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Mitchell hits her stride early and well at Blossom

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It's been almost a decade since Joni Mitchell reached her commercial — and arguably, artistic — peak with the 1974 release of her acclaimed *Court and Spark* LP and its hit singles *Help Me, Raised on Robbery* and *Free Man in Paris*.

Shortly thereafter, however, she all but abandoned the successful pop formula she'd developed for experimentation with traditional jazz forms.

In the process she also diluted her

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huge mainstream following — not only on record but in live performances as well.

The fact is, however, that despite the turn-off triggered by the jazz influence in her albums, her concerts retained the quirky, understated appeal that's been a trademark throughout her nearly 20-year career.

Combining a shy, coltish sexuality, a unique, imaginative flair for music and

a smoky but penetrating voice that's as impressive with pop and rock as it is with jazz, reggae and R & B, she commands an appeal so charismatic that it transcends musical boundaries.

Still, only about 5,000 obviously hard-core Joni Mitchell fans showed up for her performance Tuesday at Blossom Music Center.

She didn't disappoint them.

BACKED by a fine four-piece band that featured bassist-husband Larry Kline, Miss Mitchell — alternating on

guitar, piano and Marlboros — put together a terrific two-hour and 15-minute show of material from all phases of her career, including her new, far less jazz-oriented LP, *Wild Things Run Fast*.

Dressed in a putty colored blouse, long skirt cut just above the ankles and high-heeled black pumps, and with her blonde, shoulder-length hair falling in tangled curls, she didn't look like someone who would have an electric guitar hanging from her shoulder.

But with the first strains of the bounding *Coyote* it all made sense.

With the audience obviously on her side, she hit stride early. Into her second song, *Free Man in Paris*, and the catchy dance number *Cotton Avenue*, her movements were already becoming more rhythmic and spontaneous.

By the smoldering *Sharon* and into the sing-along *God Must Be a Bogey Man*, her nods and impish smiles indicated she was enjoying herself as much as the crowd which, justifiably, seemed to be a lot.