

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**

contents

6 “She wanted to be a big deal” **CLASSIC INTERVIEW** Half a century on, the story of a singer-songwriter’s remarkable rise

18 SONG TO A SEAGULL **ALBUM FEATURE** A fêted 23-year-old songwriter steps into the spotlight, with a maverick ex-Byrd producing

22 CLOUDS **ALBUM FEATURE** The world-weary ingénue embraces her own contradictions with soon-to-be-standard songs

26 LADIES OF THE CANYON **ALBUM FEATURE** Fame beckons as we hear Mitchell “cracking out of her chrysalis and beginning to soar”

30 “I want my music to get more sophisticated” **CLASSIC INTERVIEW** Joni visits the UK, leaving her public and our correspondent awestruck

34 BLUE **ALBUM FEATURE** Romantic upheaval and restless travel fuel a timeless classic

38 FOR THE ROSES **ALBUM FEATURE** A retreat to Canada produces a more impressionistic fifth album

42 COURT AND SPARK **ALBUM FEATURE**

Backed by the LA Express, a bigger, bolder Mitchell sound is born, with hints of jazzier experiments to come

46 “They say I’ve changed... Yes, I have!” **CLASSIC INTERVIEW** Back in London, Joni isn’t talking, but she still reveals some secrets

52 THE HISSING OF SUMMER LAWN **ALBUM FEATURE** Subtle sounds and suburban musings: an underrated (at the time) gem

56 HEJIRA **ALBUM FEATURE** Fearless women and open roads inspire an expansive, experimental journey

60 DON JUAN’S RECKLESS DAUGHTER **ALBUM FEATURE** Inching further into jazz with a bold double album

64 MINGUS **ALBUM FEATURE** A dying mentor inspires a meeting of minds like no other

68 WILD THINGS RUN FAST **ALBUM FEATURE** The Police, Lionel Richie and a new beau help usher Joni into a brash new decade



72 DOG EAT DOG **ALBUM FEATURE** Thomas Dolby’s synthscape soundtrack Ms Mitchell’s raging broadsides against the Reagan era

76 “You’re going to get me into my apocalyptic vision...” **CLASSIC INTERVIEW** The newlywed holds forth on censorship, Live Aid and her synth-heavy new LP

98 TAMING THE TIGER **ALBUM FEATURE** A new guitar sound, a rediscovered daughter and... a last hurrah?

102 BOTH SIDES NOW **ALBUM FEATURE** The legend finds a new voice, via vintage covers and a couple of her own old favourites

106 TRAVELOGUE **ALBUM FEATURE** Mitchell delves further into her back catalogue, in playfully revisionist mood

110 SHINE **ALBUM FEATURE** A ballet soundtrack is a surprise final encore to a peerless singer-songwriting career

114 Joni Mitchell’s 30 Greatest Songs **CLASSIC INTERVIEW** Friends, fans and bandmates take their pick

126 “I’m a fighter, that’s what I do” **CLASSIC INTERVIEW** Joni gathers her strength since her aneurysm in 2015

138 LIVES AND COMPILATIONS **ALBUM FEATURE** Bootlegs, outtakes, concert recordings and more

142 MISCELLANY **ALBUM FEATURE** Singles, DVDs, paintings, guest appearances... and those guitar tunings in full

146 STOP ME **ALBUM FEATURE** LA Express guitarist Robben Ford tells of his journey with Joni



Joni at 75: a birthday celebration at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, LA, November 7, 2018



86 CHALK MARK IN A RAIN STORM **ALBUM FEATURE** Celebrity guests add stardust to a glossy late-'80s outing

90 NIGHT RIDE HOME **ALBUM FEATURE** A new decade heralds a return to intimate, introspective concerns

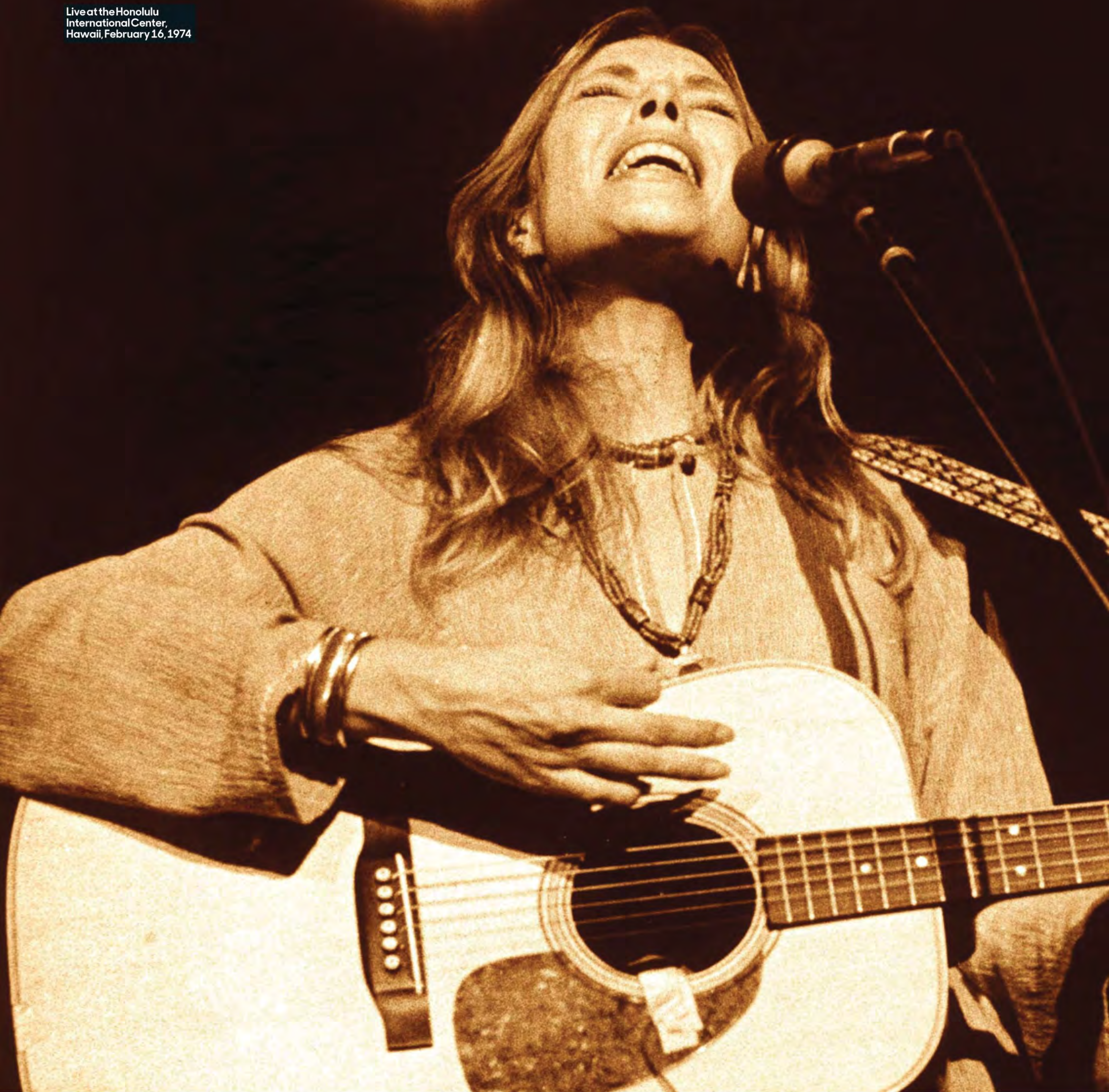
94 TURBULENT INDIGO **ALBUM FEATURE** As a Van Gogh homage adorns the cover, a tortured artist vents her spleen between the grooves within



“They say
I’ve changed...
Yes, I have!”

By 1974 Joni Mitchell has given up interviews, but as a run of shows at London’s New Victoria Theatre proves, she has ways of appearing more accessible than ever. **MICHAEL WATTS** and **STEVE CLARK** take notes, and follow the trail to the after-show, where Rod Stewart pays homage and Joni’s manager offers encouragement... “She’s nice. Go over and say hello!”

Live at the Honolulu
International Center,
Hawaii, February 16, 1974



ROBERT KNIGHT ARCHIVE/REDFERNS

ENTERTAINMENT, as the critic Ned Rorem has pointed out, confirms rather than challenges. One might comment that there are entertainers and there are blue-blood artists, but that the two don't often coincide in popular music. When they do, you've good reason to believe you're in the presence of something special and rarefied: genius as opposed to talent.

As far as I know, nobody has ever asked for their money back at a Joni Mitchell concert, and that's a

fair enough endorsement of good entertainment for you. At the same time you'd be a pretty boneheaded mutt not to feel challenged by her presence and the splendid mystery of her music.

There's nothing equivocal about shivers bristling on the spine as she hovers into view upon the stage and that effortless, crystal voice begins to play upon the sensibilities. Joni Mitchell is disturbing in a very real way, because after watching and listening to her for a while you start thinking she's not just a woman, she's WOMAN, embodying all male desires and expectations.

Small wonder then that a legion of very well known men have been sufficiently drawn by the

siren's call to jump in headfirst after her. So this is the meaning of worship? Like the White Goddess of mythology she beckons – elusive, virginal and not a little awe-inspiring. It must be a trifle terrifying to know you appear that perfect. Crap, she'd probably reply, because after all she's human and with a well-developed sense of humour, too.

Idolatry is fun, but it gets a little wearing after the initial enslavement. Her biggest problem in recent years, one might argue, has been to convince us that she's not Lady Madonna, children at her feet, and not, for that matter, a latterday Joan Baez for the pure of heart...



Still, the mystique persists, and it's not just confined to male fantasies and communicants. Without her ever having made much outright comment on it, ardent feminists inevitably tend to see her as the patron saint of Lib, finding all the justification they need in the barely oblique autobiography of her albums. Therein lie exposed all her innermost thoughts and feelings, her psychic and sexual wrestlings with the male species that she's at pains never to divulge in any journalistic context. A true paradox.

For her part she retires to some private world, there to view the outside happenings with a deep and discerning detachment. She laughs a lot –

girlishly, even – but I should think, from the few occasions I've seen her away from the public platform, she's careful to keep her guard up. For a woman so obviously sensitised by her experiences it must be necessary; flippant posturing and brassy panache are not weapons in her armoury. Ms Midler and Ms Streisand find no echoes.

Dory Previn can turn it into tragi-comedy, play Woody Allen from the safety of the psychoanalyst's couch, but Joni always makes us feel her soul is on the line. It's all rather confusing for a mere mortal male: the protective instinct met head on by her sensual authoritativeness.

But quite evidently, something has changed of

late, for her concert appearances, such as Saturday's at London's New Victoria Theatre, are now much less solemnly artistic than in the past. She no longer even resembles the old coffee-house folk singer, with long blonde hair brushing shoulders and eyebrows; it's curled and finessed, and her cheeks glow with makeup.

Her manager, Elliot Roberts, laughs as you remark upon this. "Well," he says, "she's a woman!" Undeniably, but the effect is somehow less ethereal. And then there's a band around her for the first time, Tom Scott's LA Express, filling the emptiness and silence between the grand piano, the acoustic guitar and Appalachian harp.

Joni actually rocking out with some funky chicken, Joni closing the show with Annie Ross's little exercise in lingual humour, "Twisted". Joni cracking wry jokes. Joni elaborating long stories to her audience as preludes to her songs, and even – for her pains – coming in for the affectionate rebuke of "speed freak" from some guy out there in the crowd.

Joni, finally, somewhat more in evidence as the entertainer, as well as the artist, and suddenly the sharp realisation for this listener of the gap in time and emotion between a song's composition and its public performance, and in particular the extent of her professional skill in pulling out that original emotion. Yes, she was as great as ever, but her performance was doubly interesting for the way the new situation threw light on her artistic functioning.

In "The Same Situation" she muffed the second stanza, stopped and laughed broadly, then explained via the piano how she was confusing the particular passage with a new melody she was working on. Eventually she went back to the song and performed it with such conviction and sincerity that it might have been the freshest thing she'd written.

She preceded "People's Parties" with a wickedly intelligent and humorous rap about the incident from which it sprang, complete with a dissertation on the significance of Nixon's facial expressions. And then she illuminated a song about her mistrust of materialism, together with critics and the music industry, with a completely evocative tale about ascetic existence in British Columbia and the humanistic qualities of the arbutus tree that grows there!

These virtual self-parables and the evident disregard for the private mask made her more accessible than she's ever seemed. Contrast this attitude with the incommunicado stance of Dylan, the male artist whose stature she most closely approaches, and one can't help but feel her performances gain from it.

On the other hand, perhaps, by featuring a band, she never built up and sustained the deepest intimacy of atmosphere that she's often achieved before with just an acoustic and a piano. But it was time for her to devise a new mode of presentation, and in the LA Express she couldn't have found finer instruments.

If anything, they helped to concentrate attention on the arranging side of her talents. For instance, that usually delicate song "Woodstock" was here translated into a piece of funk, with snapping snare work from John Guerin and the deep, churning Fender of Max Bennett. It didn't quite suit the lyrics, but what *were* you to do with a four-year-old hippie anthem? ➤

The LA Express perform a similar kind of function for Joni as the Section did for James Taylor: they're both an independent unit and a backup band. But the Section don't have quite the same degree of intensity and virtuosity. As the LA Express went through a short warm-up set for Joni, it gradually began to dawn upon us that they weren't just B-movie filler material for the great extravaganza. Not that the presence of Robben Ford, the guitarist last seen here with Jimmy Witherspoon, would suggest that. Though the context didn't allow for much in the way of real soloing, his gifts were always apparent in deft touches and complements, and his enthusiasm – his body jiggling around and long hair flapping – was infectious.

Roger Kellaway on electric piano had one roaring solo on "Raised On Robbery", and Tom Scott played a variety of parts on saxes, flute and clarinet – a lovely, wistful sign-off on "For Free" – but the essence of their role was its selflessness, just as their inclinations were obviously towards jazz. And for Joni's music they were perfect, gilding the lily at exactly the right junctures and taking the edge off the occasional austerity of her live performance.

Now, too, Joni seems able to laugh at herself more – at the public image of her. In "For Free" she could slip in a sly reference to not just one or two, but "16 gentlemen" lovers, an indication of her self-confidence and maturity. Again, the gentle humour of her public self, the optimism of her onstage presence, contrasted with the disquiet and virtual despair of her records. Ultimately, you're forced to admit, she remains a cool and beautiful enigma, all the more so with a new style of performance that stresses her easiness of manner.

For Saturday's performance did, indeed, confirm and challenge one's feelings about her, and at the risk of being accused of critical overkill, I'd say she's just about the most fascinating and involving artist of the times. She's found a uniquely personal way of transcending the rock idiom while retaining the rock audience. What's more she's undisputedly an artist of the future, who's yet to



hit anything like a peak. She's got everything she needs, she's an artist... she don't look back.

MICHAEL WATTS



THE LADY sits at the head of the table, boyfriend on her right. Her face isn't attractive in the normal sense of the word, but it's not the kind you forget in a hurry – gaunt without being wasted and highlighted by prominent cheekbones. It's also a kind of haunted face.

She's a rich girl and not afraid to admit it. One of the "nouveaux riches" she'd called herself earlier – though that was slightly tongue-in-cheek. She's got a sense of humour, too, see.

The humour of her public self contrasted with the disquiet of her records

Every now and then, a well-wisher nudges in and says hello to her. Rod Stewart, bright green suit, matching tartan waistcoat, and ruffled front shirt, goes and has a bit of a natter. Has his picture taken.

She doesn't stay very long and, after a while, she walks – bodyguarded – out of the restaurant where her party's being held and into a black limo. She'd sang about that car earlier (or, to be precise, a car like it) in a song called "For Free" which comes from her third LP, *Ladies Of The Canyon*. Changed the words a little, though. In the original, she sang about having just three gentlemen escorting her to the halls. This evening she'd sang "about 16". And as she sang the lines "And I play if you have the money or if you're a friend to me" a note of cynicism crept into her voice. Was she being hypocritical? Or was this another example of Joni Mitchell's fearsome honesty?

She's a star all right, but she comes over as the Reluctant Star, as with most other human situations she can see through that one. For instance, Joni Mitchell barely does any interviews. "She's nice. Go over and say hello. She'd like to meet you but she doesn't do interviews... These things are so awkward." Co-manager Elliot Roberts, in London with her, takes care of business.

She doesn't like having her photo taken either. Some fella at her concert – one of three at London's New Victoria Theatre – broadcast the fact that Miss Mitchell would leave the stage if any pictures were taken. And at the party afterwards a similar statement was issued by the English boss of Elektra-Asylum, her record company.

Is this elusiveness yet another example of keeping the press away from the star so as to increase the enigma? Or is it that Joni doesn't really consider herself too much of a star – or, more likely, doesn't put that much importance on her star status? From her lyrics it's obvious that she's quite aware of her stardom, but she seems to regard it as inhibiting. But in the same breath she enjoys the freedom that it brings, ie, the cash. In "For The Roses", she sings, "I guess I seem ungrateful with my teeth sunk in the hand that brings me things I really can't give up just yet".

ON SATURDAY she didn't look too much like a star, either on stage or off. For the first half of her set she wore flared jeans and a blouse belted around her middle and changed into a plain powder-blue evening gown for the second half. But the music... that's what Joni Mitchell is all about. Forget all this star crap. I think she tries to.

Tom Scott's LA Express opened the show with around half an hour or so of jazz-cum-funk doodlings. Scott has now been playing horns with Joni for her last two albums, *For The Roses* and *Court And Spark* – although it wasn't until the latter that his music played any real role in her music. All the musicians in his band are very accomplished, but often the music they produced degenerated into mere muzak. And somehow they overdid it at times.

Joni herself appeared on stage without any "Hello-I'm-glad-to-be-back-in-England" (no bullshit, you see) and, strumming an acoustic guitar, went into that Nazareth (!!) song "This Flight Tonight". She didn't sound too good and her voice seemed kind of flat and the band trod very gently, feeling their way. Obviously she was very nervous. Her onstage gait is not one you would expect from



In Amsterdam with co-manager Elliot Roberts, '72

"Twisted" sisters:
with Annie Ross,
supporting Crosby,
Stills, Nash &
Young at London's
Wembley Stadium,
September '74



a performer who's made six albums: she stands as though she's hardly ever been on stage before. (On a couple of occasions she sang without either a guitar or a piano to keep her hands busy.)

Scott tacked on a sax solo at the end of "This Flight Tonight" and that was that. Not a bad start, but in no way was it shattering – although the sheer power of her voice came through a couple of times.

No introduction of any sort as she went into "You Turn Me On, I'm A Radio". Her vocals had now improved no end and she sounded just as good as on the record, although the band were still very loose and seemed under-rehearsed. She finished the song by improvising vocally in harmony with the guitarist.

Scott added backup vocal on "Free Man In Paris", the first song of the set from *Court And Spark*. He's not a very good singer – although trying to sing the part of a Joni Mitchell backup vocal where she does it herself on the record ain't too easy.

Her confidence grew and her voice was now more mellow than before, and she hardly ever broke into that piercing falsetto she used around the time of *Ladies Of The Canyon*. Still without a word, she moved to the piano for another *Court And Spark* song, "The Same Situation", with its very fine melody. Again it's a very honest song and although a lady of experience, Joni doesn't sound world-weary like so many of today's so-called rock poets. She fights a situation realistically: "Send me someone who's strong and somewhat sincere".

It was during this song that the ice finally broke and Joni established some kind of conversation with the audience. She was barely into the piece when she suddenly started playing something

different. "Hey, you guys," she giggled to the nonplussed band. "I've been working on this other thing. I know it wasn't what we were doing but I'd like to throw it in." She explained they'd just had a two-week layoff, so things might be a little loose.

They started the song again and it was the best so far. During "Just Like This Train" – another *Court And Spark* song – her vocals were almost extinguished by Scott's sax break. The band kept with her for "Rainy Night House", and although they didn't ruin it, the sparser recorded version is far better. They did, however, virtually destroy "Woodstock", adding a totally uncomplementary broken rhythm and some soul chords.

And that was the first set.

Now I reckon that Joni Mitchell's the best at what she does. There's not another singer-songwriter, male or female, fit to handle the same guitar. She's as good as that kind of thing gets and to see one or two of her songs ruined brought me down a little. She did, however, get a whole lot better in the second set.

"Cactus Tree", from her first totally romantic album, came first, plain and simple and beautiful. "Big Yellow Taxi" followed and some words got changed, and instead of "big yellow taxi" she sang about a "big yellow tractor" taking down her house.

Then came her first real rap of the night. She rambled on about being at a party where all the food was white and all the furnishings were

transparent. And all the people had Nixonian expressions (predictably that got a lot of applause). And then she sang "People's Parties" – again from *Court And Spark*. Her phrasing was perfect and she seemed to have butterflies in her voice, holding down notes long and low until they disappeared.

She picked up a dulcimer and, sitting legs astride, did three songs from *Blue*: "All I Want" and "A Case Of You" and "Blue", with its immortal "crown and anchor me" line. Beautiful, breathless, sensual phrasing. Another long preamble and she sang "For The Roses". Then it's that uncomfortable song about heroin, "Cold Blue Steel And Sweet Fire". The eeriness of the song is enhanced by Scott's excellent sax solo from offstage.

Look, all these song titles are getting boring, but let me tell you, she did some more songs from *Court And Spark* ending with "Raised On Robbery", a band-accompanied version of "Both Sides, Now" (in which she added "Yes, I have" after the line "They say I've changed"), an encore of "Last Time I Saw Richard" – where she mimicked a New York barmaid putting on a harsh accent for the lines "Drink up now, it's gettin' on time to close" – and Annie Ross's "Twisted".

Now that's a lot of songs to sing in one evening. During the second half she dispelled all my earlier misgivings, although those were really about the band. But even they had improved by the end. ●

STEVE CLARK

