

# Leisure

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It was a concert full of pleasant surprises. There was no ceremony about her introduction. Tom Scott, leader of the L. A. Express, Joni's back-up band, merely said "Ladies and Gentlemen, Joni Mitchell."

Joni strolled onstage dressed in a long dress that was a solid blue. She smiled and took a practiced bow. Then strapping on her guitar, she went right into "This Flight Tonight."

The audience, still recovering from having her on stage so quickly, warmed up with some handclaps, but the noise quickly died out as it became apparent the most of the crowd wanted to listen, not boogie.

Joni didn't speak between songs. She seemed to be trying to lay some groundwork for a mood, a feeling. She seemed to want the evening to be a performance, not an exercise in hysteria, complete with mad requests for songs from the audience.

After doing a few numbers off "Court and Spark," which the audience apparently had not heard, she went into the driving rhythm of "Big Yellow Taxi." The Boogie people almost made a resurrection, but she quieted them down and captured the crowd's attention with a speeded-up version of "Woodstock."

Then, she was off stage as quickly as she had come on. The lights came back on, illuminating the interior of St. John arena. Situated in the center of Ohio State University, at least it seemed as if it were in the center, I couldn't tell in the dark, the arena looks as if it could be a burial ground for 747 jets. You could probably lay three of the mothers on top of one another inside St.

John and still have room for a Cessna.

When the lights went down, Joni came back dressed in a lovely white gown, imprinted with roses. There was, by the way, one rose lying on top of her piano. This looked as if it would be the quiet season. It was. It was during this set that she did what I think is one of her most beautiful songs; "For The Roses."

She blew the first verse, then said "God, this place is horrible. When you people whisper, it sounds like (making a grating noise) down here."

She described how the song grew. She said her California apartment was "overdecorated," so she sought the escape of Canada, her birthplace. One night, she heard a plant called Arbutus rustling outside her door. "It sounded like applause, so I automatically took a bow," Joni said with almost a child-like giggle. Hence the first two lines of "For the Roses": "Heard it in the wind last night - It sounded like applause."

Joni then set aside her guitar and picked up her dulcimer. She did two songs from "Blue": "All I Want" and "A Case of You."

Over to the piano now. Through the telephoto lens of the freak sitting next to me, I could see her sway on the stool as she played "For Free." The sound was truly horrible. It reached you by bouncing over from the other side of the arena. Enough of this, I thought. I had earlier been back behind the stage. That was my destination now.

What a difference. I was about 15 feet behind her now. I didn't even care if she turned around. The L. A. Express was back onstage and the tempo picking up.

Not only does Joni seductively sway while she plays the piano; she does the same thing with the guitar. She was doing "Both Sides Now" and looking out from behind her into a sea of faces. The audience, particularly the males up front, seemed entranced with Joni. They watched her every move.

With her Bette Midler-like intro to "Raised on Robbery," the band kicked into gear. And what surprised me is that Joni didn't look out of place. She can move from the spotlight to the rhythm guitarist with no apparent problem.

One more number and she was off stage, smiling as she gracefully skirted over all the electrical wires crisscrossing the stage. The audience, yelling with all the enthusiasm the Buckeye madness is noted for, lighted the traditional matches to call her back.

Gripping the rail, I strained my head to see if she was coming back.

Waiting... waiting. She's not coming.

Wait a minute. She's back.

Now, she's dressed in a white blouse and jeans with high-heeled slipper-affair shoes. Cigarette in left hand, glass of wine in the right. She looks out at the audience and the arena as if she'd never seen it before.

She sat down at the piano and went into a nice version of "Blonde in the Bleachers." One more number and she was gone for good.

I walked out of the arena with a smile on my face whistling "Blonde in the Bleachers." I suddenly realized I was doing harmony with about 4,000 others.

