

MOJO

The Music Magazine

THE BEATLES



“Get back”

The film. The music. The book. Why they couldn't Let It Be.

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John Harris

John has been writing for MOJO for 20 years, as well as covering politics at The Guardian. He's just had the fascinating experience of editing down hours of conversation caught during The Beatles' early 1969 sessions for the thumping official book that accompanies the new *Get Back* films. Read his findings from page 68.



Lenny Kaye

Lenny is an American guitarist, composer, record producer, writer, founding member of Patti Smith And Her Band, and the compiler of *Nuggets*, arguably the most influential compilation album ever. His new book, *Lightning Striking*, tracing the key flash-points in rock'n'roll history, is extracted from page 52.



Janelle Barone

An illustrator based in Melbourne, Janelle Barone loves to tell visual stories and make everyday things more intriguing. She illustrates this month's Lead Album on page 83 and you can find a range of her editorial and commercial work at: www.janelle-barone.com or follow her on Instagram: @janelle.barone

Janelle Barone, Ulf Holberg, Alamy

Chelsea mornings to Sunset pigs

In the solo years that forever cemented the image of Joni Mitchell, what was she keeping from us? Asks **Jim Irvin**.

Joni Mitchell



Archives – Vol. 2: The Reprise Years (1968-1971)

RHINO. CD/DL/LP

BLAME BOB DYLAN. The man with buried treasure in every corner. His hugely successful *Bootleg Series* (itself 30 years old this year) has spawned high demand for the vault openings of the worthies. Neil Young eventually saw the benefit of showing his workings. Now Joni Mitchell is doing it.

Yet, although Joni is often spoken of as Dylan's equal – not least by herself – I don't sense in her fans the same desire that haunts the Bobnuts, the desire to get to the bottom of the mystery. And she doesn't have the numerous, mythologised, complete-but-abandoned projects that litter the output of capricious ol' Neil Young. Most Joni fans I know are content to wallow in her marvellous, officially sanctioned catalogue because, going by the material in this bigger-than-it-need-be collection, Joni, unlike Dylan, has mostly been an astute judge of her best work. She has a painter's instinct for knowing what mark to make and when to leave the canvas alone, she has clarity of tone and conjures pin-sharp imagery. If Dylan is all about sprawl and obfuscation, Joni is surely about concision and aptness. Therefore, faced with five CDs of imperfection and repetition, it's tempting to ask: what's the point of all this?

Well, obviously, it's fascinating to hear things that have entered into legend, like her pitch for the title song to the movie, *Midnight Cowboy*. It's here in two demos, one a bit awkward, one more assured. Not bad, but hard to imagine it having the impact of *Everybody's Talkin'*, so someone was right not to pursue it. There's a beautiful unreleased song, *Come To The Sunshine* (not the Van Dyke Parks tune), and the legendary *Hunter*, discarded from *Blue*. With its multiple strummed acoustics and subtle drumming, Carey style, it feels instantly familiar, but also too close to a couple of *Blue*'s other tracks. She also dropped the fine *Urge For Going*, her "protest song at the coming of winter". Each of the 10 she chose brought something unique to the table. Arguably, these wouldn't have. Shelving them helped make *Blue* perfect.

As did abandoning an alternative approach to *River*, a copper-bottomed masterpiece, but here with oddly tentative French horns burbling at the end. They make it more Christmassy, perhaps, but otherwise add little value. Removing them was a smart decision. You can hear Joni implicitly making such assessments



"You can hear Joni implicitly making decisions throughout."

throughout this collection. A song called *Jeremy* is demoed, played live and recorded for *Song To A Seagull*, but never released. It's a bleak ditty about someone jailed for drug use, and maybe she realised that her take on crime and punishment was a little romanticised, a little patronising. She records *Conversation* for both *Song To A Seagull* and *Clouds* and rejects it both times. This, with previously discarded songs *Blue Boy* and *The Priest*, finally makes it onto *Ladies Of The Canyon*, but it's one of her duller songs. Part of her knew that.

There's a fine recording from early 1969 at Carnegie Hall ("It's long way from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan..."). The sound is good and there are several striking moments, like a medley of *Circle Game* and *Little Green*, the former an early, perfect lyric, the latter, a heartbreaker, as we know, but here a work-in-progress with a clunky chord shift in the ascent to the title line. And there's a delightful cover of Dino Valenti's love anthem, *Get Together*, where she reharmonises the melody, slightly throwing the crowd she's asked to sing along. This show is worth hearing.

An earlier concert recording, from Le Hilbou Coffee House, Ottawa in March 1968, was recorded by Jimi Hendrix. (From his diary: "Talked with Joni Mitchell on the phone. I think I'll record her tonight with my excellent tape recorder, knock on wood... hmmm... can't find any wood... everything's plastic.") Once you've gotten over that crazy detail, it's unremarkable next to the Carnegie Hall show. However, a complete BBC Live In Concert recorded in December 1970, where she is joined by current old man James Taylor, is splendid, and demonstrates a marked leap forward in her sound. The way Taylor takes over the introductions once he comes on is notable: "Here's another song Joan wrote..."

Less fascinating are the scrappy tapes recorded in her friend Jane Lurie's apartment in New York's Chelsea district (as in "Woke up, it was a Chelsea morning"), including performances where her voice is inaudible, and bits of conversation you won't listen to much. Some off-air fan recordings of a John Peel session for the BBC, with stalwart British arranger John Cameron (Donovan, Bobbie Gentry) providing accompaniment are disappointingly lo-fi, though they offer an interesting anomaly: early Joni with a backing group.

Indeed, the enduring image of Joni Mitchell – flaxen-haired, flutey-voiced hippy goddess alone with her guitar or piano – effectively only lasted for the few years covered by this box. Once she'd switched to Asylum Records – and after the transitional *For The Roses*, a more oblique *Blue* – she landed on her future direction with the jazz-burnished sophistication of her second masterpiece, *Court & Spark*, a truer direction for a woman nearing 30, raised on Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, who loved to dance. The new style required skilled, supple musicians around her. She'd never again go back to being alone in the studio.

The box promises to be a handsome object (only digital files of the music were available to review) and if you're a Mitchell completist or just love owning stuff, it looks like a winner. But for the casual listener, there's rather too much here that gets in the way of the things you might wish to hear again. Team Joni could, and should, boil it down to a single disc of highlights that would make a worthy companion to the regular albums, and display the focus her fans have come to expect.



BACK STORY: ALL SIDES, NOW

• This is the second volume in Joni's Mitchell's career-spanning and maybe career-closing *Archive* series, gathering the demos, outtakes, some audio vérité and three complete concert recordings (recorded by Reprise, the BBC and, er, Jimi Hendrix) from the period she was releasing records for Reprise – her first four albums. Features 122 tracks, 87 songs, the rest are introductions and documentary. The complete 5-CD set is also being released digitally. A 10-LP vinyl edition will be limited to 4,000 copies.

Getty (2)

Before the spark:
Joni Mitchell,
"flaxen-haired,
flutey-voiced
hippy goddess".

