

FOLK MUSIC

Joni Mitchell: a new summing up

By PETER GODDARD

In pop music there's a new feeling in the air. The disillusioning, depressing songs of the Bob Dylan era are being replaced by ones characterized by a hippy hedonism.

The new beat credo is love (on a social as well as personal level), personal freedom is the new necessary condition, altruism its expression and mind expansiveness its inspiration.

And in this search for a latter-day Utopia Joni Mitchell, appearing at the Riverboat until Aug. 6, has a new relevance as a singer. Images of tranquillity, of children, naturalistic elements, and day to day living comprise her poetry; fluid, breathless melodies over original experimental harmonies fill out her music, and a gentle feminism colors her performance.

As she herself puts it "I spent months knocking on record company doors, but suddenly music is accepting so much more. There is now an accepted female point of view. And my problem now is that I have to decide on an image that I have to fill."

Yet unlike other female singer-writers, for example Janis Ian in rock 'n' roll or Judy Collins in folk, there is little emotional complexity or ambiguity about realism in Joni Mitchell's singing.

Racism, riots or revolutions (personal or political) are never mentioned; she even sings a pastel blues. "Protest" always seemed ironic to me," she says, "for who do you reach? Those who like your songs agree with you; those who don't won't listen."

Perhaps; but while in most modern songs the attitude is unsentimental, she sings of a "funny day looking for laughter — and finding it there."

The frantic escapism of the beats of the Fifties has been replaced by the wilful self-indulgence of the self-styled flower children. The dark, death-orientated literature of Kerouac's generation is no longer read; and in its place J. R. R. Tolkien's *Hobbits* and Hermann Hesse escapism (as in *Siddhartha* where a young boy leaves his Buddhist parents in search of truth and himself) are now in vogue.

The hippies are beginning to see themselves as holy barbarians, living lives of inverted sainthood. Drugs are no longer used to escape an old reality, but are employed in an attempt to find a new one. But the fads of the capricious hippy-culture, now loving, now messianic, now vengeful, vary as radically as their hair styles. And Joni Mitchell's music, once too sweet, sad and sexless, seems to sum up what is going on now, and has them drooling like Pavlov's dogs, for more.



Joni Mitchell: a hip singer