

# NIGHT RIDE HOME

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*The difficult '80s over, the critics were back on Mitchell's side for an easy-going folk album – albeit with some dark themes. Not that Joni seemed to care what anyone thought...*

Mad about you: Mitchell with husband and collaborator Larry Klein at Sting's show at the Wiltern Theatre, LA, February 4, 1991.





## TRACKS



## Side 1

Night Ride Home

Passion Play  
(When The Slaves  
Are Free)

Cherokee Louise

The Windfall  
(Everything For  
Nothing)Slouching  
Towards  
Bethlehem

## Side 2

Come In From  
The ColdNothing Can  
Be DoneThe Only Joy  
In TownRay's Dad's  
CadillacTwo Grey  
Rooms

***“Night Ride Home is a comforting shrug of a record, the sound of an artist totally at ease with herself.”***

**N**IGHT RIDE HOME was the sound of Joni Mitchell coming back to base after more than a decade of experimental jazz-tinged diversions. But this was a different type of folk music to the songs she'd made as an earnest 20-something two decades earlier and Mitchell, now 47, was a different type of artist. This was folk that sounded like it had lived through the '80s, dressed in Fairlight flourishes and warm synth pads – maybe some shoulder pads too, everything a little more languid than Mitchell had ever sounded before. This was her album of middle-aged reflection: as she sung on the jaunty, chiming *Nothing Can Be Done*, “Oh I am not old/I'm told/But I am not young.”

Accordingly, there is a sort of “who cares?” grace to the way *Night Ride Home* unfurls with its airy, strolling percussion and homely guitar strums. Sonically, it's a comforting shrug of a record, the sound of an artist totally at ease with herself. “I'm 47 and I guess I've come through my middle-age crazies, which are as predictable as the terrible twos,” she said.

Though interviews at the time suggest her nose had been put out of joint by the less than rapturous receptions for *Chalk Mark In A Rain Storm* and *Dog Eat Dog* (“The critics have not been kind to me for many years,” she stated in a promo interview distributed by Geffen), none of that rancour made its way into the

music. Instead, it was an album constructed from what Mitchell described as “happy, positive chords”. “It's a very sunny modality, this album, and friendly,” she told the *Boston Globe*.

Despite that, it was made at night, Mitchell preferring to work with husband and bassist Larry Klein and a tight-knit group of musicians into the wee hours, perhaps explaining the sense of hushed ambience.

Darker lyrical themes were tucked in among the easy-going musicality. *Cherokee Louise* is about a childhood friend who was sexually abused, while *The Windfall (Everything For Nothing)* is a seething diatribe at the Guatemalan (former) housekeeper who tried to sue Mitchell. The LP's most astounding moment is the epic slow drama of *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, a reworking of W.B. Yeats' poem *The Second Coming* that plays like a gently devastating salute to the impending apocalypse.

Released in February 1991, *Night Ride Home* got those pesky critics back on-side. Not that it really mattered. Mitchell had been playing the game too long to get wrapped up in it. “I feel this aura of ‘Welcome home, Joan!’ building,” she said, “but this album isn't an attempt to regain my old audience. A lot of the things I was doing is the same thing that Paul Simon and Sting are doing now. I haven't gone back, I just think I'm in sync with the times again.” ●