USED TO love Joni Mitchell's music but I stopped listening to it once I realised that The Dream girls get raised on wasn't good for me. I can't say that I've replaced it with a better dream, but that one was a definite dead end, and it was all I was hearing in Mitchell's music.

So, around 1972 - after 'Blue' - I shifted my allegiance elsewhere.

Then, over the next ten years, while I wasn't watching, Joni made some drastic revisions in her telling of The Dream. Her thoughts on the white picket fence happy ending became increasingly convoluted and oblique, and a lot more interesting.

oblique, and a lot more interesting.
One of the major stars to emerge from
the '60s, Mitchell was the quintessential
folk-rock old lady of the Woodstock era; her
persona as a sweet beauty on a quest for
spiritual growth sent her reeling in and out

of ill-fated romances.
Simplicity and candour were admired qualities in the Dylanesque '60s, and Mitchell's confessional writing style coupled with her imaginative melodic ear yielded some of the most popular standards of the folk-rock canon. An exquisitely of the folk-rock canon. An exquisitely controlled vocalist capable of yodelling octave leaps, Mitchell accompanied herself on exotically tuned guitars. She sounded unique and pretty, so that when her debut collection of dainty warblings from the battlefront of love came out in 1968, she was an instant star.

was an instant star.

The sunny childhood of Mitchell's career culminated in 1971 with 'Blue', considered by many to be her finest work. Although she scored three hit singles with her 1974 release 'Court And Spark', she'd already begun to tinker with the lucrative song formula she'd perfected and was edging out of the glaying prographic the she with the her. of the glaring pop spotlight and into the

of the glaring pop spotlight and into the world of jazz.

Her music began to stretch out and took on more air and space. Structurally her albums evolved from being collections of songs, into fluid, interwoven symphonic compositions with a cinematic feel; ethereal music embellished with ethnic rhythms and flourishes of jazz, floating around a loosely sketched story line.

Her melodies were now fragile hothouse creatures that required special handling to survive. Her contemporaries stopped covering her compositions because who else but Mitchell could sing them? Her voice, too, had become so elegant and arch it was downright air conditioned.

This phase peaked in 1975 with The Hissing Of

This phase peaked in 1975 with "The Hissing Of Summer Lawns', Mitchell's last album to reach the Top Ten. The musical equivalent of a story by Ann Beattie, 'Hissing' was an essay on the



## the dream

spiritual bankruptcy of America's upper middle class, and a work of jarring disillusionment. The wide-cyed lass of the 60s who d penned such anthems of hope as 'Woodstock' had clearly seen a lot in the intervening years.

Mitchell's involvement in jazz deepened, while the cynicism she expressed on The Hissing Of Summer Lawns' subsided into just plain weariness on her next albums, 'Helira' and 'Don Juan's Reckless Daughter', which dealt with escape, lost innocence and the parched purity of the American Southwest.

Mitchell completed her transition from pop singer to jazz vocalist in 1978, when she collaborated on an album with jazz great Charles Mingus, which was his last work prior to his death in 1979.

Gone in rambling across the musical map for nigh on seven years, Mitchell had let that white picket fence get a mite run down and had completely estranged herself from her early fans. Joni, we hardly knew ye, they moaned .

Mitchell's new album 'Wild Things Run Fast' should help quiet the grumblings of fans who've

CONTINUES OVER

PHOTOGRAPHY: NORMAN SEEFF

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been anxiously awaiting her return to the pop-song format. It's easily the most mainstream work she's done in years, including a vocal duet-with Lionel Richie, and a version of Lieber and Stoller's '(You're So Square) Baby I Don't Care', which has been released as a single. She's presently in the midst of preparing for an extensive tour—her first in three years— which kicks off in Japan in February, takes her through New Zesland, Australia, Europe and concludes in America in mid-'83. As Mitchell herself puts it, she's most definitely 'back in the harness'.

definitely "back in the harness".

definitely "back in the namess".

I interviewed her one afternoon at her manager's office on Sunset Boulevard.

Expecting a cool, aloof rock star, I was pleasantly surprised to find a warm and open woman of impressive Intelligence. Mitchell admits that The Dream didn't turn out to be as simple as we'd once hoped, but even better, she laughe shout if

supple as we do need noped, but even better, she laughs about it.
Yes! Joni Mitchell, legendary for her incurably sick heart, actually has a terrific sense of

OU HAVE a reputation for being

OU HAVE a reputation for being reluctant to meet with the press. Why do you dislike being intervlewed?

There are many reasons. First of all, the form doesn't bring out what I feel are the most interesting parts of me. I'm full of vignettes and stories, but it takes the associative process that's at work in a conversation to bring them out. In an interview you're fielding questions about ideas and feelings that you probably haven't thought through, and your initial responses aren't always accurate. Then you're held to these improvisational comments that are often very stupid.

aren't always accurate. Then you're held to these improvisational comments that are often very stupid.

And the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee is sometimes kind of like a trial. I don't know what kind of peer group pressure journalists are subjected to, but it seems they often look on the celebrated person with aumosity. You feel like you're going into enemy camp, as if it's a heavy competitive spart or something, and you're got to be on gaafd all the time — which obviously doesn't lead to a very good exchange.

I've been in this business a long time and have noticed this recurring pattern that goes — if nice things were said about you last year, then this year it's your turn to get attacked. I happen to be at the point in the cycle where I'm due for nice things.

As I recall, your last record 'Mingue' got fairly good reviews.

As I recall, your last record "unjue" got tairly good reviews.

They were mixed. There was a lot of controversy around the record, which is good. The European press and the jazz press seemed to have a fairly good understanding of it, although some jazz eireles thought it was presumptuous for a white woman to work with Charles who had a reputation of being racist — which was at all. He was just outspoken about black - which wasn't true

at all. He was just outapoken about backs problems.

The pop preas didn't know what to do with the record so they either ignored it, or treated it as some kind of breach of orthodoxy, as if I'd been a catholic and suddenly became a baptist. They called it pretentious and a lot of the kinds of adjectives that imply, don't you know what you are? It just seems to be human nature to typecast. Priends even do it to one another, so it's not just the preas or record buyers. For an artist, once your audience realises that change is part of your style, they assume an attitude of, what will he do next? — and then you're home free.

Free.

I think that finally, after 15 years of making records, people have adjusted to the fact that I change and my changes are more comfortable

Many people see your music as being very much intertwined with the myth of Los Angeles. Has LA played a prominent role in shaping your style?

No more than New York has. There's a lot of No more than New York has, There's a lot of New York mythology in the songs too. I was living in New York when I made my first albums and that environment inspired many of the songs "Chelses Morning," Marcie'. I hadn't quite gotten hold of that city's wavelength at that point, and it was a period of disenchantment for me. Plus, New York's self-esteem as a city was

me. Pins, New York's self-esterm as a city was at a low ebb then.

Do you think there's any truth to the cliches about Los Angeles?

It's definitely true that the city suffers from a lack of community, but the geography here doesn't silow for that. And yes, it is a rather indulged, spolled place but there are good people here too.

HAT DO you see as the

recurring themes in your music?
Well, there's ecology, although I did throw cigarette butts out the window the other day so I

have no right to talk. (Laughing) Of course, the anatomy of the love crime is my favourite subject. There are many kinds of love and there doesn't have to be a victim for it to be love, but doesn't have to be a victum of the top, of the top the the big hurt and the big pay-off seem to be the most popular form of love. I think that's just a bad habit this culture has because there are cultures where love doesn't work that way. Your music is sometimes described as being introspective to the point of moreoeness. Is that a fair assessment?

that a fair assessment?
Most of my writing has dealt with the inner landscape, and we're living in a time when a lot of people have become numbed-out adrenalin addiets. I write about personal, inner intricacies, addicts. I write about personal, timer increaces, and people who prefer not to deal with those things probably do see my music as depressing. I think depression is generally minunderstood though. I hate to get poetic on you, but it's sort of like winter and is necessary for further blooming.

Do you have to be in a winter state of mind to

write?

It helps, because if you're rolling along having a real good time you're less likely to put yourself in the isolation that writing demands.

I admit that I am an overly-sensitive person. I have a kind of loud antenns and sometimes I pick up too much, to the point that it becomes chaotic, but I don't see myself as a melancholy person. My wonder is still intact and I laugh a lot.

There's certainly plenty in life to make us sad and pensive though. This is kind of a weird anti-climax to the industrial revolution we're living in!

living in! What aspect of your career have you found ost difficult?

I love the behind the scenes processes and go willingly to a canvas or recording studio, but it is hard for me to work up enthusiasm for touring and doing interviews. So, I guess I find the more public aspects hard.

AS FAME forced you to lead an insulated life?

No, on the contrary. But then, that's kind of a

No, on the contrary. But then, that's kind of a hasty thing to say.

Fame does cause you to get very unnatural responses from people. Somebody will call you an asshole in a public place, then someone tells that person who you are and they light up like a Christmas tree.

1 receive an inevilinate amount of affection,

I receive an inordinate amount of affection, which is a lovely thing, but sometimes, depending on your own undulating patterns of self-esteem, it can be terrifying. If your self-esteem is at a low ebb and you're being showered with affection it seems out of whack. It's like someone you feel nothing for telling you they love you. It's a weird feeling. I was very maiadjusted to fame in the beginning, and it's taken me ten years to learn to deal with it. It was easily the biggest upheaval in my life and when it first hit, it was no extreme that when people looked at me I wanted to shrivel up. I just couldn't get used to people acking in their breath when I walked by. But I insist on my right to move about the world and I go a lot of places by myself—as a writer, you have to.

insist of my right of the words and in go a lot of places by myself—as a writer, you have to.

Every few years I take off on a long car trip by myself and I encounter people in little restaurants in the boomies who know me, and I'm as capable of being comfortable with that as they are. My relationships really sort of depend on how comfortable the other person is with my career. If they're too impressed by me what usually happens is, the first time I show any signs of being human they're disappointed and they attack! (Laughing)

You know, one of the things that attracted me to the jazz world was the fact that a lot of jazz people didn't know who I was and there was no phenomenon surrounding me there—I found that delicious. I also like the fact that the jazz world allow you to grow old gracefully, whereas pop music is completely aligned with youth. In reading past interview you've done, I got the Impression that you considered jazz to be the superior form compared with pop.

I have to admit that "Meffertitii," and some of Miles Davis' romantic music is something I've always revered and looked to as the real shit. To me it had incredible contours, depth, whimsy—it had everything Miles had the full musical talent: a gift of composition, shading, emotion, everything was there.

At the time when that music came into my life, pop was in a formularised, simplistic phase. It had fallen into the hands of producers and been

At the time when that music came into my life, pop was in a formularised, simplistic phase. It has fallen into the hands of producers and been packaged for commerce, and a lot of it was very sterile. Of course, that happens to every musical form at one time or another, and then a temporary messiah comes along and revitalises it. The Beaties brought new blood to rock hiroll after a very bland period, and punk brought some new textures in as well. Punk interested me as an act of revolution, but its strength was in social rather than musical ideas. I keep hoping that something musical will flower out of it. You once commented that Lambert, Hendricks And Ross' "The Hottest New Sound In Juzz' was your 'Meel The Beatles' — the first music that completely thrilled you. What was it about that music you found so appealing?"

It just had a sassiness and dexterity that I It just had a sassness and dexterity that I loved. People talk about punk having an attitude but that music really had attitude! It was sophisticated, wry, and it just really swung. The harmonies were so far out I'd sit there thinking, Wow! How can they do that?

appealing?

bohemian atmosphere?

Not really. I recently went home to this sort of class reunion and met a man I didn't remember class reunion and met a man I didn't remember as a child, hut who tived across the street from my best friend Frankie. Frankie was a piano prodigy who could play the church organ when he was seven years old, and I thought he was just aplendid. He and I were the only artists in what

spiendid. He and I were the only artists in what was basically a real jock community. This man I met never liked Frankie and wouldn't play with him when they were kids, and at this reunion he said to me, You know, you and Frankie were the only recative people in a town where everyone threw balls and stones. So, 118-ee;12 No. liberal? No

liberal? No. Have there been pivotal episodes in your life that shaped you as an artist? Yes: I was an only child, I had a lot of childhood illnesses, and we moved a lot. You can see in early picture of me that I started out as an extroverted, hazmay idd. But a number of an extroverted, harmy kid. But a number of moves, then polio, scarlet fever, chicken pox bordering on smallpox, mearly dying with meanles—all that isolated me a lot. Every summer all the kids that threw balls and stones would hang out at the lake, but my family would pile into the car and drive someplace like Minnesota.

Minnesota.

Do you see your new record as a step back in the direction of pop?

I don't see it as a step back, but rather as a synthesis of a lot of things I've done. There is a return to rock steady rhythms which I'd shandoned for a while simply because I was sick of the backbeat, but I think the music is quite progressive. And there is still a lot of jazz in the vocal phrasing:

What ago I'd rules and baunderies do you see vocat parasing. What sort of rules and boundaries do you set

for yourself when you work?

for yourself when you work?

During the making of an album I become sort of musically narrow minded, yet open at the same time. I'm kind of hard to please because I'm looking for something fresh that I haven't heard before, but I can't ask for it because I don't know that it is in the same I don't know that it is in the same I don't know that it is in the same I don't know that it is in the same I don't know that it is in the same I don't know that it is in the same I don't know that it is in the same I don't know that it is in the same I don't know that it is in the same I don't know the same I don't know that it is in the same I don't know the same I

before, but I can't sak for it because I don't know what it is — yet.

I like to hear every musician play with a ripe, blooming personality rather than lock them into a military drill. The records are very much a collaboration between myself and the musicians I work with. A musical talent is a complex thing and there aren't many people who have all of its facets. There are players who have power, dexterity and technique, but perhaps aren't aware of subtleties in structure. Or maybe they don't listen to the lyries and play licks instead of moods, and I'll have to lead them to shade the song in a particular way.

song in a particular way.

Generally I'm very pleased with the new record because I think the musicians did play o then itset no

more than just notes.

What sart of things do you keep in mind in laying down a vocal track?

Unless a song means something to you you're not gorns get any magic, and that's all there is to it. I have an acute sensitivity to false sexuality or false emotion in a voice. Moans and grouns are OK if they're stylised to the point of parody, but if it's trying to pass itself off as real heart, it would ly just seems like bad acting.

Do you think most people have a finely tuned enough ear that they're able to detect that kind of falsity?

Yes, I think becole hear music more

enough ear that they're able to detect that kind of falsity?
Yes, I think people hear music more comprehensively than they know, but it varies how much a person will connect what he senses intuitively to his intellect. For example, on Shadows And Light there's a spot where 25 voices are overchibed and they're all tangled up together. One of the voices was really out of time, but the way we'd worked up the place made it impossible for us to correct it. David Geffen came to hear the song at a playback and when it hit that note he noticeably started, as if a doctor had in this knee to check his reflexes. After the thing was over I asked him if he'd heard a sharp not wand he said no. I told him your mid may not we heard it but your body did!
You've always managed to get by producing your own albums. Is producing an overrated akill?

Lonce tried working with a producer on a song

SKHIZ

Tonce tried working with a producer on a song for my second album and it pearly broke my heart. He was so fussy about his soud that if I closed my eyes and swayed off the microphone he had a fit. The guy was constantly hitting the button and he made me a nervous wreek.

David Creaky did moduce my first album, but

David Crosby did produce my first album, but he did it with the idea that he'd keep producers

or me.

For the most part, producers are spirit bruisers. They're formula people who usually anly know what's been before. They hire a pla for what he's played before and I don't want a musician who recycles old licks. It's not going to thrill me unless he comes up with something that surprises him too.

What step in the music making process is m

what step in the must manage process a true likely to prove the undoing of a record? Cocaine! There are entire albums that would probably be different if that drug didn't exist. Cocaine seals off the heart and creates a very intallectual mood. It takes all your energy out of your spine and sends it right up to your brain.

OUR RECORDS are sometimes described as being cluematic. Do you think that's an accurate description? Yes, I think they do have that quality. I should preface this by saying that I think of the album as a modern form comparable to a symphony or sonata. Most of today's serious musicians aren't going into classical music, they're getting into the popular recording industry, so I think it has to be taken seriously. As far as the cinematic qualities in my music, there's one technique in particular that I use that's sort of like sticking clips of old newsreels in a film.

For instance, in 'Harry's House', a song on 'The Hissing Of Summer Lawns', I inserted a passage of 'Centerpicee', which is an old Lambert, Hendricks And Ross song, On the new album there's a song called 'Chinese Cafe', that includes bits of 'Unchained Melody' and 'Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow'.

Does the idea of having hit singles still interest you!

Does the idea of having hit singles still interest you?

As we were making this album we found ourselves saying, Gee, that sounds like a single. But I really don't know what a single in 1888 is. I'm interested in musical trends so I listen to the radio a lot and most of what they play reminds of that banal spell in the early '80s when music went through a very anti-intellectual phase. I really think that Bobby Dylan and that movement — we did our part in growing up the American pop song, but I don't find much deep thought in the music on the radio right now. And by deep I don't mean it has to be down — there isn't even much wit in current popular music.

by deep I don't mean it has to be down — there isn't even much wit in current popular music. I know you're presently very involved in your work as a visual artist. If your career as a suitable of the property of the property to leave painter took off would you be content to leave

painter took or wound you be considered music in the past?
I'm there already. I've always considered myself a painter first and a musician second. My main drive is to paint and since I turned this main drive is to paint and since I turned this record in I've had no desire to pick up an instrument. When I made this album I wanted it to be my swan song because in a way it summarises everything I've got to say about love. It was to be my last record for Elektra, but as it turns out, it's the first of five records I'll do for Geffen Records—and there are days when I

for Geffen Records — and there are days when I regret making that commitment.

David's pretty good with me though. We're friends — we lived together for a few years. He knows I wanted to quit so I don't think he'll pressure me. But I'm sort of like a good girl in that when I make a commitment I pressure myself, and I told him look, if I sign up for five years I'll be back under the harness and I'll make myself, and myself do it. Why did vo

myself do it.
Why did you make that commitment if your
heart is in painting?
Out of some kind of obedience I guess. There is
some logic to the decision though. The new album
is good and has the potential of reaching a lot of
people and I hayen't made an album too many people and I haven't made an anount out many prople could relate to in a long time. So the idea is to get a lot of mileage out of it and then I can afford to drop back.

afford to drop back.

Does it frustrate you that you're known as a musician rather than as a painter?

No, because I haven't come into my talent as a painter yet. Twe been painting all my life, but I haven't reached my stride and the work is really inst heorienizer or given.

haven't reached my stride and the work is really just beginning to ripen. Will your career in pop work for or against you in trying to break into the fine arts world? Rasically, I've got two strikes against me. First, a woman has to be twice as good as a man to make it in the art world. Second, coming into the fine art world from the pop field, you've got dilettante written all over you. My frienda in New York have told me that if I show my paintings in Los Angeles first, I'll be categorised as a movie star painter like Henry Fonds, or Red Skelton, who paints clowns.

RE YOU looking forward to

RE YOU looking forward to touring again?
I'm look forward to touring, but I'm dreading the rehearsal. I don't remember anything! I don't even remember the title of some of the songs on the new album. The past is the past. My manager Elliot Roberts gave me a pep talls the other day, Run Joan! Swim Joan! He says that when you're pushing 40 you have to run back and forth line Mick Jagger. I told him to just pash ree aut in a wheel chair and I'd do the whole set sitting down. Who is your a undience now? What sorts of people do expect will cume to the shows?
Elliot tells me that most of my audience is dead already! (Laughing) I expect that kids who are unfamiliar with my music will make up the bulk of the audience for these concerts because there seem to be large numbers of kids turning out right now to see the old guard perform before they croak!
What sort of show do you plan?

right now to see the old guard perform perore they croak!
What sort of show do you plan?
I don't know — maybe I'll just go out there and throw paint at a canvas and hum.
You seem to be in a preity good frame of mind about the tour, and things in general.
Yeah, I think I'm learning to accept life. You just get up every day and try to make the most of it. Hopefully you'll see or feel something in the course of that day that makes it worthwhile. There have been times when I feared I might be done in by the conflict around me, but I think that the major crises of my life are behind me now. And every time I flirt with one of them again I get the dreaded feeling it's going to latch on and stick to me, but it never does. This isn't to imply that I've solved anything, because nothing is ever dealt with and done with, and human beings are always in conflict. And for an artist, to run away from conflict is the kiss of death.

