

WILD THINGS RUN FAST

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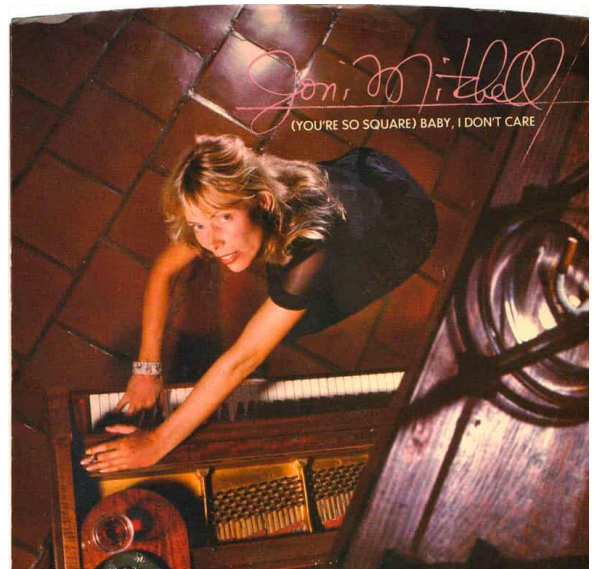
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After a three-year gap came the first release on new label Geffen and a confused start to the '80s, with rhythms influenced by The Police and a coded message about her past.



ICONS WHO CAME of age in the '60s and revolutionised the game in the '70s tended to hit the '80s with decisions to make. To consolidate or keep evolving? Move with the times or keep going your own way?

In Joni Mitchell's case, 1979's *Mingus* album proved to be the final word in the lexicon of her hybrid of folk, rock and jazz. After an astonishing run of 10 LPs in 11 years, there was a gap of three years before *Wild Things Run Fast* appeared, suggesting she was unsure of her next step. Few would have anticipated that she would be guided by The Police. "Their rhythmic hybrids, and the positioning of the drums, and the sound of the drums, was one of the main calls out to me to make a more rhythmic album," Mitchell explained, also citing the impact of Talking Heads and Steely Dan.





TRACKS



Side 1

Chinese Cafe /
Unchained
Melody
Wild Things Run
Fast
Ladies Man
Moon At The
Window
Solid Love



Side 2

Be Cool
(You're So
Square) Baby,
I Don't Care
You Dream Flat
Tires
Man To Man
Underneath
The Streetlight
Love

Rock, funk, new wave, AOR – just what would *Wild Things* really sound like? The answer was a confused, erratic and yet strangely satisfying record from the get-go. With new husband Larry Klein's bass aping *Mingus* star turn Jaco Pastorius' luminous style, album intro Chinese Cafe could have slotted into, say, *Hejira*, with Mitchell indeed feeling nostalgic – the cafe was one of the venues she'd played in her early days in Toronto, but the feeling here was bittersweet, even cynical. "We're middle-aged, we were wild in the old days," she sang. "Birth of rock'n'roll days/Now your kids are coming up straight."

The track was also a confession – unnoticed at the time – that Mitchell had given up a daughter for adoption ("My child's a stranger/I bore her/But I could not raise her") in 1965. In this context, Chinese Cafe's segue into a cover of the Righteous Brothers' 1965 smash Unchained Melody makes sense. But without context, it was a baffling choice, especially coming after the bravery of *Mingus*. On top, *Wild Things* also tackled Elvis Presley's rocker You're So Square (Baby, I Don't Care), like something Joni might perform

at a friend's wedding, even with guitarist Michael Landau's impersonation of part-time Talking Head Adrian Belew's busy, bendy style.

Following Chinese Cafe/Unchained Melody, at least the title track unveiled a new Joni, the sinewy Police-like rhythm charging Mitchell's dynamic chords. Addressing a former lover ("What makes you run?/Wild thing/I thought you loved me"), her tone was regretful, but the object of her disaffection in Ladies Man gets it in the neck ("You're acting like a vandal/Wrecking the dream"), though the music was soft, sweet and even soulful. Also caressed by the similar jazz-lite tones of Steely Dan, Moon On The Window cast the net of blame wider: "People don't know how to love/They taste it and toss it/Turn it off and on."

Solid Love's uptempo sass triggers a more positive spin on love, considering Mitchell's new marriage. You'd even call Underneath The Streetlight joyous and playful ("Yes I do I love you/I swear on the disco sparkle dark I do"), and by the closing Love, Joni is in the mood to celebrate ("love is the greatest beauty").

For all its flaws, and its new influences, *Wild Things* was nothing if not totally Joni Mitchell. ●

Unchained: (far left) Joni on-stage at CNE Bandshell, Toronto, July 12, 1983.

