

Melody Maker

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DYLAN DUE!

BOB DYLAN is definitely in line for a British concert this year! And the likely date is in November, it was confirmed this week.

Elliott Roberts, a close business associate of Elektra/Asylum president, David Geffen, told the MM this week that Dylan is due to play at least one British concert this autumn.

No dates or venues have yet been finalised

although it is believed virtually every major British promoter has made a bid for Dylan. Robert Paterson, one of the country's leading promoters, confirmed he has made an offer although no negotiations have yet been started.

Geffen, who signed Dylan to his Asylum label late last year and was responsible for the marathon Dylan/Band American tour, told the MM in January: "Chances are that they will definitely play England, in fact we've already had conversations about Europe. They're particularly keen to play England."

Confirmation of Dylan's November date rules out any chance of a concert appearance at the London Rock Proms in July.

WHO: giant football gigs fixed

THE WHO and DAVID CASSIDY are both playing giant concerts at football stadia this summer.

The Who will be headlining a massive bill at London's Charlton Athletic ground, the Valley, on May 18.

And there's a possibility the whole show will be repeated in Glasgow on May 25.

The concert, which promises to be one of the biggest rock events since the Bickershaw and Lincoln Festivals in 1972, will also feature HUMBLE PIE, LOU REED, BAD COMPANY, LINDISFARNE and DAVE MASON.

The stadium has a capacity of 70,000 and tickets, costing £2.50, available in advance only through branches of Harlequin record shops or by post from 32, Great Pulteney Street, London, W.1.

And DAVID CASSIDY is appearing at Manchester City's ground, Maine Road, on May 28. This is in addition to his concerts at Shawfield Stadium, Glasgow, on May 24 and London's White City on May 25.

The new concert, co-promoted by Chrysalis and Manchester City, starts at 8 p.m. Tickets, costing £2 and £3, will be available from the ground next week.

* Full Lou Reed tour dates: see page 4.

JONI MITCHELL: TRUE GENIUS

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SLADE, PURPLE HIT THE ROAD

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BUFFALO, BYRDS WILL REUNITE!

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- THIS IS RUSSELL MAEL, lead singer with the hottest new band in the land—Sparks.
- The band is rehearsing for its first tour, scheduled to start in late-May and, hopefully, coinciding with their first chart success with "This Town Ain't Big Enough For The Both Of Us," Sparks' great debut single for Island Records.
- The tour is due to end in mid-June. It will be the band's first British dates with their new line-up.
- Sparks' new album, meanwhile, will be released on May 17 as a prelude to the tour. Called "Kimono My House" the album features such tracks as "Amateur Hour", "Thank God It's Not Christmas" and "Talent Is An Asset".



THE divine Miss M

by
Michael
Watts



Dylan, the male artist whose stature she most closely approaches, and one can't help but feel her performances gain from it.

On the other hand, perhaps, by featuring a band she never built up and sustained the deepest in timacy of atmosphere that she's often achieved before with just an acoustic and a piano. But it was time for her to devise a new mode of presentation, and in the L.A. Express she couldn't have found finer instruments.

If anything they helped to concentrate attention on the arranging side of her talents. For instance, that usually delicate song "Woodstock" was here translated into a piece of funk, with snapping snare work from John Guerin and the deep, churning Fender of Max Bennett. It didn't quite suit the lyrics, but what WERE you to do with a four-year old hippie anthem?

The L.A. Express perform a similar kind of function for Joni as the Section did for James Taylor; they're both an independent unit and a backup band.

But the Section don't have quite the same degree of intensity and virtuosity. As the L.A. Express went through a short warm-up set for Joni it gradually began to dawn upon us that they weren't just B-movie filler material for the great extravaganza. Not that the presence of Robben Ford, the guitarist last seen here with Jimmy Witherspoon, would suggest that.

Though the context didn't allow for much in the way of real soloing, his gifts were always apparent in deft touches and complements, and his enthusiasm — his body flailing around and long hair flapping — was infectious.

Roger Kelleway on electric piano had one roaring solo on "Raised On Robbery," and Tom Scott played a variety of parts on saxes, flute and clarinet — a lovely, wistful sign-off on "For Free" — but the essence of their role was its selflessness, just as their inclinations were obviously towards jazz. And for Joni's music they were perfect, gliding the lily at exactly the right junctures and taking the edge off the occasional austerity of her live performance.

Now, too, Joni seems able to laugh at herself more — at the public image of her. In "For Free" she could slip in a sly reference to not just one or two but "16 gentleman" lovers, an indication of her self-confidence and maturity. Again, the gentle humour of her public self, the optimism of her onstage presence, contrasted with the disquiet and virtual despair of her records. Ultimately, you're forced to admit, she remains a cool and beautiful enigma, all the more so with a new style of performance that stresses her easiness of manner.

For Saturday's performance did, indeed, confirm and challenge one's feelings about her, and at the risk of being accused of critical overkill, I'd say she's just about the most fascinating and involving artist of the times. She's found a uniquely personal way of transcending the rock idiom whilst retaining the rock audience. What's more, she's undisputedly an artist of the future, who's yet to hit anything like a peak. She's got everything she needs, she's an artist... she don't look back.

ENTERTAINMENT as the critic Ned Rorem has pointed out, confirms rather than challenges. One might comment that there are entertainers and there are blue-blood artists but that the two don't often coincide in popular music.

When they do — and the temporal clause should be stressed — you've good reason to believe you're in the presence of something special and rarefied; genius as opposed to talent.

As far as I know, nobody has ever asked for their money back at a Joni Mitchell concert, and that's a fair enough endorsement of good entertainment for you.

At the same time you'd be a pretty boneheaded mutt not to feel challenged by her presence and the splendid mystery of her music.

There's nothing equivocal about shivers bristling on the spine as she hovers into view upon the stage and that effortless, crystal voice begins to play upon the sensibilities.

Joni Mitchell is disturbing in a very real way because after watching and listening to her for a while you start thinking she's not just a woman, she's WOMAN, embodying all male desires and expectations.

Small wonder then that a series of very well-known men have been sufficiently drawn by the siren's call to jump in headfirst after her. So this is the meaning of worship. Like the White Goddess of mythology she beckons, elusive, virginal and not a little awe-inspiring. It must be a trifle terrifying to know you appear that perfect.

Crap, she'd probably reply, because after all she's human and with a well-developed sense of humour, too.

Ideally is fun but it gets a little wearing after the initial enslavement. Her biggest problem in recent years, one might argue, has been to convince us that she's not Lady Madonna, children at her feet, and not for that matter a latter-day Joan Baez for the pure of heart.

Still, the mystique persists, and it's not just confined to male fantasists and communicants. Without her ever having made much outright comment on it, ardent feminists inevitably tend to see her as the patron saint of L.H., finding all the justification they need in the barely oblique autobiography of her albums.

Therein lie exposed all her innermost thoughts and feelings, her psychic and sexual wrestlings with the male species that she's at pains never to divulge in any journalistic context. A true paradox.

For her part she retires to some private world, there to view the outside happenings with a deep and discerning detachment. She laughs a lot — girlishly, even — but I should think, from the few occasions I've seen her away from the public platform, she's careful to keep her guard up.

For a woman so obviously sensitised by her experiences it must be necessary; flippant posturing and brassy panache are not weapons in her armoury. Ms. Midler and Ms. Streisand find no echoes.

Dory Previn can turn it into a traigi-comedy, play Woody Allen from the safety of the psycho-analyst's couch, but Joni always makes us feel her soul is on the line. It's all rather confusing for a mere mortal male: the protective instinct met head on by her sensual authoritativeness.

But quite evidently, something has changed of late, for her concert appearances such as Saturday's at London's New Victoria theatre, are now much less solemnly artistic than in the past.

She no longer even resembles the old coffee-house folksinger, with long blonde hair brushing shoulders and eyebrows; it's curled and finessed, and her cheeks glow with make-up.

Her manager, Elliott Roberts laughs as you remark upon this. "Well," he says, "she's a woman." Undeniably, but the effect is somehow less ethereal. And then there's a hand around her for the first time, Tom Scott's L.A. Express, filling the emptiness and silence between the grand piano, the acoustic guitar and Appalachian harp.

Joni actually rocking out with some funky chicken, Joni closing the show with Annie Ross's little exercise in lingual humour, "Twisted." Joni cracking wry jokes, Joni elaborating long stories to her audience as preludes to her songs, and even — for her pains — coming in for the affectionate rebuke of "speed freak" from some guy out there in the crowd.

Joni, finally, somewhat more in evidence as the

entertainer, as well as the artist, and suddenly the sharp realisation for this listener of the gap in time and emotion between a song's composition and its public performance, and in particular the extent of her professional skill in pulling out that original emotion. Yes, she was as great as ever, but her performance was doubly interesting for the way the new situation threw light on her artistic functioning.

In "The Same Situation" she muffed the second stanza, stopped and laughed broadly, then explained via the piano how she was confusing the particular passage with a new melody she was working on; eventually she went back to the song and performed it with such conviction and sincerity that it might have been the freshest thing she'd written.

She preceded "People's Parties" by a wickedly intelligent and humorous rap about the incident from which it sprang, complete with dissertation on the significance of Nixon's facial expressions. And then she illuminated a song about her mistrust of materialism, together with critics and the music industry, with a completely evocative tale about ascetic existence in British Columbia and the humanistic qualities of the arbutus tree that grows there.

These virtual self-parables and the evident disregard for the private mask made her more accessible than she's ever seemed. Contrast this attitude with the incommunicado stance of

