

THE ULTIMATE MUSIC GUIDE

# JONI MITCHELL

UPDATED  
DELUXE  
EDITION

EVERY ALBUM  
REVIEWED

CLASSIC  
ENCOUNTERS,  
REDISCOVERED

*A Case Of You*  
JONI MITCHELL  
THE FULL STORY

ARCHIVES  
VOL 1:  
THE VERDICT

HER 30  
GREATEST  
SONGS

THE 2020  
COMEBACK

FROM THE MAKERS OF **UNCUT**



# contents

**6** “She wanted to be a big deal” **CLASSIC INTERVIEW** Half a century on, the story of a singer-songwriter’s remarkable rise

**18** **SONG TO A SEAGULL** **ALBUM FEATURE** A fêted 23-year-old songwriter steps into the spotlight, with a maverick ex-Byrd producing

**22** **CLOUDS** **ALBUM FEATURE** The world-weary ingénue embraces her own contradictions with soon-to-be-standard songs

**26** **LADIES OF THE CANYON** **ALBUM FEATURE** Fame beckons as we hear Mitchell “cracking out of her chrysalis and beginning to soar”

**30** “I want my music to get more sophisticated” **CLASSIC INTERVIEW** Joni visits the UK, leaving her public and our correspondent awestruck

**34** **BLUE** **ALBUM FEATURE** Romantic upheaval and restless travel fuel a timeless classic

**38** **FOR THE ROSES** **ALBUM FEATURE** A retreat to Canada produces a more impressionistic fifth album

**42** **COURT AND SPARK** **ALBUM FEATURE**

Backed by the LA Express, a bigger, bolder Mitchell sound is born, with hints of jazzier experiments to come

**46** “They say I’ve changed... Yes, I have!” **CLASSIC INTERVIEW** Back in London, Joni isn’t talking, but she still reveals some secrets

**52** **THE HISSING OF SUMMER LAWNS** **ALBUM FEATURE** Subtle sounds and suburban musings: an underrated (at the time) gem

**56** **HEJIRA** **ALBUM FEATURE** Fearless women and open roads inspire an expansive, experimental journey

**60** **DON JUAN’S RECKLESS DAUGHTER** **ALBUM FEATURE** Inching further into jazz with a bold double album

**64** **MINGUS** **ALBUM FEATURE** A dying mentor inspires a meeting of minds like no other

**68** **WILD THINGS RUN FAST** **ALBUM FEATURE** The Police, Lionel Richie and a new beau help usher Joni into a brash new decade



**72** **DOG EAT DOG** **ALBUM FEATURE** Thomas Dolby’s synthscapes soundtrack Ms Mitchell’s raging broadsides against the Reagan era

**76** “You’re going to get me into my apocalyptic vision...” **CLASSIC INTERVIEW** The newlywed holds forth on censorship, Live Aid and her synth-heavy new LP

**98** **TAMING THE TIGER** **ALBUM FEATURE** A new guitar sound, a rediscovered daughter and... a last hurrah?

**102** **BOTH SIDES NOW** **ALBUM FEATURE** The legend finds a new voice, via vintage covers and a couple of her own old favourites

**106** **TRAVELOGUE** **ALBUM FEATURE** Mitchell delves further into her back catalogue, in playfully revisionist mood

**110** **SHINE** **ALBUM FEATURE** A ballet soundtrack is a surprise final encore to a peerless singer-songwriting career

**114** **Joni Mitchell’s 30 Greatest Songs** **CLASSIC INTERVIEW** Friends, fans and bandmates take their pick

**126** “I’m a fighter, that’s what I do” **CLASSIC INTERVIEW** Joni gathers her strength since her aneurysm in 2015

**138** **LIVES AND COMPILATIONS** **ALBUM FEATURE** Bootlegs, outtakes, concert recordings and more

**142** **MISCELLANY** **ALBUM FEATURE** Singles, DVDs, paintings, guest appearances... and those guitar tunings in full

**146** **STOP ME** **ALBUM FEATURE** LA Express guitarist Robben Ford tells of his journey with Joni



Joni at 75: a birthday celebration at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, LA, November 7, 2018



**86** **CHALK MARK IN A RAIN STORM** **ALBUM FEATURE** Celebrity guests add stardust to a glossy late-'80s outing

**90** **NIGHT RIDE HOME** **ALBUM FEATURE** A new decade heralds a return to intimate, introspective concerns

**94** **TURBULENT INDIGO** **ALBUM FEATURE** As a Van Gogh homage adorns the cover, a tortured artist vents her spleen between the grooves within



# CLOUDS

RELEASED 01 MAY 1969

**"Ageing children, I am one..." Songs of innocence and experience, intertwined.**

**BY WYNDHAM WALLACE**

**B**y the time Joni Mitchell released *Clouds*, in May 1969, the track whose chorus gave the album its name – “Both Sides, Now” – had already been recorded by more than a dozen other artists, with further renditions on the horizon. Its ubiquity was understandable: not only is it a remarkable song but, as Mitchell revealed on March 12, 1967, in an interview for Gene Shay’s *Folklore Program*, “I’ve been driving everybody crazy by playing it twice and three times a night.” She’d only written it “a few days earlier”, she added, but within months Judy Collins had cut a version for her *Wildflowers* album, which, released as a single a year later, took the song into the American Top 10. Frank Sinatra adopted it too, and *Camelot* star Robert Goulet, while Claudine Longet and Marie Laforêt delivered French interpretations. Even Leonard Nimoy took an affectionate, if faltering, crack at it for 1968’s *The Way I Feel*, and its allure has apparently never waned. Including Dexys’ cover last year, Mitchell’s website currently states that it’s been recorded an astonishing 1,141 times. A standard before Mitchell even put it to tape herself, “Both Sides, Now” is, one might argue, indestructible.

The song, she told Gene Shay during that *Folklore Program* interview, was inspired by – and written before she even finished reading – Saul Bellow’s *Henderson The Rain King*. “There’s a line in it that I especially got hung up on,” she confided, “that was about when he [*Henderson*] was flying to Africa and searching for something. He said that in an age when

people could look up and down at clouds, they shouldn’t be afraid to die. And so I got this idea: ‘*from both sides now*’.” It’s an idea that, broadly speaking, she applied to the album as a whole. Almost all of *Clouds*’ 10 tracks are distinguished by Mitchell’s ability to perceive things from more than one perspective, and this sense of equilibrium, conspicuous in both her serenity and lyrical poise, is vital to the album’s enduring appeal.

It’s unsurprising that critics have often alluded to Mitchell’s offerings as songs of innocence and experience. Unlike William Blake, however, Mitchell seems unable to separate these two mindsets. Twenty-five when the album was released, she appears both naïve and world-weary; forced, on “I Don’t Know Where I Stand”, to acknowledge the complexities and doubts new love brings while celebrating its dopamine-fuelled rush. “*Picked up a pencil and wrote ‘I love you’ in my finest hand*”, she sings, “*Wanted to send it, but I don’t know where I stand*”. Like the “*varnished weeds in window jars*” and “*roses dipped in sealing wax*” that she describes on the meditative, minor-key “Tin Angel”, she’s frozen in a state of youthful purity. Unlike them, though, she’s susceptible to a wisdom that grows with age. In fact, she even spells this out towards the end of the album: “*Songs to ageing children come/Ageing children, I am one*”.

*Clouds* articulates the dizzying confusion that accompanies the onset of adulthood, when you’re expected to shoulder responsibilities, but are still coming to terms with your identity. Mitchell had ➤





It's hard to pinpoint one single quality that makes it so impressive. Its content perfectly matches its delivery



been forced to grow up fast in the years since she'd left home in 1965, swapping cities – including Toronto, Detroit and New York – and partners until, in 1967, at the behest of her new lover, David Crosby, she reached Los Angeles, where the Toronto department store in which she'd once worked was swiftly forgotten. *Clouds* is consequently saturated – in both its themes and the moods conjured up by its artful, unanticipated chord changes – with a vigorous idealism and a grounding realism. She'd come a long way in a relatively short time from her hometown of Saskatoon.

*Clouds*, however, reveals little of this frantic activity. Partially this is because some of its songs were long established in her catalogue, if unrecorded by Mitchell: besides “Both Sides, Now”'s multiple incarnations, “Chelsea Morning” had already been covered by both Jennifer Warnes and Dave Van Ronk, and “I Don't Know Where I Stand” and “Chelsea Morning” were included on Fairport Convention's 1968 self-titled debut after Joe Boyd passed them demos. The latter, furthermore, referred back to 1967 and Mitchell's New York bedroom's “yellow curtains”, its “crimson crystal beads”, and the rainbow projected on the wall through stained glass salvaged years earlier from a home for unwed mothers. But, more importantly, Mitchell's composure lies at the album's very heart: these songs are intricately constructed, full of carefully considered observations and confessions, and accompanied almost exclusively by only a single acoustic guitar, with any occasional overdubs largely restricted to Mitchell's additional harmonies. Whatever upheavals she's encountered are downplayed. Sidestepping drama in favour of subtle revelations, *Clouds* is instead as self-assured as it is candid, as calmly cynical as it is sentimental.

It had taken a while for Mitchell's approach to lift her above the scrum of folk singers whose recent omnipresence had initially handicapped her search for a deal. Even after manager Elliot Roberts had solved this problem with a Reprise Records contract, Mitchell had to battle prevailing attitudes in order to overcome the “girl singer” tag. In the summer of 1968, *Crawdaddy's* Paul Williams – even though he was ostensibly praising *Song To A Seagull* – patronisingly asserted that, “Young women think and speak on a fairly simple level, but feel on a deeply complex one,” before asking, “Have you ever noticed how much more important is the sound of a woman's voice than what she says with it?”

Mitchell, however, contradicted this, overcoming prejudices by pairing the fluidity of her voice with the ingenious expression of knotted emotions. “I was really a folk singer up until 1965,” she told Barney Hoskyns, “but once I crossed the border, I began to write. My songs

## CRITICS' VERDICT

“A superb second album from one of America's best singer-songwriters... All she has written is of a highly personal nature dealing with tangible situations and reflecting her reactions to them... Joni Mitchell is a great talent and this album more than confirms it.”

CHRIS WELCH,  
MELODY  
MAKER,  
SEPTEMBER 27,  
1969

began to be, like, playlets or soliloquies. My voice even changed – I no longer was imitative of the folk style, really. I was just a girl with a guitar that made it look that way.” Untrained as either a singer or guitarist, Mitchell assimilated influences from beyond the genre – her work's suitability for stylistically varied interpretations confirms this – and her lyrics, though full of colourful imagery like “*Crickets call, courting their ladies in star-dappled green*” (“I Don't Know Where I Stand”), transcended and sometimes even subverted contemporary hippie tendencies.

“Tin Angel”, the album's opening track – also covered, alongside “Urge For Going” (a future B-side to “You Turn Me On, I'm A Radio”), by Tom Rush for the previous year's *The Circle Game* (itself a Mitchell composition that would later surface on *Ladies Of The Canyon*) – swiftly establishes this technique. Beginning with a gently plucked guitar line and rippling chords, Mitchell goes on, elegiacally, to list “reflections of love's memories”: “*Tarnished beads on tapestries*”, “*Valentines and maple leaves/ Tucked into a paperback*”. But her joy in finding “*someone to love today*” is carefully undermined: “*Dark with darker moods is he/ Not a golden prince who's come/ Through columbines and wizardry/ To talk of castles in the sun*”. Similarly, “Both Sides, Now”'s memorable sketches of the skies above her – “*Rows and flows of angel hair/ And ice-cream castles in the air*” – are soon transformed into something more negative: “*But now they only block the sun/ They rain and snow on everyone*”.

On “I Don't Know Where I Stand”, too, she appears to mock her romantic inclinations, contrasting the naïve pleasures of a “*sunny day, braiding wild flowers and leaves in my hair*” with a more sceptical acceptance of reality: “*Feeling too foolish and strange to say the words that I had planned/ I guess it's too early*”. Indeed, while *Clouds* overflows with references to pleasures traditionally – condescendingly – thought of as feminine, they're part of a more sophisticated picture that relishes earthy, sensual desires and is tolerant of betrayals. This wasn't entirely new for Mitchell, as *Song To A Seagull* attests, but throughout *Clouds*, she extends this privilege even further, treating her listener as a confidante, inviting empathy

Mitchell pairs the fluidity of her voice with the ingenious expression of knotted emotions

while discreetly draping a poetic veil over the minutiae.

Two songs in particular address a love affair with a man whose identity was later confirmed by Judy Collins in her 2011 autobiography, *Sweet Judy Blue Eyes*. “Joni wrote ‘That Song About The Midway’ about Leonard (Cohen),” she revealed, “or so she says. Sounds right: the festival, the guy, the jewel in the ear.” Mitchell had met Cohen at the 1967 Newport Folk Festival, and he not only made a significant impression, but also provoked one of her most notable similes: “*You stood out like a ruby in a black man's ear*”. The relationship was short-lived, possibly because, as Mitchell hints, Cohen proved to be less than faithful: “*You were betting on some lover/ You were shaking up the dice/ And I thought I saw you cheating once or twice*”. “The Gallery”, too, appears inspired by Cohen's infidelity, a suggestion given further credence by both the Cohen-esque language employed by her protagonist – “*Lady, please love me now, I am dead*” – and her introduction to the song during a 1970 BBC In Concert performance: “Artists are connoisseurs of beauty, and I always like to say that this is a song about a man who spent a lot of time riding around ‘connoisseur’ all those



"Both Sides, Now":  
live on *The Mama Cass  
Television Program*,  
June 26, 1969



beauties." As she told Cameron Crowe in 1979, "I have a tendency to confront my relationships much more often than people would care." What's most striking about both songs, however, is how graceful her voice remains, even when, in "The Gallery", she sweetly but mischievously divulges how "I see that now it's Josephine/Who cannot be without you". Tenderness, in fact, permeates *Clouds*, whether she's exploring her newfound lower register on the contemplative but quietly optimistic "Tin Angel", or hitting her highest notes at the end of "Roses Blue", in which she slowly, expertly, unfurls a tale of a woman who's allowed her obsession with the occult to destroy friendships. It's there, as well, on "Songs To Aging Children Come", in which she trills and coos like a songbird, and in her playing, too, the strings of her guitars often seemingly caressed rather than strummed.

On "Chelsea Morning", she even spurns its lower notes, emphasising the lyrics' carefree, hopeful sentiment, while, on "The Fiddle And The Drum", she puts her instrument down altogether, forcing us to focus entirely on its forlorn melody and a bold, reasoned message of peace. "Johnny, my dear friend", she asks, "What time is

this/ To trade the handshake for the fist?" before she extends similar queries to America as a whole. To some, its sacrifice of the transparently personal for the bluntly political made it less effective than the songs that surrounded it. Geoffrey Cannon, writing in *The Guardian* in June 1969, declared that "'The Fiddle And The Drum' is her only failure, because its metaphors don't have her living in them." But such criticism was to overlook the affection expressed for its protagonist – and, by extension, the US – in lines like "We can remember/All the good things you are". It also neglected to acknowledge that its sentiment, sadly, might remain pertinent even today.

In the end, it's hard to pinpoint one single quality that makes *Clouds* so impressive.

Its content perfectly matches its delivery, the delight of language employed with such precision ideally suited to music even more lively. It earned Mitchell a 1970 Grammy for Best Folk Performance, but that was a backhanded compliment: *Clouds'* reach extended far beyond any specialist category. It confirmed Mitchell not only as a writer of unusually versatile songs open to endless reinvention – her website documents a total of 1,378 recordings of *Clouds'* tracks by other artists – but as a performer of exquisite sensitivity able to shed light on our passions and doubts. Like the sun that dappled her apartment walls on that famed Chelsea morning, its music "poured in like butterscotch/And stuck to all my senses".

## TRACKMARKS CLOUDS

- 1 Tin Angel ★★★★★
- 2 Chelsea Morning ★★★★★
- 3 I Don't Know Where I Stand ★★★★★
- 4 That Song About The Midway ★★★★★
- 5 Roses Blue ★★★★★

- 6 The Gallery ★★★★★
- 7 I Think I Understand ★★★★★
- 8 Songs To Aging Children Come ★★★★★
- 9 The Fiddle And The Drum ★★★★★

- 10 Both Sides, Now ★★★★★

Label: Reprise  
Recorded at: A&M Studios, Hollywood, CA  
Produced by: Joni Mitchell (except "Tin

Angel": produced by Paul Rothchild)  
Personnel: Joni Mitchell (vocals, guitar, keyboards), Stephen Stills (bass, guitar)  
Highest chart position: UK -; US 31