

joni mitchell at ease

a review by fred graver

From the beginning last night it was very evident that Joni Mitchell has changed in her attitude toward the performance of her music. She has mellowed considerably. Since her last tour, her approach to each song is more melodious than before when she seemed inhibited by the power of her words. The change was especially evident in her vocals, which were considerably freer and more at ease with the tensions set in the words.

A nice example of this new style was her treatment of "You Turn Me On, I'm A Radio." The woman can be, when she wants to, tremendously sexy. She swayed to and fro, swinging her hips and carrying her guitar along like a prostitute swings her purse. That flaunting is what the song is about, and Joni Mitchell conveyed all of the feelings which the flaunting of femininity can bring out.

Her new songs have a certain quality of renewed vitality in them, too. She seems to have gained a little more control of her soul now, and in that little bit of control she has found a new freedom to express her feelings.

The new songs which stick out in my mind the most are the love songs. They possess a quality of lightness and ease which has before now been missing. Joni can still pinpoint with stunning accuracy the millions of idiosyncracies of a love affair. The song about a beautiful pick-up checking her sex appeal in the bathroom mirror before returning to her lover, and the following tune about feeling unable to encounter love because of a peculiar loss of heart show a new side of her vision of love, the vain and egotistical side that comes from protecting oneself too much.

The show opened with a set by Tom Scott and the L.A. Express. The audience didn't expect their funky style of jazz, and greeted Scott's arrival with hands under their seats. Though they were very good, very tight, and very talented, there were only a few jazz freaks in the audience who really cared enough to appreciate them. In many ways they reminded me of The Section, James Taylor's back-up group. In fact, the guitarist could run in a look-alike contest with Danny Kortchmar of the Section. Tom Scott is a good flautist and alto sax player, but his strongest point comes with his tenor sax playing. The pianist deserves a lot of credit for keeping the group together at times when they seemed as though they were going to falter in over-enthusiasm.

Their performance of a John Coltrane composition was a true bit of inspired playing, and the group-written piece "L.A. Expression" brought together all of the best elements of the band, leaving out Scott's at times oppressive conducting. "Expression" musically covered atmospheres from the desolate to the chaotic.

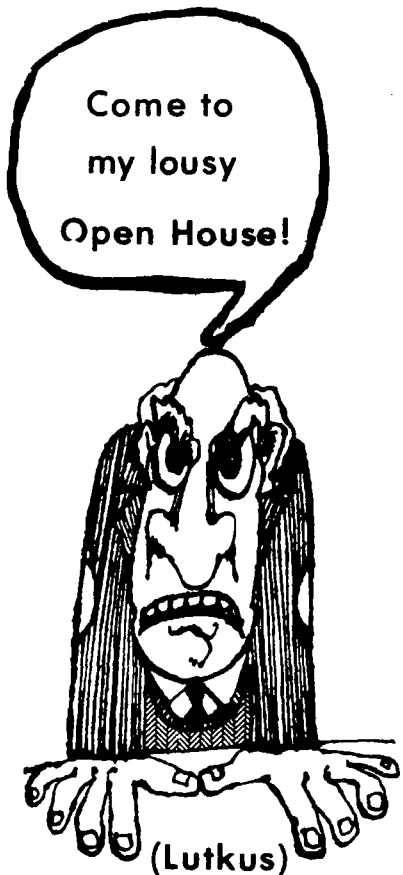
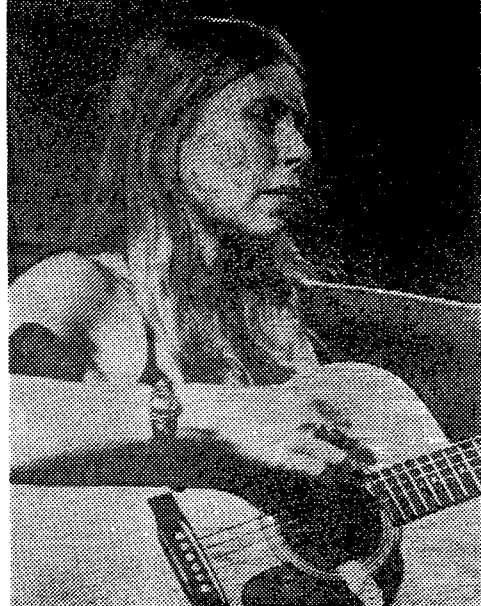
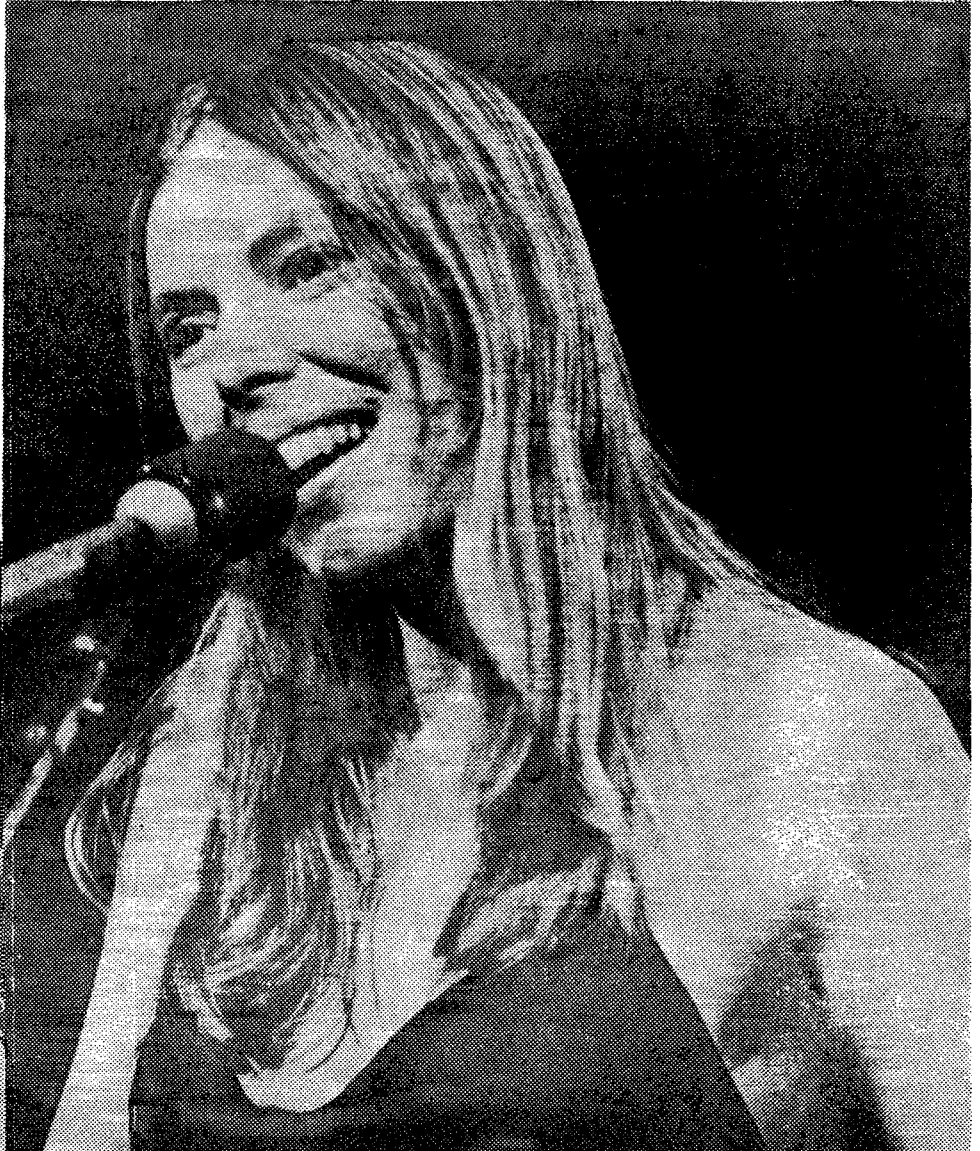
Working with Joni, they provided some really fine arrangements of older tunes and seemed to be something of an inspiration for her music in the new tunes. I think that especially in the arrangements of "This Flight Tonight" and "Both Sides Now", a heightened sophistication was shown.

Another big surprise about this band was that they could lay down some really fine rock and roll. "Raise on Robbery", which Joni introduced by saying "We're gonna boogie for ya", was perfect for the close of the concert. The encore closer, "Twisted" (an old song that's enjoying some new popularity thanks to Miss Mitchell and Bette Midler) brought all of the loose and easy style of the evening into welcome perspective.

Joni emerged after the intermission to do a solo set. She mixed new songs with old, and in the process presented the most touching moments of the evening. A song about a beautiful fashion model crying drunkenly at a party and explaining that it provides the same release as laughing combined chilling images with ironically light melody to produce a moment of delicate pathos.

The two most touching songs of the evening were performed on the dulcimer. "A Case of You" and "All I Want" were two instances of very personal openness from Joni to the audience.

The concert was excellent, slowed at points only by the audience's unwillingness to readily accept certain changes in Joni Mitchell as a performer. The feeling that she left us with was the same sort of quiet elation that was produced by James Taylor and Paul Simon. The beauty of her poetry and the delicacy of her melodies combined to make the evening a soft moment of simple joy in the humanity of Joni Mitchell, and in the humanity in all of us.



TONIGHT

thru Thursday Night after 9:00 pm.

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Also: Full staff meeting tonight at 7:00 pm.
Staff yearbook picture before meeting at 6:30 pm.