

A look at . . .

# 'In Cold Blood'

by Daniel Okrent

WHEN TRUMAN CAPOTE set out for Holcomb, Kansas, eight years ago to research his chronicle of a cold-blooded, motiveless mass murder, the automatic challenges were evident. Here was a man who had earned his reputation primarily for fiction, and he was attempting a basically journalistic effort. The book that resulted was clearly the product of a man caught up between these two basic forms of prose—some said that this was, in fact, the book's distinction and virtue—and never really managed to reconcile them.

Richard Brooks' film is no different. Again, the maker of *In Cold Blood* is an individual versed in non-fiction idiom. His film, like Capote's book, teeters back and forth on the rope bridge linking reality and creation. But the connection is generally quite smooth, and Brooks has actually accomplished more on celluloid than Capote did in print. What he has done is take the factual evidence that Capote so earnestly compiled, and weld it together into a glossy narrative that very effectively speaks a case for the need for solutions to the damage of social neglect. He builds a two-and-a-half hour metaphor, and only rarely taints it with maudlin effects or intrusions.

PERRY SMITH and Dick Hickock kill Herbert Clutter, his wife and their two teenage children for no reason at all. Dick, lacking in conscience, but more so in mentality, and Perry, the bruised product of a broken home and broken life, end up dangling from an impersonal gallows. On their way there, though, director Brooks vividly paints two personalities with clear psychological problems, without the heavy-handed reliance on "Perry felt this way because . . ." that marred Capote's book.

Sure, there are points where Brooks belabors the obvious: his use of flashbacks to spell out the incidents of life that warped Perry Smith's mind are totally unnecessary. But when he lets his actors (two absolute unknowns, Robert Blake and Scott Wilson, whom Brooks picked because he wanted Perry and Dick to be Perry and Dick, and not movie-star faces in movie-star roles) play out their lives in conversation and action, there is an unobtrusive brilliance that shines through.

IN FACT, BROOKS has picked up where Arthur Penn left off. Indeed, he develops sympathy for Perry, at least, so much so that the poignant hanging scene is really throat-clutching (bad pun, good description). Actually, Perry and Dick are crude, harsh killers, just as much as were Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker. But we feel for the protagonists in both because they aren't really guilty; I am guilty and you are guilty and we all are very, very guilty. And so we empathize with the killers, and bemoan the plight of our distorted society in pure bleeding-heart liberal fashion.

Not that we shouldn't. An artist like Penn or Brooks (both nominated—and both deserving—for the Best Director Oscar), who can produce a film that evokes gut reaction to a meaningful problem, should be lauded. The need for expressive art that transcends pure aesthetics and approaches editorial commentary is really clear, especially when this art does not speak to a selective audience. This was the ill taint of *How I Won the War*, that is happily absent from both *In Cold Blood* and *Bonnie and Clyde*. They speak in pure vernacular, and not just to those tuned in on a specific wavelength.

Brooks' artistic and commentative talents combine beautifully just a few minutes before the final scene, when the doomed Perry Smith leans against the window of his dingy death row cell, and the rain that batters the window outside is projected onto his face in trickles of lighted tears. It tells the whole story that Capote worked on for six full years.

# Joni Mitchell Yang, Dylan Yin



Joni Mitchell

By ROBERT FRANKE

Let's get the perhaps obvious but certainly important statements out of the way first.

Joni Mitchell is playing at the Canterbury House this weekend. See her.

Seriously. There is so much there. She is a beautiful woman standing alone on stage. Her voice and her acoustic guitar are free, pure instruments in themselves; there is an additional beauty in the way she uses them to convey such a full range of idea-emotions. But if she looked like your grandmother and her voice cracked and she only knew three chords, her performance would be justified by her songs alone.

As a songwriter she plays Yang to Bob Dylan's Yin, equalling him in richness and profusion of imagery and surpassing him (until "John Wesley Harding," perhaps) in conciseness and direction. But the sterility of analysis into categories like these (what is "richness of imagery," anyway?) misses the prevailing undercurrent of the songs of either Joni or Dylan, and in Joni's case that undercurrent is very immediate.

Perhaps one of the best words to describe it is joy. Not happiness as such, but the positive unity of human experience. "He

Comes for Conversation" is as good an example as any. It combines grapes, cheese, rings, and a first-person feminine viewpoint with an irony that is delicate, yet near-sociological in its exactness, to describe a frustrating drawn-out relationship. But all through the song the listener is thinking things like "my God, that's the way it is, but why didn't I realize before that it was beautiful?" Her songs are the best of strange experiences because they make you realize that human reality is the best of strange experiences.

Someone at the Canterbury House wrote upon an advertising sign for a radio show, "God is alive in Joni Mitchell." I wouldn't know, myself; I don't know the woman. I suspect very strongly that God likes her for what she does in taking aspects of her own person—her voice, musical ability, charm (a word from the early fifties, but it fits) and aesthetic sense, and using them to formalize a tremendously insightful vision of how it is to experience this human time and place, to formalize it into an immediate and affecting popular medium. The vision comes from Joni Mitchell, it is readily accessible to you this weekend, and in terms of human experience, at least, it is a free gift. I for one accept with thanks.

# Stockholm: Thrill of Dorati

By H. F. KEUPER

It had been eleven years since I had last watched and listened to the work of Antal Dorati conducting a major concert performance. I anticipated the coming of Friday evening with no small measure of excitement—and just a little fear. After all, the current vogue is toward the younger generation of conductors, and Mr. Dorati is by no means as youthful as he once was.

My fears, I am happy to report, have proved groundless, for in the past decade Mr. Dorati appears to have lost none of the vigor, the bounce, and the drive which has characterized his technique on the podium.

Before him lay the extremely well-drilled and uncommonly precise Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra; behind him a fairly respectful, albeit scanty, Ann Arbor concert audience. The evening's work, as it turned out, was pleasure for most present.

Following the playing of the American and Swedish national anthems, Mr. Dorati led his band of visitors in Hector Berlioz' overture to "Benvenuto Cellini." No great concert fare this particular work, but the thrill lay in the delivery by the orchestra. From the opening strains, it was apparent that here was a group

of musicians who possessed none of the heavy-handed, almost pompous, temperament so common among several of our contemporary American orchestras—the New York Philharmonic and the Philadelphia Symphony to mention but two.

Bela Bartok's "Two Images" ("In Blossom" and "Village Dance") led us down yet another musical road. The first of the two almost unrelated pieces is sweetness and tranquility personified, particularly as Bartok personified. The dance piece is really a set of developed variations on a single theme. Invigorating in its style, it bears resemblance to the former image only in that the dance ceases momentarily to return to the tranquility of "In Blossom" before reaching its rather folksy finale.

The highlight of the performance for me was the choreographic suite "Sisyphus" by the contemporary Swedish composer, Karl-Birger Blomdahl. This work is chiefly an exploration in sound and rhythm and, in addition to the breathless quality already attributed to the Berlioz work, left me at times almost sighless as well.

From an essentially calm introductory passage, the compo-

sition gradually, gathers momentum, intensity, and musical complexity. Punctuated as it is by the efforts of what appeared to be full platoon of percussionists, there is almost as much to watch as to listen to.

The final Dance of Life contains so many fascinating combinations of rhythm and tone that I almost began to fear whether or not Mr. Dorati could actually hold his charges back as they approached the smashing climax. This was as close to what I might refer to as incite-to-riot music as I have ever heard.

The work is along a different path of contemporary development of sonic experimentation than the one begun by Bartok

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