

REACH FOR A STAR, MOST PEOPLE DO

The way of Joni

By SUSAN KASTNER
Star staff writer

The pleasantly round-faced girl in the Riverboat audience was watching her husband drink Joni Mitchell in. The singer's long golden hair floated around her doll's face while her shimmering voice chanted of flowers and sun-warmed shoulders and seabirds soaring out of reach. "Call, and I follow, I follow!" cried the look on the husband's rapt face. "And just who do you think would mend your socks, buster?" asked the small, pained, ironic smile on the face of his wife.

Three years ago, when Saskatoon-born Joni Mitchell came to Toronto after working for nothing in Calgary folk clubs, the only job the Riverboat would offer her was a job as a dishwasher.

Today her songs are recorded by everyone from Harry Belafonte to Judy Collins. She has performed all over the United States and Europe; she has an apartment in New York and a house in California. And she makes the men who hear her sing believe that a life without mended socks is still possible.

Man and boy, they are plainly thinking that if only they hadn't settled for their prosaic Maudes and Mary Janes, they could be taking flight with a naturally golden-haired Joni, one innocent yet wise, childlike yet knowing, half-buttercup, half-peony; one who would understand, and never sink their soaring souls with weights of darned socks and dental bills...

*Michael from mountains
Go where you will go to
Know that I will know you
Someday I may know you
very well.*

Joni's thin, sturdy child's body weaves gracefully above an immense guitar; her blouse is flowered and transparent above a tiny skirt the color of wine, with white stockings, and feet buckled and strapped in little girl's round red shoes.

She is not unaware of the reaction she stirs in the clean-faced young boys who sit through three of her sets without moving, reading books like Joseph Conrad's *Tales of Land and Sea* during intermission. "The stage lets you project an awfully powerful image," she says. "It sets you apart; makes you a tremendously romantic figure." The image, like the songs, is a projection which is not completely uncalculated.

*Marcie in a coat of flowers
Stops inside a candy store
Reds are sweet and greens
are sour*

*Still no letter at her door
So she'll wash her flower
curtains*

*Hang them in the wind to dry
Dust her tables with his shirt
and*

Wave another day goodbye...

"Most of my songs are written from personal experiences. The Michael in Michael From Mountains is a real person. He was a child-man; he was always showing you his treasures like a boy. I got a letter from him the other day; it said, 'I found a cave at the foot of a mountain with a stone at the entrance where Neptune sits...'"

"It was because of my Grade 7 teacher in Saskatoon, Mr. Kratzman, that I first started to write the way I do. He was an Australian, a great tall man with one gold tooth and I was in love with him. I had written a poem about a stallion; he returned it all marked up and circled. 'What do you know about stallions?' he said. 'The other day you told me about going out after the rain and gathering tadpoles in an empty mayonnaise jar. Why don't you write about that?' I've dedicated my first album to him for teaching me to love words."

There are, of course, those who find all this a little too simplistic. If you search very hard you can find one man who calls her "mindless" and another who feels the \$2.50 he spent on a Joni Mitchell concert in Ottawa was money shamefully wasted. She has been criticized for being too bland, out of the modern mainstream of modern-day, involved, protest-filled youth, but she insists that it is the protesters who are lacking, not she.

"They're like the old fire-and-brimstone preachers who have you roasting in hell if you don't do what they say. They preach to the converted, anyway. The preachers and teachers I remember best are the ones who pointed gently to where I was wrong, so that I felt naughty."

"When people listen to Nathan La Franeer, which is about a real New York cabdriver. I hope someone who's been particularly greedy would hurt in his stomach, and say to himself, 'Wow—what would she think of me?'"

She also writes so openly about her own character in her songs that you are freely invited to consider what you ought to think of her:

*There's a man who sends her
medals*

He's bleeding from the war

There's a jester and a jester

and a man who owns a store

There's a drummer and a dreamer

*And you know there may be
more*

*She will love them when she
sees them*

They will lose her if they follow

*And she only means to please
them*

*And her heart is full and
hollow*

Like a cactus tree

"Men fascinate me. I love them," she says, crinkling her eyes in a little-girl laugh. "But there's this ironic thing with me too; I'm busy being free. I think when I settle down I'll have to quit the business. But first I have to see it through to the end."

Beneath that flower-child exterior beats a relatively serious and well-organized heart. Since the beginning, for instance, Joni has done without a road manager, and although she finally broke down and hired an agent and a business manager this year, she still books all her shows herself. She also admits she's "a pretty good manager of money. I never did like charge accounts; I always pay cash and I always have money in the bank."

"Gee, those were good days," she adds, not altogether convincingly. "before I was a celebrity and I could just slip in and out of town without having to talk to anybody. I had to work hard on gaining confidence, you know. I only started believing in myself this year." She lowers her blue eyes to the table.

Born in Saskatoon 25 years ago, Joni Mitchell attended art college in Calgary for a year after high school and began playing the baritone ukulele. "I was a Kingston Trio fan. I used to sing some of their English ballads, but when I discovered how little material there was that was right for me I started writing my own things, and playing them on the guitar. I don't transcribe them myself; I tape them and send them to a transcriber. I never have liked getting down to the little-detail part of things."

She had no musical training, "except for a year of piano between the ages of six and seven." She still does a little painting, in deference to her art college days. The cover of her new Warner Brothers album is her own design, a pure-Joni explosion of art-nouveau flowers, sunshine, and plump little birds. One is sitting on a fat egg marked "Love Life."

As you might expect with a breakaway girl from Saskatoon, her parents are a little baffled by it all. "I wrote a very subtle song once called Easter Rain. My mother called me and said, 'Joni, it sounds as though you've been shacking up with someone!' I haven't heard from them yet about my record, which is not a very good sign..."

Her three-year-old marriage to folksinger Chuck Mitchell ended last year—a hazard of mating with the man you work with, she says. "It destroys them when you do well and they don't. It's practically an impossible situation. You know the only one who's been able to manage it? Elizabeth Taylor, with Richard Burton. I'll have to study her and figure out how it's done."

John Macfarlane reviews Joni Mitchell's new album—her first —on page 80.



—Star photos by Doug Griffin

THREE YEARS AGO Joni Mitchell was offered a job as a dishwasher in a Yorkville coffee house. This week and next, at the same coffee house, she's the star entertainer. Three years from now she may be one of the biggest names in North American folk music.

Michael From Mountains

By Joni Mitchell

*Michael wakes you up with sweets
He takes you up streets and the rain comes down
Sidewalk markets locked up tight
And umbrellas bright on a grey background
There's oil on the puddles in taffeta patterns
That run down the drain
In colored arrangements
That Michael will change with a stick that
he found*

*Michael brings you to a park
He sings and it's dark when
the clouds come by
Yellow slickers up on swings
Like puppets on strings hanging in the sky
They'll splash home to supper in wallpapered kitchens
Their mothers will scold
But Michael will hold you
To keep away cold till the sidewalks are dry*

*Michael leads you up stairs
He needs you to care and you know you do
Cats come crying to the key
And dry you will be in a towel or two
There's rain in the window
There's sun in the painting that smiles on the wall
You want to know all
But his mountains have called so you
never do...*



Nathan La Franeer

By Joni Mitchell

*I hired a coach to take me from confusion to the plane
And though we share a common space I know
I'll never meet again
The driver with his eyebrows furrowed in the
rear-view mirror
I read his name and it was plainly written
Nathan La Franeer*

*I asked him would we hurry
But we crawled the canyons slowly
Thru the buyers and the sellers
Thru the burglar bells and the wishing wells
With gangs and girly shows
The ghostly garden grows*

*The cars and buses bustled thru the bedlam of the
day
I looked thru window-glass at streets and Nathan
grumbled at the grey
I saw an aging cripple selling Superman balloons
The city grated thru chrome-plate
The clock struck slowly half-past-noon
Thru the tunnel tiled and turning
Into daylight once again I am escaping
Once again goodbye
To symphonies and dirty trees
With parks and plastic clothes
The ghostly garden grows*

*He asked me for a dollar more
He cursed me to my face
He hated everyone who paid to ride
And share his common space
I picked my bags up from the curb
And stumbled to the door
Another man reached out his hand
Another hand reached out for more
I filled it full of silver
And I left the fingers counting
And the sky goes on forever
Without metermaids and peace parades
You feed it all your woes
The ghostly garden grows*

