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Joni Mitchell

Joni Mitchell overwhelms fans at Tanglewood

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Last night at Tanglewood Joni Mitchell simply overwhelmed 17,000 of her most devoted fans. The Canadian singer-songwriter performed for over three hours with and without her backup band, Tom Scott and the L.A. Express.

Rain led concert officials to begin the show 15 minutes earlier than the previously announced 7:30 starting time, which is an event in itself because in "rock and roll time," 7:30 scheduled starts are almost always 7:45 starts. Tom Scott and the L.A. Express opened the concert with some of their raucous progressive jazz. The L.A. Express has five members, including a drummer, bass and lead guitarist, keyboarder, and Tom Scott, who alternates on saxophone, flute, and clarinet.

After about a half hour set by the L.A. Express, Scott introduced Joni Mitchell and she was greeted by thunderous applause. With the L.A. Express accompanying her, Ms. Mitchell opened with an upbeat version of her present Top Forty hit, "Free Man in Paris." Her first set with the L.A. Express lasted about a half hour (I spent most of that time being pummeled as I attempted to record the event for history, as they say). The high point of the set was probably Ms. Mitchell's rendition of one of her most popular tunes, "Big Yellow Taxi." The powerful sound of the L.A. Express often smothered Mitchell's singing, which made her lyrics inaudible to all but the well-informed. Jammed aisles, the usual rush to the stage, requests for old favorites, and mane cries of "Let's

Boogie!" angered many folks who had come to sit and enjoy the music. The problem was solved when Ms. Mitchell paused during one of her songs and quietly intoned into the microphoned, "Shut up." Mitchell closed her first set with a jazzier version of her 1970 composition, "Woodstock."

Only one word accurately describes Joni Mitchell's second set: awesome. She set an entirely different mood for the second set by appearing on stage alone. She also donned a different dress — the second set she wore a blue, mid-length dress which gave her an aura of dignity. As she alternated between piano and acoustic guitar, Ms. Mitchell performed such compositions as "This Flight Tonight," "A Case of You," "All I Want," and "Laughing It All The Way." Each song received the full treatment from Joni Mitchell's exquisite voice, and she held her large audience in rapt attention throughout the set. The poignant and dreamy lyrics which have made Joni Mitchell a friend to millions were more evident and moving than ever. Probably the high point of the set came while she sat at the piano singing her beautiful ballad, "For Free," in which she tells of standing on a street corner watching an unknown clarinet player. Near the end of the song, Tom Scott dramatically strolled on stage playing his clarinet. With the L.A. Express once again accompanying her, Ms. Mitchell finished with "Both Sides Now" and "Help Me."

During the evening, Ms. Mitchell occasionally paused to chat with her audience. At one point she asked, "What do you guys think about lately?" A voice replied, "I think you're beautiful!" No one disagreed.