



Joni Mitchell: The Hissing of Winter Concerts

Joni Mitchell
Nassau Coliseum
Long Island
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by Kit Rachlis

While she is one of the most distinctive personalities in rock, Joni Mitchell's career has been a series of contradictions. A romantic obsessed with love, she consistently chooses independence over men. A leading poet of the pop aristocracy, she is consumed with guilt about her elitism. She is simultaneously an innocent little girl lost and a sophisticated, severe *Vogue* model.

Her concert at Nassau Coliseum, part of a three-month tour, didn't resolve any of these conflicts. Instead, it highlighted each pose, presenting them like so many beads on a string. For "Help Me," her opener, Mitchell dressed in a black pantsuit, topped by a black felt hat with her hair piled up inside, the total effect being one of androgynous austerity. Frequently turning her back to the audience and not talking during the first four songs, she made Dylan seem accessible. Two hours later, she would remove her hat (to great applause), strip off her jacket, roll up her sleeves and, ciga-

rette in hand, close with a loose, smiling rendition of "Twisted."

The middle of the concert did not help resolve this stylistic and sartorial disparity. Pensive and removed at one moment, cheery and full of stage patter the next, Mitchell remained the consummate professional throughout, leading the L.A. Express, her five-piece band, with firm control. Though such leadership isn't commonplace among women singers, Mitch-

ell's audience is so adoring that she really wasn't risking much. For a performer operating in a state of grace, she took few chances (except by introducing four new songs), improvised little and ran through her set with the spontaneity of a NASA space launch.

Although her work since *For the Roses* (1972) has won her enormous popularity, Mitchell demonstrated at Nassau that she hasn't overcome the difficulties that have plagued her

recent work, particularly last year's *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*. Her lack of melodic ideas and the cliché-ridden, cumbersome support of the L.A. Express are particularly disconcerting.

She circumvented some of these problems by playing much of the *Summer Lawns* material solo or accompanied by a single instrumentalist. As a result, "Shades of Scarlet Conquering" and "Edith and the Kingpin," with her voice in full

command, fared much better than in the studio. But when the full L.A. Express joined her they burdened her songs with chunks of ersatz jazz, performed with all the finesse but none of the power of the locomotive that is their namesake.

Of the new material she presented, the most striking was "Blues for Furry." Written for and about Memphis bluesman Furry Lewis, the song represents a further examination of the relationship between guilt and pop stardom. The other new songs ("Coyote," "Don Juan's Reckless Daughter" and "Talk to Me") resembled her pre-*Summer Lawns* personal material even though many of the words were lost in the din. Musically, the new songs are only a denser rehash of *Court and Spark*. Even a performer whose audience offers carte blanche can't subsist on tedium.

And it was no coincidence that the concert's high points were her spare, slowed down versions of "Rainy Night House" and "Cold Blue Steel and Sweet Fire." But with her music and her masks rarely in order, Mitchell failed to establish that listening to her concerts is remotely as satisfying as hearing her records.

CALENDAR

Bad Company: Tuscaloosa, AL (3/25), Mobile, AL (3/26), Jacksonville, FL (3/27), Miami, FL (3/28), Lakeland, FL (3/30), Atlanta, GA (4/1), Charlotte, NC (4/2), Greensboro, NC (4/3).
Chicago: Denver, CO (3/25), San Francisco (3/27-28), Los Angeles (3/29-30).
Joe Cocker: Memphis, TN (3/25), Shreveport, LA (3/26), San Antonio, TX (3/27), Tulsa, OK (3/28), Corpus Christi, TX (3/31), New Orleans, LA (4/2), Houston, TX (4/3), Dallas, TX (4/4), Davenport, IA (4/7), Milwaukee, WI (4/8).
Jessi Colter: Hays, KS (3/30), Portales, NM (4/2), Anaheim, CA (4/4), Reno, NV (4/5).
Commodores: Rochester, NY (3/26), Syracuse, NY (3/28), New Haven, CT (3/30), Springfield, MA (4/2), Baltimore, MD (4/3), Philadelphia, PA (4/4).
Doobie Brothers: Columbia, MO (4/6), Omaha, NB (4/7), Tulsa, OK (4/8).
ELO: Norfolk, VA (3/26), Greensboro, NC (3/27), Columbia, SC (3/28),

Memphis, TN (3/29), New Orleans, LA (3/30), Jacksonville, FL (4/2), Atlanta, GA (4/4-5), St. Petersburg, FL (4/6).
Crystal Gayle: Abbeville, LA (3/26), Houston, TX (3/27), Charlotte, NC (4/1-3).
Merle Haggard: Saginaw, MI (3/26), Kalamazoo, MI (3/27), Chicago, IL (3/28), Greenville, SC (4/2), Macon, GA (4/3), Dothan, AL (4/4).
Alphonso Johnson: Milwaukee, WI (3/27), Berkeley, CA (4/2), Santa Monica, CA (4/3).
Journey: Norfolk, VA (3/26), Greensboro, NC (3/27), Columbia, SC (3/28), Atlanta, GA (3/29-31).
Gordon Lightfoot: Sacramento, CA (4/2), San Jose, CA (4/3), San Diego, CA (4/4), Ft. Collins, CO (4/5).
Lynyrd Skynyrd: Dallas, TX (3/26), Oklahoma City, OK (3/27), St. Paul, MN (3/30), Des Moines, IA (3/31), Chicago, IL (4/2), St. Louis, MO (4/3), Kansas City, MO (4/4).
Laura Nyro: Chicago, IL (3/26), Champaign, IL (3/27), New York City (3/31).
Olivia Newton-John: Tempe, AZ (3/26), Tucson, AZ (3/27), Las Cruces, NM (3/28), Little Rock, AR (4/1), Memphis, TN (4/2), Mobile, AL (4/

3), Monroe, LA (4/4), Baton Rouge, LA (4/5), Shreveport, LA (4/6).
Ohio Players: Rockland, NY (3/27), Cullowee, NC (4/8), Jacksonville, FL (4/9).
O'Jays: Rochester, NY (3/26), Syracuse, NY (3/28), New Haven, CT (3/30), Baltimore, MD (4/3), Philadelphia, PA (4/4).
Charlie Rich: Providence, RI (3/26), Hartford, CT (3/27), Ozark, AL (4/2), Kansas City, MO (4/3), Omaha, NB (4/4).
Ravi Shankar: San Francisco (4/3), Crawfordsville, IN (4/8), Chicago, IL (4/10).
Neil Sedaka: New Orleans, LA (3/26), Memphis, TN (3/27), Ruston, LA (3/28), Chattanooga, TN (3/30), Knoxville, TN (3/31), Nashville, TN (4/1), Johnson City, TN (4/2), Atlanta, GA (4/3), Charleston, WV (4/4).
Robin Trower: Indianapolis, IN (3/28), Detroit, MI (3/29), Philadelphia, PA (3/30), Boston, MA (4/1), Largo, MD (4/2), Hampton Rhodes, VA (4/3), New Orleans, LA (4/7).
Johnny Winter: Milwaukee, WI (3/26), Duluth, MN (3/27), Nashville, TN (3/30), Little Rock, AR (3/31), New York City (4/3), Boston, MA (4/4).