

swerve

fun listings +

CALGARY INSIDE & OUT

02.02.07

riffing joni

“ I was in a café smoking,
somewhere, and a girl
came up to me and said,
'I'm a manic depressive.
I love your music, but I hate
pictures of you. Every time
I see you, you're smiling
and it makes me mad!' ”

-joni mitchell, 1997

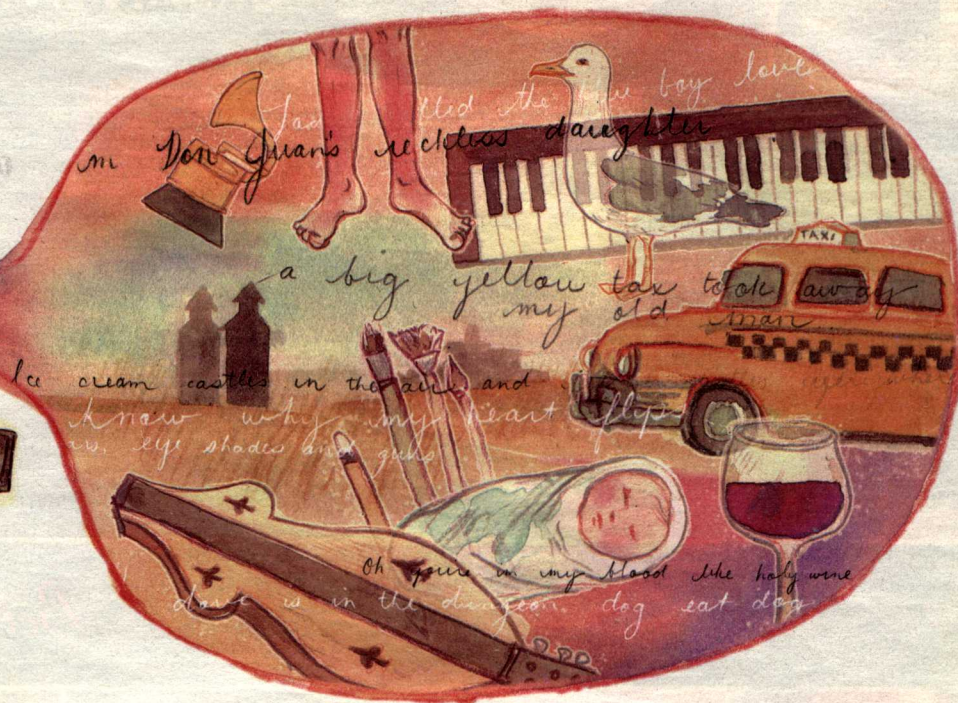
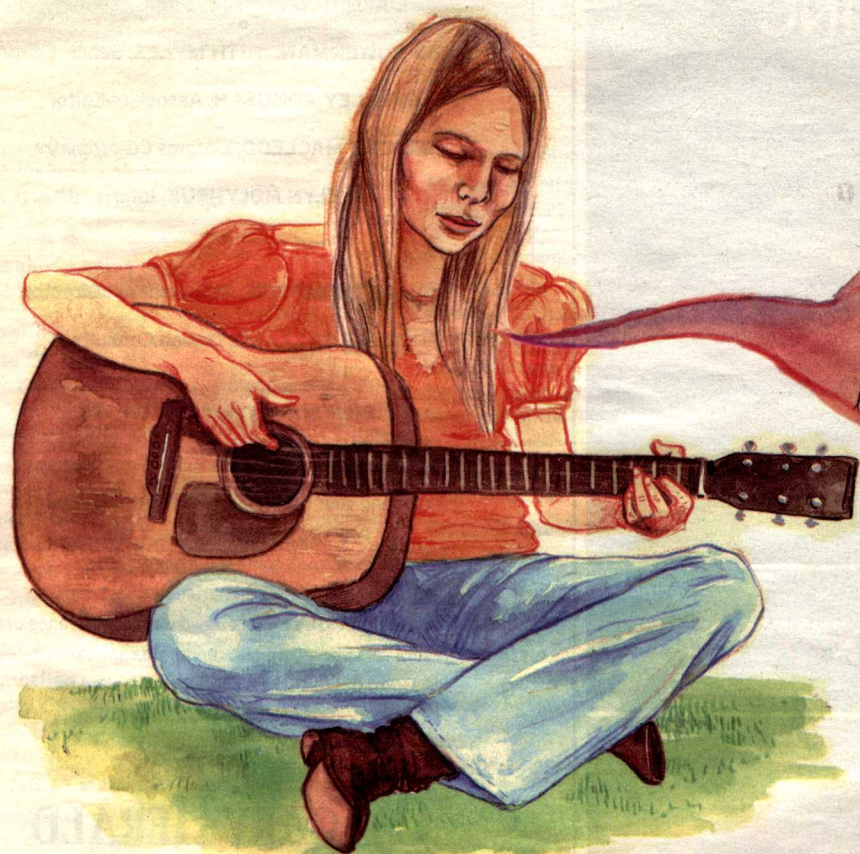


JONI MITCHELL'S ARTISTIC HOMECOMING: Her New Ballet + Her Quirks + Her Musical Babies + Her Roots

SWERVE

02-02-07

"The fragile scarecrow image of her that comes through on TV in no way prepares one for the mature, sexy realities of Miss Mitchell in the flesh"



ON THE COVER

22 ...JONI RIFFS

Joni Mitchell is here, there and everywhere right now—which makes this the perfect time to submerge ourselves in our prairie muse.

BY SHELLEY YOUNGBLUT, SHELLEY ARNUSCH AND JACQUIE MOORE

COVER BY JACK ROBINSON/HULTON ARCHIVES/
GETTY IMAGES (TAKEN NOV. 28, 1968 FOR VOGUE)

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JULIE MCLAUGHLIN

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CALGARY HERALD
AND DEERFOOT MEADOWS PRESENTS

JONI MITCHELL

Paints a Ballet for the 21st Century

DANCING JONI

& OTHER WORKS

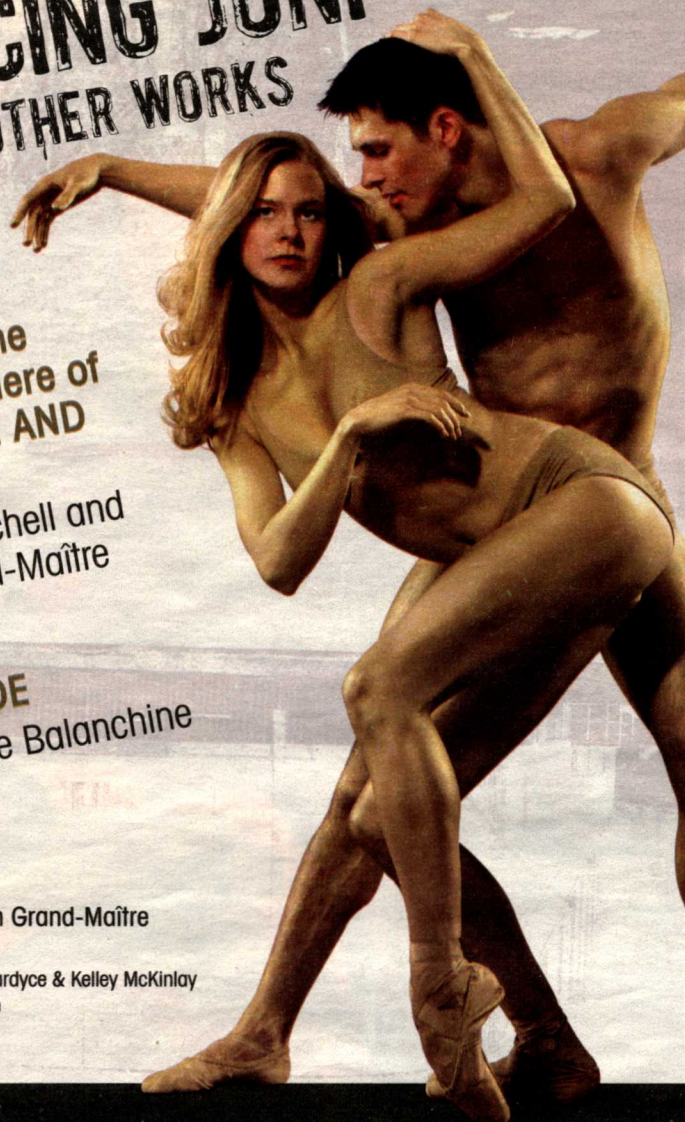
AB
ALBERTA BALLET
CANADA
FIRST 40 YEARS

Don't miss the
World Premiere of
**THE FIDDLE AND
THE DRUM**
by Joni Mitchell and
Jean Grand-Maitre

PLUS
SERENADE
by George Balanchine

Artistic Director Jean Grand-Maitre

Company Artists Leigh Allardyce & Kelley McKinlay
Photography by Trudie Lee



Get your tickets **now** before we sell out!
Performing at the Southern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium,
February 8 - 10, 2007

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For info: www.albertaballet.com

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swerve

going out **february 02-08**

sun feb. 4

Stephen Fearing
At The Club, Banff Centre
Theatre Complex. 8 p.m.
\$15 - \$17. 1-800-413-8368.

upcoming

Iain Campbell Smith
Friday, Feb. 9. Calgary Folk Club
at Dalhousie Community Centre,
5432 Dalhart Rd. N.W. \$20 at UC,
286-5651. calgaryfolkclub.com.

David Francey
Sat., Feb. 10. With Lindsay Eil.
NMC.

Lunch At Allen's
Saturday, Feb. 10, presented
by Bow Valley Music Club
(BVMC), \$20. Sunday, Feb. 11
at Margaret Greenham Theatre,
Banff Centre. 8 p.m. \$24 - \$26.
1-800-413-8368.

Barry Luft
Sunday, Feb. 11. With Collage.
At Banff Trail Hall, 2115 20th Ave.
N.W. Two shows: 3 p.m. and 7 p.m.
\$12 at the door. 287-9969.

Emmylou Harris
Sunday, Feb. 11. With Carolina
Star. At Jubilee Auditorium.
8 p.m. \$63.60. TM.

Tim O'Brien
Sun., Feb. 11 at the Irish Cultural
Centre, 6452 35th Ave. N.W.
7 p.m. \$20. 220-7202.

Rascal Flatts
Thursday, Feb. 22. With
Jason Aldean. At Pengrowth
Saddledome. \$79.50. TM.

The Ruthie Foster Trio
Thursday, Feb. 22 at Knox United
Church, 506 4th Ave. S.W. 8 p.m.
\$25 at www.keystonemusic.ca.

**Mae Moore and
Lester Quitzau**
Friday Feb. 23. With Andrew
Bartley at Southwood United
Church, 10690 Elbow Dr. S.W.
8 p.m. \$20 at [www.fishcreek
concerts.com](http://www.fishcreek
concerts.com).

The Dry Branch Fire Squad
Friday, Feb. 23 and Saturday, Feb.
24. Friday Feb. 23: Calgary Folk
Club at Dalhousie Community
Centre, 5432 Dalhart Rd. N.W.
\$20 at UC, 286-5651. Saturday,
Feb. 24: Chinook Musical Society
at Braeside Community Centre,
11024 Braeside Dr. S.W. 271-3719.

Willie and Lobo
Friday, March 2 at Southwood
United Church, 10690 Elbow Dr.
S.W. 8 p.m. \$25 at [www.fishcreek
concerts.com](http://www.fishcreek
concerts.com).

Buckwheat Zydeco
Sunday, March 4. BD&P World
Music Series at Jack Singer,

Epcor Centre. Pre-concert
Big Squeeze Jam with the
Accordion Association of Calgary.
\$26.88 - \$31.88. TM.

blues, jazz + big band

fri feb. 2

Joe Arroyo
Salsa performer with 17-piece
band. At Bowness Sportsplex,
7904 43rd Ave. N.W. 8 p.m.
\$53 - \$63.60. TM.

upcoming

Mr. Janis Steprans
Friday, Feb. 9 and Sat., Feb. 10.
Presented by Jazz Is Society
at Cantos Music Foundation,
134 11th Ave. S.E. With the
Resident Artists Ensemble.
8:30 p.m. \$20 - \$25 at UC,
Classics Plus (1134 8th Ave. S.W.)
and the door. 543-5115.

The Oath Big Band
Saturday, Feb. 10. Valentines
dinner and dance at Calgary
Petroleum Club, 319 5th Ave. S.W.
7 p.m. \$125 per couple, advance
tickets only. 254-0435.

Ndidi Onukwulu
Thursday, Feb. 15. Carma Acoustic
Blues Series at Engineered Air
Theatre, Epcor Centre. 8 p.m.
\$21.66 - \$25.86. TM.

Jazz and Mambo Gala
Friday, Feb. 16. With performance
by iBombal. Presented by the
Calgary Salsa Society at
MacEwan Ballroom, U of C.
9 p.m. \$39 at www.ticketweb.ca
and 510-8300.

Jane Bunnett
Saturday, Feb. 17. At Bragg
Creek Performing Arts Centre,
23 White Ave., Bragg Creek.

8 p.m. \$10 - \$20, available in
advance at 949-3881 and the
venue (949-4277).

Johnny Winter
Sat., Feb. 17. With David Gogo at
Bowness Community Hall. \$42
at www.keystonemusic.ca.

**Colin James & The Little
Big Band**
Friday, Feb. 23 at Jubilee
Auditorium. \$32.50 - \$42.50. TM.

B.B. King
Friday, May 4. At Jubilee
Auditorium. 8 p.m. \$70 - \$95
at TM.

**classical, choral
+ opera**

fri feb. 2

**Happening 07: University of
Calgary New Music Festival**
Last day of the festival. Three
events: New Music at Noon, free;
Ting: Surround Sound Art, octo-
phonic composition based on the
sculptures of Jean Tinguely,
7 p.m., free; Land's End Chamber
Ensemble, 8 p.m., \$13 - \$20. At
Roza Centre, U of C. 220-5089.
www.ffa.ucalgary.ca.

Concert Night Out
Weekly event at the Banff Centre.
At Rolston Recital Hall. 7:30 p.m.
\$15 - \$20, kids \$10, Concert
Lovers Cardholders, free.
1-800-413-8368.

Frobisher
Closing performance of new origi-
nal English language opera by
John Estacio and John Murrell
(Filumena). Presented by Calgary
Opera at the Jubilee Auditorium.
\$15 - \$125. TM.

LEGEND

TM TicketMaster, 777-0000, www.ticketmaster.ca (extra
charges may apply) **MG** Megatunes, 932 17th Ave. S.W.,
229-3022 **UC** University of Calgary ticket centre, 220-7202
SL Sloth Records, 1508 4th St. S.W., 265-6585 **G45** Giant 45,
1403 11th St. S.W., 244-5845 **JACK SINGER** Concert Hall is
at Epcor Centre for the Performing Arts, 205 8th Ave. S.E.
Box office, 299-8888; info line, 294-7444. www.epcorcentre.org
NMC Nickelodeon Music Club; all shows at Crescent Heights
Community Hall, 1101 2nd St. N.W. www.thenick.ca **BVMC** Bow
Valley Music Club; all shows at Strathcona Community Centre,
277 Strathcona Dr. S.W., concert hotline, 287-2299, [www.bow-
valleymusicclub.org](http://www.bow-
valleymusicclub.org) **MRB** McNally Robinson Booksellers,
120 Stephen Ave. S.W. 538-1797 **Pages** Pages Books on
Kensington, 1135 Kensington Rd. N.W. 283-6655

All events and release dates subject to change



joni sings, joni paints, joni dances, joni laughs, joni smokes, joni riffs

Joni Mitchell is here, there and everywhere right now—which makes this the perfect time to submerge ourselves in our prairie muse.

by shelley youngblut

She is a giggler. This is not what you were expecting. The clichéd view of Joni Mitchell is more like this, courtesy of a *Vogue* writer in 1995: “Though she’s warmer than cordial, she’s a bit distant, a bit beyond reach—like a painting behind glass.” Silly man. You should have just challenged her to a game of pool. She’s actually a good-time gal, who can run up a million on a pinball machine, goes all out at Halloween and jumps up with joy in her kitchen like a seven-year-old. Her laugh, which is as broad, blue and endless as a prairie sky, has deepened over her 64 years, but it erupts from a solid, steady sense of self that took root at birth. How else do you go from being Roberta Joan Anderson, the only child of a small-town Alberta grocer and a schoolteacher, to Joni Mitchell, one of the most original, influential and enduring artists of the 20th Century? That last statement would sound like so much hype, except that she has continually... relentlessly... ambitiously proven it to be true.

She’s been such a consistent icon that it’s difficult to appreciate

the ripple effect her accomplishments have had on the Canadian psyche (without her, Neil Young and Leonard Cohen, we’d just be, say, Switzerland, a nice place to visit but hardly the breeding ground of once-in-a-lifetime geniuses). In a way, her being lumped in with Neil and Leonard has blinded us to her fearlessness. At nine, she contracted polio, but refused to succumb to the iron lung. At 21, she was a pregnant college dropout, with no money, no formal musical training and no connections, determined to sing, as she put it, “long tragic songs in a minor key.” At 25, she had already written “The Circle Game” and “Both Sides Now,” making her Bob Dylan’s peer on the folk/rock scene and Johnny Cash’s choice to duet with him on his ABC TV Show. She was making \$500,000 (US) a year, which meant she could go her way for the next five decades. Look inside the Nov. 20, 1968 issue of *Vogue*, and there’s Joni, grinning, her hands over her mouth and those famous blond bangs in her eyes.

She’s still smiling. You’ve probably read the interviews in which



she skewers the music business, not so much for its chauvinism as for its short attention span. "I'm a very analytical person, a somewhat introspective person; that's the nature of the work I do," she once said. "But this is only one side of the coin, you know. I love to dance. I'm rowdy. I'm a goodtimer."

Joni, Joni, quite contrary, but oh, how your garden grows. Actually, let's bring the metaphor closer to home and call it a field, which Mitchell periodically lets go fallow to replenish the soil before she re-seeds. Right now, for example, she is set to release her latest artistic crop to the world. She's finishing a new record, her first set of original songs since 1998, and there's a tribute album coming in the spring from Nonesuch, featuring Bjork, Prince, Annie Lennox, Elvis Costello and Sufjan Stevens. At this very moment, she's here in Calgary, collaborating with Alberta Ballet's Jean Grand-Maitre on an original ballet called *Dancing Joni, the Fiddle and the Drum*, which premieres Feb. 8 to 10th at the Jubilee Auditorium.

"She's a woman of opinions, but I can say that I've now worked with one of the most vulnerable and open artists I've ever worked with," says Grand-Maitre. He'd originally pitched her on a semi-abstract work about an artist who lost a child when she was very young and got her inspiration from that experience. Mitchell hated it. The saga of her quest for her daughter, who was conceived while she was an art student at SAIT in 1964 and then given up for adoption, had been told and retold, tied up with the red ribbon of her reunion with her daughter and grandson. But Mitchell was intrigued by the freshness of working on a ballet, so she had Grand-Maitre fly to her home in L.A. to see her current artwork. "She'd had a camera set up in front of her flat-screen TV for about a year and was taking photos of all these images that looked like negatives—the hands of a child holding a gun, dancing girls, a tank," he says. "She's created triptychs from all these images; they'll be projected onstage during the ballet."

Dancing Joni is set to nine of Mitchell's songs, many of which can be found on her tongue-in-cheek titled *Misses*, a 1996 compilation of overlooked songs she wanted us to reconsider. It deals with big themes, from war and the environment to AIDS. It also hints at the thrust of Mitchell's upcoming album, which my gut says could be a definitive, deeply personal statement, the 2007 version of Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On*. Joni Mitchell, you see, has a black man's soul, which is pretty out there for a fair-skinned chick from Canada. When she received her honorary doctorate from McGill in 1995, she was most delighted by a prose poem about her jazzy, hip-hop sensibility called "How Black is Joni Mitchell," delivered by urban American writer Greg Tate. "She's not a parrot, a pirate, or a parody," Tate wrote in another piece called "Black and Blond." "In point of fact, she's her own damn genre. Joni Mitchell is hard-core."

"As part of a video she produced for the ballet, she's painted herself as a black soldier in 'The Beat of Black Wings,' " says Grand-Maitre, referring to a song about Vietnam that originally appeared on 1992's *Chalk Mark in a Rain Storm*. Feeling that the

hostility toward American soldiers who had fought in Vietnam was inappropriate, Mitchell asked to play at Fort Bragg where she met Killer Kyle, whose experiences she channelled in a song that could have been written today about Iraq: “There’s a man drawing pictures / On the sidewalk with chalk / Just as fast as he draws ’em / Rain come down and wash ’em off / Keep the drinks comin’ girl / ’Til I can’t feel anything / I’m just a chalk mark in a rainstorm / I’m just the beat of black wings.”

Grand-Maitre says the reason Mitchell said yes to doing a ballet is that she’s still driven to communicate. “We’re paying her dismal ballet fees,” he says. “But she’s so engaged as an artist; she wants to communicate with people in different ways. I’ve heard the new songs and I think they’re comparable to the best she’s ever written; she’s really engaged with social issues. She’s coming out with new music at a time when people need to hear Joni again.”

Damn right. But it must be pretty daunting for an artistic director from Quebec to collaborate with someone David Crosby famously described as being “as modest as Mussolini.” How do you tell La Mitchell when she has a bad idea? “She never does have a bad idea,” shrugs Grand-Maitre. “She’s very open, she loves dance, she wanted to be an athlete. She’s also extremely humble and quite vulnerable in creation. It’s always, ‘Is this good enough?’”

She is, you see, an enthusiast. She’s the toddler who collected broken coloured glass in her cheeks to bring home undetected because she liked to look at the light through transparent glass.

She’s the teen who organized Wednesday-night dances in Saskatoon because she simply couldn’t wait for the weekends.

She’s the 19-year-old art student who was the delighted runner-up in the 1964 Queen of SAIT competition (see right, in the pale pink organza dress), and a dedicated member of the bowling club.

She’s the twentysomething homebody, immortalized by Graham Nash in “Our House,” with two cats in the yard. How many times have we all sung that song, longing for that elusive domestic bliss: “Staring at the fire / For hours and hours / While I listen to you / Play your love songs / All night long / Only for me.” It was Joni who bought the vase for the flowers, baked the rhubarb pies and made their house a home.

She’s the 35-year-old superstar who felt a sweet giddiness when jazz great Charles Mingus played her “the fastest, smokingest thing you ever heard” and challenged her to write the lyrics.

She’s the middle-aged newlywed on a road trip to Fort Macleod, singing, “I love the man beside me / We love the open road... Once in a while / In a big blue moon / There comes a night like this.”

She’s the polio survivor who is now challenged by post-polio syndrome, similar to the effects of multiple sclerosis. And yet, at 64, she is still dancing, with a cigarette in one hand even though she knows it makes her lungs black and her skin more wrinkled. She’s decided that happiness is the best facelift.

It all adds up to a rather straightforward enigma. You write a masterpiece like *Blue*, and everyone wants you to stay this sad-eyed lady of the lowlands. How dull. How limiting. How not Joni.



PHOTO COURTESY SAIT



“ They’re going to crucify you for staying the same. They’re going to crucify you for changing. But staying the same is boring. And change is interesting. Of the two options, I’d rather be crucified for changing. ”

Illustrator Julie McLaughlin is 22 and just graduated from the Visual Communications program at ACAD. It’s the current version of the program Joni Mitchell attended in 1964.