



Sinatra
Simply the best,
by Elvis Costello



**Gram
Parsons**
Genius & grief

Joni Mitchell
Genesis, Rod
& 50 pages
of reviews

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MOJO

The Music Magazine



The lunatics
are on the grass...

**massive
attack**

and the new psychedelia



LIVE SHOWS



Hush, a rare sighting of the migrant Canadian songbird. If we keep still, she might sing Big Yellow Taxi.

Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, Van Morrison

Los Angeles, Pauley Pavilion, UCLA

Set List Van Morrison: Sweet Thing / You Make Me Feel So Free / Burning Ground / It Once Was My Life / Cleaning Windows / Vanlose Stairway / That's Life / Days Like This / Sometimes We Cry / Moondance / This Weight / Tupelo Honey / Why Must I Always Explain / Have I Told You Lately / Soldier Of Fortune / Thank You Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agoin / Burning Ground

Set List Joni Mitchell: Night Ride Home / The Crazy Cries Of Love / Harry's House / Slouching Towards Bethlehem / Just Like This Train / Black Crow / Amelia / Hejira / Big Yellow Taxi / Facelift / Sex Kills / The Magdalene Laundries / Moon At The Window / Woodstock

Set List Bob Dylan: Absolutely Sweet Marie / The Man In Me / Cold Irons Bound / Just Like A Woman / Silvia / Rank Strangers To Me / Masters Of War / Tangled Up In Blue / Make You Feel My Love / Highway 61 Revisited / Forever Young / Love Sick / Rainy Day Women #12 & 35 / Restless Farewell

LOATHSOME AS it may be to hurl around descriptions such as "historic", this all-time dream billing – one of just seven shows on the North American West Coast during mid-May – can be described in no other way. Not only because of the unimaginable feat of getting three such Generational Icons in the same room at the same time (more or less), but more importantly because of how similar the trio's individual roles have become in the late '90s. They are among the very few pop performers their age making music today that people – critics mostly, I suppose – still take as seriously as their earliest work. And with all due respect to Elton John and Billy Joel, another set of seasoned performers recently joined together at the ticket stub, both promoting

albums no one even remembers, art beats commerce any day of the working week.

Short report: It was fabulous.

If I told you that nostalgia was not a factor during the course of these three performances, would you believe me? It was the single most amazing aspect of this triple-billing. Between Dylan's recasting of much of his material in Big Rock Show mode, Morrison's spotless band transforming, unbelievably, Moondance into something new, and the rarely-seen Mitchell taking the opportunity to air brand new material like Facelift and The Crazy Cries Of Love, this was not the sort of greatest hits show one might wisely dread. It was not an Introducing Of The Elders to a whole new generation either, nor a Gathering Of The Tribes; it was, in fact, simply three great artists on an inspired bill playing better than you might expect, and doing it for \$86 per ticket. Just a dollar less would get you a ticket for Eric Clapton's concert in Phoenix the same week.

Van Morrison's opening set may have been the night's most inspiring, if only for what it represented: complete and robust professionalism, noticeably spurred on by the presence of the other headliners. "Van Morrison seemed like a lounge act," I heard a 20ish woman remarking at the night's end; it was clear that she hadn't seen the singer before and, more importantly, simply didn't 'get' him. At his best, Morrison is a showman giving a show – a man who somewhere in the back of his mind must be drawing inspiration from role models like Bobby Bland, Ray Charles and even James Brown, but who somehow,

Robert Knight/Reefers (2), Larry Busacca/Retna

endearingly, never escapes sounding like anyone but himself, only shorter and squatter. His band, always good, was better than usual, featuring a mix of old and new faces including trumpeter Mark Isham, saxophonist Pee Wee Ellis, keyboardist John Allair, bassist David Hayes, and exceptional guitarist John Scott, among others. Their complete familiarity with the material, as well as backing vocalist Brian Kennedy's glossy run-throughs of Sweet Thing and You Make Me Feel So Free, further emphasised the Soul Revue feel, but Morrison at front and centre commanded every eye.

At this late date, why grapple with complexities? Morrison's greatest success may simply be that, unlike nearly all his contemporaries, he has established a groove that is his own, into which nearly all of his material fits. Net result, on display this night: everything sounds familiar, but surprises can turn up anywhere. Mixed between the few actual hits – Moondance, Tupelo Honey, and Have I Told You Lately, sung by his daughter Shana – came a steady flow of recent material, much of it characteristically self-absorbed (Why Must I Always Explain and It Once Was My Life), but that much more fascinating because of it. An encore and finally a throbbing version of The Burning Ground followed; the audience cheered, lights came on, and opening act Van Morrison left the stage.

When the Los Angeles Times reviewed this concert's San Jose stop two days earlier, whose picture did they choose to slap on Page One of the entertainment section? That would be Ms Joni Mitchell, reclusive singer-songwriter, whose performances are so rare that an entire generation of artists influenced by her work have simply never seen her.



This month's Van Morrison picture. Enjoy.

Backed by a skilled trio comprising ex-husband and bassist Larry Klein, pedal steel guitarist Greg Leisz and drummer Brian Blade, Mitchell was absolutely captivating at the centre of the stage. Chatty, as if she had years and years of unused stage patter bubbling within her – for, indeed, she had – the singer ran through an array of mostly post-*Hejira* material. The quartet was a surprisingly full unit and Mitchell was given ample room in which to vocalise. Come to think of it, her post-*Hejira* style essentially eschews melody for rhythm and lyric, not unlike modern-day Lou Reed or a Roman Catholic priest during High Mass, but infinitely more charming. The sole performer to

THE DREAM TICKET

Moondancing with the recluse and roaring Bob.

comment on another member of the bill, Mitchell first noted "Bob Dylan wrote this verse" in the midst of Big Yellow Taxi (a song he covered on 1973's *Dylan* collection), then convincingly brayed it in near perfect Dylanese.

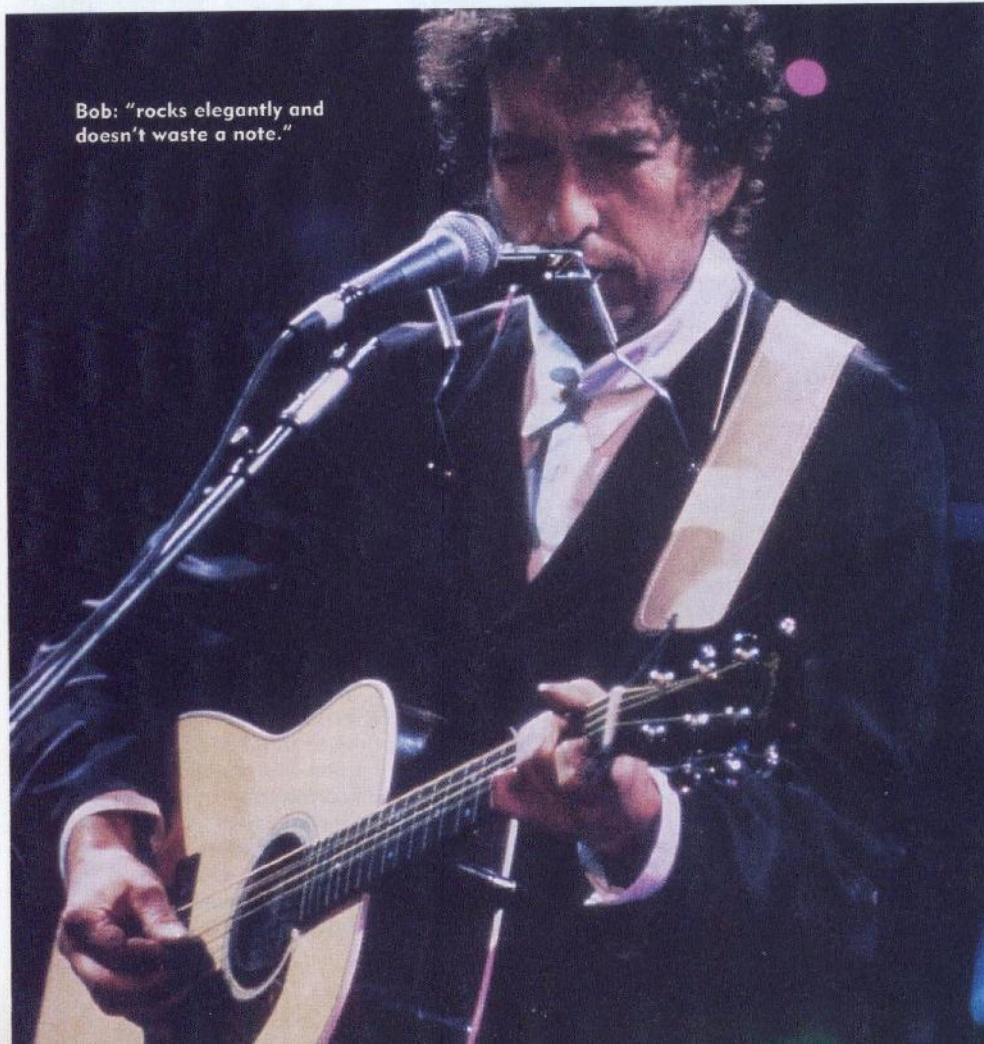
Whether poking fun at herself for writing "melancholy" songs, explaining the origin of such songs as Sex Kills, or joking about performing with ex-husband Klein on-stage, Mitchell oozed warmth and had much to share – and perhaps needed more time to share it. The new songs sounded sophisticated and sleek, and hearing more would have been welcome. But the 14 songs Mitchell sang were revealing in their very selection, and the deliberate absence of material from her acclaimed *Blue* signalled a woman intent on looking forward rather than in other well-travelled directions. And it was time for the headliner.

Opening with a roaring Absolutely Sweet Marie, Bob Dylan looked trim, regal, and – forgive this, please – every inch the rock star. Word among those who care most is that Bob Dylan's shows have been getting better by the minute, and word in this evening's case was absolutely correct. Those who didn't know that, who might've bought an LA concert ticket because they wanted, in light of Dylan's recent medical history, to see him while they "still could" – must have had the shock of their lives.


To see Dylan perform in such a manner in 1998 is unarguably inspiring, but still distinctly odd, especially for those with overactive irony glands. Here is a man interpreting one of the most classic catalogues of 20th century songcraft, belting out Just Like A Woman, Highway 61 Revisited and Forever Young with a power and passion that had been largely absent from the majority of his performances during the last 15 years. It was as if they were not his own but he was covering them, *making* them his own. Every single song was uniformly tight, Dylan himself often played lead guitar (the biggest surprise in this last decade; the man rocks elegantly and doesn't waste a note), and despite the vintage of most of the material, it all sounded jarringly contemporary. I did not care much for Silvio when I heard it on 1988's *Down In The Groove*, but I – and those seated next to me in Pauley Pavilion – now know that it's a powerful rock'n'roll song. That the surrealistic mumbler Bob Dylan has the power to convey that in 1998, in a rock concert context, borders on the astounding.

The spectral presence of yet another cultural icon – one who'd passed away in this city only a week earlier – made itself felt throughout the night's performances, including the concert's climax. Mitchell had namechecked Frank Sinatra during a passage in *Hejira*, Morrison had covered *That's Life*, and Dylan concluded his show with a vague introduction and extremely rare performance of *Restless Farewell*. The last time he'd sung the song in public had been three years ago, during Sinatra's televised 80th birthday tribute. It came from an album called *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, a sentiment relevant when it comes to departed icons like Sinatra, but here on this night in Los Angeles, with three fine artists very much in their prime, it seems very much a bald-faced lie.

Dave DiMartino



Bob: "rocks elegantly and doesn't waste a note."



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