christmas, and the modern rock station played "River". That knocked me off my ass. Then, when I was about 20, I moved to Seattle and started listening to *Blue* incessantly. But "Free Man In Paris", I was with someone for three years who managed the band [Fleet Foxes]. We would listen to that song around the house and she would sing it. It was so specific, like it was tailor-made for this person that I loved at this point in my life. I was watching her life get overtaken by the work. So on some level, I relate to the song. You start out as a songwriter and then all of a sudden you feel like you're running a small business. You have employees and you've got the merchandise and people are asking you about budgets. So there's something about that song's portrayal of the black hole that a career in

Supporting Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young at Wembley Stadium, London, September 14, 1974



music can become. The irony is, you get into this thing for freedom and creative expression, live this lofty, spiritual existence, but before you know it, you're filling out Excel spreadsheets. But Joni is the real deal, and "Free Man In Paris" is a very special song.

18 | BIG YELLOW TAXI MILES OF AISLES, 1974



MAX BENNETT, BASSIST, LA EXPRESS: The band had just started. We were working at the Baked Potato, the jazz club, and she came in. She went crazy for the band and asked if we would

like to play on a couple of songs on her upcoming album. That was *Court And Spark*. Then we went on tour with her.

We recorded *Miles Of Aisles* at the Universal Amphitheatre. It was open air, and chilly at night, so we were on stage freezing every night for a week while they were recording us. The version of "Big Yellow Taxi" from *Miles Of Aisles* was fun to play live; we just kept adding little things to it while we were on the road. Things are never the same once you do the album and then you go on the road, you alter songs as you go along, and that tune became a lot of fun to play. Being in the studio with Joni was very different to being on stage. The studio is pretty much business; friendly business, though, because she respected the band. We were all professional jazz musicians and because she would skip beats or whatever she did to make a song unique, that never bothered us. She said once, the guys in CSNY couldn't get it because they were a different type of musician.

When we were on the road, we hung out a lot together. Because we all liked to bowl, her manager would go to a bowling alley in the city where we were playing and ask them to keep it open so we could go bowling after the concert. Of

all the people I've gone on the road with – Ella Fitzgerald, Peggy Lee – she was definitely the best.

1975 19 | THE JUNGLE LINE THE HISSING OF SUMMER LAWNS, 1975



AL STEWART: I went to see the first concert she ever gave in England, a little showcase put on by the record company. There were about 20 people there. Then, a little later, I played the Royal Festival Hall. Fairport Convention were the headliners and Joni was the special guest; that would have been 1968. About 10 years later, I played at a benefit concert for an American charity called Bread & Roses run by Mimi Fariña, Joan Baez's sister. Joni was on that bill too, so our paths keep crossing.

I think a lot of her style comes from those guitar tunings; because she had an illness in her youth, she had to adapt to play the guitar in her own style. Everyone around the folk scene played D-A-D-G-A-D, but not Joni. "The Jungle Line", though, is quite a departure. It's a very odd chord construction; very unorthodox. I don't even think there's any rhythm guitar on it. "Rousseau walks on trumpet paths/Safaris to the heart of all that jazz..." She is very literate. She uses words that pretty much no-one else would, but she uses them more in an emotional way than an intellectual way. So I'm always interested in what she does with the language, to conjure up a fresh take on something which otherwise would be quite run of the mill.

20 | DON'T INTERRUPT THE SORROW THE HISSING OF SUMMER LAWNS, 1975



ROBBEN FORD, GUITARIST, LA EXPRESS: The song that always comes to mind first, it's not obvious I don't think. But it is "Don't Interrupt The Sorrow", which I believe is the fourth tune

on *The Hissing Of Summer Lawns*. It doesn't really have a dynamic range – it doesn't go higher, it doesn't go lower, like other things might do. But Joni has this groove that just keeps on going, rather than things getting louder she just adds. That's how tunes are done in classical music. It's not about playing louder, you just add more instruments and it naturally gets louder. There's that quality to the recording that is done by layering it. It's also got this slinky feel to it! So it has this very interesting journey. I play Dobro guitar on it, something kinda funky, kinda bluesy, and Larry Carlton is playing this very fluid electric guitar that comes in and out. It has an incredible lyric too. It's just a great, unusual piece of music and I'm very proud to have been on it. It's my favourite Joni Mitchell song and I played on it!

1976 21 | COYOTE HEJIRA, 1976



SIMON NICOL, FAIRPORT CONVENTION: I can never get tired of "Coyote". There's a particularly good live version, from the Greek Theatre in 1979.

It has her stamp; that unusual degree of storytelling going on during that period, and she tells the story in quite a tongue-twisting way. The delivery is more energetic than reflective. It sounds like she's having a ball, especially when she's with Jaco and the others in the band from that period.

I met her a couple of times. She was stepping out with Joe Boyd when he first signed us. This was ➤

1967 or '68, and she found herself in London to talk publishing with somebody and she was staying with Joe for a week or so. He invited us round to meet her one afternoon. I was 16 or 17 and she was this sophisticated super hippie, with this North American aura about her. I recall she had a very smart Martin D28 guitar. We sat in the room and she sang about half a dozen songs. That's where we got "Eastern Rain" and "Chelsea Morning" and the other songs of hers that are on our early albums. Then the next time I saw her was 1970 or '71. She'd parted company with Joe by then, but somehow we ended up in her house in Laurel Canyon in the afternoon, having tea. It wasn't going to be builders; it was Earl Grey drunk in little Chinese tea cups, the ones without handles. We sat on the deck in her lovely garden, overlooking the canyon. That was jolly.

22 HEJIRA

HEJIRA, 1976



JONATHAN WILSON: I was a young jazz fanatic when I heard the *Mingus* album and the recordings she'd made with Jaco Pastorius. Yet when I listen back to "Hejira", the way she melts jazz into her thing seems so effortless. Her sensibilities and her ethereal qualities speak to me, the harmonic depth and chords that she achieved being self-taught is staggering. But on "Hejira", the way she cross-pollinates between styles is very affecting. I always think about when I was in my studio with David Crosby, and just the reverence with which David – or Graham [Nash], Jackson [Browne] or whoever – talk about her. David told me about when he first heard her, and how she blew his mind and he was so excited to bring her back to town to share this stupendous talent, and he's like a proud parent. You know, I ended up at her 70th birthday party. It was completely random. We were downstairs at this Hollywood club and upstairs had a VIP space. I thought I'd pop up and see what was going on. I sneaked my way up and Joni was sitting there. It was her birthday party. They had a beautiful cake in the shape of a Martin guitar. I spoke to her briefly and wished her a happy birthday.

23 SONG FOR SHARON

HEJIRA, 1976

JOHN MULVEY, UNCUT EDITOR 2016-18:

When I listen to *Hejira*, I don't often notice the music that much. The jazz humidity, Mitchell's remorseless journey away from folk and the expectations of her fans; these details seem at best incidental, at times irrelevant. What I hear are the words, great measured cascades of them, and the way Joni Mitchell delivers them as a stream of consciousness that never loses its meticulous poetic poise.

Hejira works best as a single piece, a bittersweet travelogue of sorts. But its pleasures are most satisfyingly exemplified by "Song For Sharon", where bassist Max Bennett and drummer John Guerin empathetically track Mitchell's voice and guitar for the best part of nine minutes. Such is the focus on the lyrics that the rhythm seems to be set by her ruminations, line by line.

"Song For Sharon" is about the conflicting attractions of rootless freedom and romance,

about the divergent paths of Mitchell and a friend from childhood, about the consolations that music, at least occasionally, can offer. Ideas and stories rear up and evaporate – a trip to Staten Island to buy a mandolin is memorably hijacked by "*the long white dress of love on a storefront mannequin*" – but while nothing is resolved, I can think of few songs that present more effectively the contradictory impulses of a great artist. One moment, Mitchell is keen to embrace "*a wide wide world of noble causes/And lovely landscapes to discover*". The next, she's frankly admitting, "*All I really want to do right now/Is find another lover*".

And always, unerringly, she has the precise words for imprecise emotions. After a friend kills herself, and her friends call up, "*all emotions and abstractions*", Mitchell nails the vagaries of the human condition with, I think, one of my favourite couplets in any song. "*It seems we all live so close to that line*", she sings, as if the perfect words just materialised in her head, "*And so far from satisfaction...*"

"She plays by ear...
she makes up
colours to explain
what she's feeling"

ROGER McGUINN

1977

24 DREAMLAND

DON JUAN'S RECKLESS DAUGHTER, 1977



ROGER McGUINN: I covered "Dreamland" on my *Cardiff Rose* album. I was riding on the tour bus with Joni on the Rolling Thunder Revue. Sitting next to her, she had a little composition book and she was filling it up with new songs, and I was getting ready to record *Cardiff Rose*. I didn't have enough songs to complete it, so I turned to Joni and asked her if she had any spare. She said, "Well, McGuinn, I got this one song you might be able to use, but there's a line in it I'm not sure about." I said, "Yeah, what's that?" She said, "*I wrapped a flag around me like a Dorothy Lamour sarong*"... I said, "Well... I can work with that!" [laughs] So I changed it to "*Errol Flynn sarong*". She must have had 25 or 30 songs in there, and then she lost the book! I don't know if she ever recovered it, somehow it slipped out of her possession. I guess she remembered some of them, but I recall she was quite devastated at losing it.

On my version, I was trying to emulate some of Joni's phrasing, on the vocals. And I remember she came to the studio, and she said, "Well, it sounds pretty good, but you need to work on the vocal", and I said "Well, no, no, that's the way I wanted it." I don't think she appreciated my

version. It was so different from hers. Joni's not really a technician of music. She plays by ear, she makes up her own theory, and makes up colours and things to explain what she's feeling, what she's trying to express with her music. I remember being at Leonard Cohen's house for dinner with her, and she and Leonard were talking about this kind of language that they'd developed, about music in terms of colours, which was a very interesting conversation.

1982

25 CHINESE CAFÉ / UNCHAINED MELODY

WILD THINGS RUN FAST, 1982



LARRY KLEIN, BASS: I was called to play on some sessions that ended up becoming *Wild Things Run Fast*. I was 25, and she was unlike any woman that I have ever been around or worked

with. I was completely impressed with her. In the studio, she was very open and adventurous and curious and completely game for trying new ways of approaching music. We became an item and she wrote "Chinese Café"/"Unchained Melody" somewhat early on in our relationship. She was travelling across Canada by car, from Calgary to Saskatoon, a trip we did several times ourselves together, but this particular time she was travelling by herself. There is something in the simplicity of the song and its sentiment that is extraordinarily touching to me. It has this wistful quality to it, of someone looking out at the world changing. The hook of the chorus is, "*Nothing lasts for long*". She's using that line in relation to human experience but also the ecology of the planet. Then she interlocks it with "Unchained Melody", and the way in which she undulates between her new poem and snatches of that old song is amazing to me. When we worked on that together, it had this incredible power to make me cry, or at least just make emotions well up inside of me. To this day, when I listen to the recording that we made of it, it has the same quality for me. There's just something so evocative about it and sad. But sad in a bittersweet way, you know, in the way that melancholy is kind of sweet.

26 MY SECRET PLACE

CHALK MARK IN A RAINSTORM, 1988



NICK MASON: This came from the period when she was married to Larry Klein. I've always loved the sound of her voice, right from when we listened to her first album, and she's one of those

artists where I have virtually all her albums and so it's very hard to find a single song or moment that encapsulates it all. I would never get tired of hearing a song like "Chelsea Morning" or "Big Yellow Taxi" for instance, but I love some of the work she's done on *Shine* just as much as any on her earlier albums. Part of what I love about her music is how she's changed, that's the interesting thing. I love the things that have remained constant – the quality of the singing, the interpretation of the songs – but the music itself has also become more sophisticated, especially



At the time of
*The Hissing Of
Summer Lawns*,
October 17, 1975

after she began to work with Larry Klein. He brought a real jazz influence to her music that I loved. You can hear that change on the two versions of “Both Sides, Now” [from *Clouds and Both Sides Now*]. If I had to pick one of the songs from the albums he produced, it would be “My Secret Place” from *Chalk Mark In A Rain Storm* because she’s doing duets with various guest artists and that one was with Peter Gabriel, so it’s a two-for-one as I’m such a fan of Peter, too. Their voices just combined perfectly.

1991

27 | COME IN FROM THE COLD

NIGHT RIDE HOME, 1991

MICHAEL BONNER, EDITOR: “The ’80s were very hard on me,” Mitchell confessed to Texas radio station KGSR-FM in 1998. “Everybody that could, robbed me in the greedy ’80s.” Indeed, *Night Ride Home* – her first album in the ’90s – marked a significant return for Mitchell. The songs privileged her old jazz guitar phrasings, discreetly accompanied by co-producer Larry Klein’s sensitive bass-playing. A highlight among several graceful reminiscences that feature on the album, “Come In From The Cold” finds Mitchell chronicling a narrator’s sadness – in relationships, youthful ambitions that never came to fruition, the failings of her generation, the ageing process. Its layers of nostalgic

ruminations create a pervasive sense of loneliness and isolation: “*I am not some commission/Like a statue in a park/I am flesh and blood and vision/I am howling in the dark*”.

1996

28 | MAN FROM MARS GRACE OF MY HEART OST, 1996/ TAMING THE TIGER, 1998

STEPHEN TROUSSE, UNCUT

CONTRIBUTOR: When ex-husband Larry Klein approached Joni in 1995 to contribute a song (maybe something in the vein of “For The Roses”?) to the soundtrack he was curating for Allison Anders’ Brill Building movie *à clef*, *Grace Of My Heart*, she turned him down flat. What was she – some kind of short-order hack? She reconsidered, so the story goes, when her favourite cat, Nietzsche, went missing for over a fortnight and the grief hurt her into writing a song that, purely coincidentally, was perfect for the film (where it was sung by Kristen Vigard). As alibis go, it’s up there with *Blood On The Tracks* being about Chekhov. When she finally released “Man From Mars” herself on 1998’s *Taming The Tiger*, the song was comfortably declawed and domesticated, arranged on a plump bed of new age synth and fretless bass. But check out the original piano version with Joni’s demo vocal, accidentally released on first pressings of the soundtrack album and swiftly deleted to be replaced by the cast recording, but now easily findable on YouTube, for one of the rawest reckonings of loss (“*There is no centre to my life now/No grace in my heart*”) in the entire Mitchell songbook.

2000

29 | A CASE OF YOU BOTH SIDES NOW, 2000



GUY GARVEY, ELBOW: This is the orchestral version of “A Case Of You” from *Both Sides Now*. The song itself is very nostalgic; she was talking about past love, and it’s fairly melancholy. To hear her sing it as an old lady with a smoky old vocal and a big lush orchestra behind her, it’s just really beautiful. The first time you hear it is unbeatable, especially if you don’t know what you’re listening to, which was the case when I heard it. My sister Becky has always made me compilations, especially when the band is going on tour. Becky said, “I want to be with you when you hear the first track on this compilation.” She was working at Granada TV, and I went to meet her in the canteen. There was a chap from *Coronation Street* at the next table, I can’t remember his name. I just remember thinking, ‘I wish he’d shut up, I can’t hear this.’ I recognised the chords when the strings picked up and when her voice came in with its age and its richness and its experience and its longing and its heartbreak, there I am, sat blubbing next to whatever-his-name from *Coronation Street*. It’s just really beautiful. You can hear her influence in “Starlings” or “The Bones In You”. Her phrasing and her lines are organic, and it twists and it dives and it jumps around, and that’s why it’s so beautiful. It’s as natural as birds in the sky. ➤



4 + Joni:
Wembley
Stadium,
1974

2002

30 AMELIA TRAVELOGUE, 2002



ROBERT PLANT: On *Travelogue*, there's a great version of "Amelia". I love that orchestral version. If I ever commissioned anybody to look at me for 40 years and then write a song about me, it would be that song, it's all encapsulated there. What happened on *Travelogue* is she revisited a lot of her old songs, but the emotive quality of the voice has changed – as has mine. The voice has to change or you give up, so you have to keep using it. There's a lot of muscle involved, but also a lot of it is in the mind, gaining confidence. With "Amelia", I love the drama and the thought in the orchestration; it's a beautiful contrast to the emotive quality of the lyrics and combines with her vocal performance. It's so beautiful. Joni

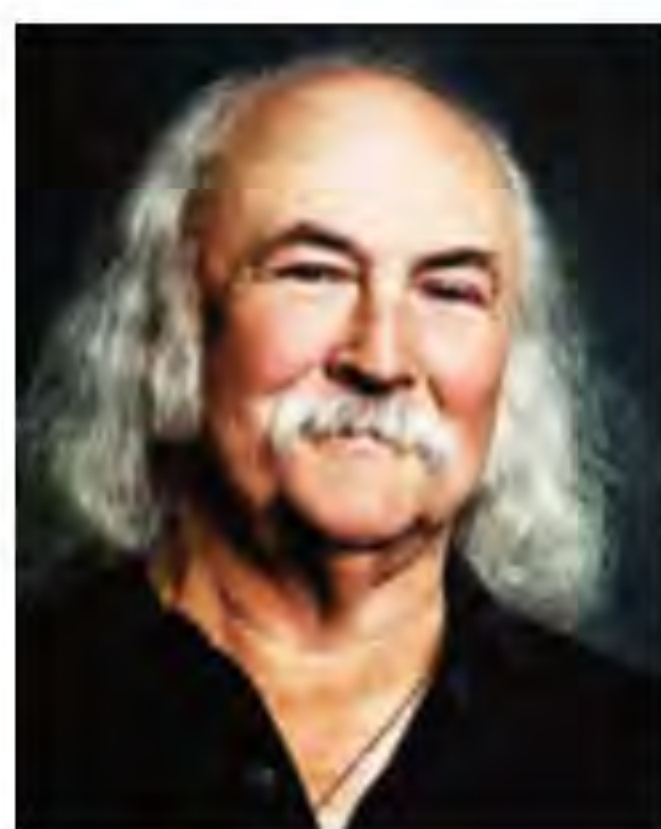
"I love the drama and the thought in the orchestration"

ROBERT PLANT

had a huge effect on me. Not so much as an influence, but as a really big, strong member of the fraternity that I really admired. She was part of that group effecting social change, attempting to embrace and demonstrate an awareness of the circumstances of America through music. I think that was a magnificent time, and all power to those people that did that. I wouldn't say I aspired to it myself. I'm a Black Country boy.

"She is probably the best writer of us all"

DAVID CROSBY
salutes the genius of Joni



I DISCOVERED JONI in a club [*The Gaslight South, Coconut Grove*] in Florida in '67. I walked in and she was standing there singing. It was one of those early songs like 'Michael From Mountains' or 'Both Sides, Now'. I was stunned. She had the voice and the guitar-playing. She'd already been singing for a while with her husband, Chuck Mitchell, and then by herself after she got smart and realised that she was good on her own. It was a hell of an experience to walk in and run into somebody who was writing songs at that level.

I produced her first album, and left it pretty simple. If I did her any kind of favour, other than introducing her to everybody, it was to keep that record pretty pristine. What folk singers did back then was a kind of indicated arrangement. We all learned how to be the whole band on one guitar, and her arrangements were superb. I was afraid that people would try to take her stuff and translate it into a band and lose the magic of how she played.

Joni had a lot of great qualities, but one of them has always been that she was a superb musician,

not just a great singer, not just a great songwriter. I didn't like the big lush orchestrations of her stuff as much, because I really love when it's her playing the guitar and the dulcimer, and her giving her own swing to it.

I think if you look back on this past 50 years from, say, 50 years from now, I don't think anybody is close to Joni Mitchell or Bob Dylan in significance and songwriting. The two of them stand out. Now, I think Bob is a fantastic poet, and I'm a huge believer in Bob Dylan, I've made records out of his songs dozens of times, I think he's fantastic – but Joni's a better musician. I don't think there's any question about it. She's certainly a better singer, 10 times the singer Bob ever was, and as good a poet in her own way. But it's apples and oranges, they approached things completely differently. If you listen to her poetry it's hard to deny, man – I mean, Christ. I've been singing 'Amelia' lately, and damn, her poetry's good! There's so many songs of hers that are so brilliantly written. You can't say which one is the best. There are 30 or 40 best ones.

At the time when I first met her and brought her back to California, we were going together, and I don't know if it lasted a year, but it lasted a long time. It was good, but it was daunting. I would sing her a song and she'd sing me three back that were all better than the one I sang her. Something like that can either make you feel belittled or it can encourage you to do better. And what it did with me is it encouraged me to do better. It made me write songs like "Guinnevere".

She's probably the best writer of us all, and I still think that. I don't think there's any question. I don't think there's a singer-songwriter in the world that hasn't been affected by Joni. If you listen to her songs and you're a singer-songwriter, you can't help but be affected by her. You want to be that good, we all did. We all do. ●

INTERVIEWS BY MICHAEL BONNER, TOM PINNOCK
AND PETER WATTS