

Joni Mitchell In An Evening Of Empathy

By John V. Hurst
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They were songs of anecdote, imagery, loving and rue: Of a heaven full of astronauts, of "the pleasure ... of watching your hair-line recede," of "just livin' on nerves and feelings," of a moon "swept down black water like an empty spotlight."

They were songs by Joni Mitchell, folkish musical poetess and fledged member of a sisterhood embracing the likes of Judy Collins, Carly Simon, Carole King and — yes — Joan Baez.

La Mitchell captivated an appreciative, near-capacity crowd in Sacramento's Memorial Auditorium Thursday night, warming it with a generous — 23 songs — sampling of her work.

"Better than wine — you're so sweet I could drink a case of you and still be on my feet," she sang, moving then to a scene

filled with "needles, guns and grass — lotsa laughs," where "everybody's saying that Hell's the hippest place to go."

She looked tall, standing onstage, like a straight-haired blonde amalgam of Faye Dunaway and Dinah Shore. Sexy too. And she flashed tune-girt insights, confessions and empathies like sequins at an audience that knew most of the words already anyway.

She got a rousing opening sendoff by her backup group, "Tom Scott and the LA Express," a surprisingly jazz-rooted quintet — drums, lead, bass, keyboards and reeds. It is a springing, driving, solidly cohesive group of superb musicians. They can turn music and rhythm into aural spaghetti and still keep in touch with a comprehensive schematic.

With Scott on reeds — especially his soprano sax — Roger Calloway on elec-

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tric piano and Robin Ford on lead guitar, the group's musical inventiveness extends beyond its exciting interplay to some truly eerie sonorities.

Scott's band opened the show 19 minutes late with a set of six numbers, then backed Mitchell for 14 of the songs she sang. The rest she performed alone onstage—at guitar, zither and piano — right after the overlong, 37-minute intermission.

At that there was a lot of music — a solid two hours, 25 minutes of it, and the crowd gave her a standing,

three-minute ovation to court her encores.

Smoking Ban?

It was the first concert for Sacramento's smoke-happy pop music crowd since the city's new ban on smoking in public places.

Thus far fewer matches flared last night than have lit the hall in times past. But what they lit smelled even less of burning tobacco than usual — a risky proposition in a day when you conceivably can get busted no matter what you're smoking.