

# Rolling Stone

**JONI MITCHELL**

*Her First Interview in Ten Years*

*Brightest New Artist*  
**STEVE FORBERT**

**PETER FRAMPTON**  
*A Private Struggle to Survive Success*

**SATURDAY NIGHT'S MR. MIKE**



**COVER: Photograph of Joni Mitchell in Los Angeles by Norman Seeff, June 1979**

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PHOTOGRAPH BY NORMAN SEEFF

SEVERAL DAYS BEFORE BEGINS these interviews, I overheard two teenagers looking for a good party album in a record store. "How about this," said one, holding up Joni Mitchell's *Miles of Aisles*. "Naaaaaah," said the other. "It's got good songs on it, but it's kind of like jazz." They bought a *Cheap Trick* album.

When I told this story to Joni Mitchell later, I could see the disappointment flicker across her face for an instant. Then she laughed and took a long drag from her cigarette. "Here's the thing," she said forcefully. "You have two options. You can stay the same and protect the formula that gave you your initial success. They're going to crucify you for staying the same. If you change, they're going to crucify you for changing. But staying the same is boring. And change is interesting. So of the two options," she concluded cheerfully, "I'd rather be crucified for changing."

Joni Mitchell, 36, has been living in exile from a mainstream audience for the last three years. Her last resoundingly successful album of new material was *Court and Spark*, a landmark in poetic songwriting, performing and in the growth of an artist we had all watched mature. From folk ballads, through Woodstock-era anthems to jazz-inflected experimentation, Joni Mitchell had influenced a generation of musicians.

Then, in 1975, she released *The Hissing of Summer Lovers*, her ambitious followup to *Court and Spark*. She introduced jazz overtones, veered away from confessional songwriting and received a nearly unanimous critical drubbing. Mitchell reacted to the criticism by keeping an even lower personal profile. She spent most of her time traveling (the road album, *Hejira*, was released in 1976), associating with progressive jazz artists and asking questions. With *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter*, a double album released in the winter of 1977, she and pop music had nearly parted ways. In a time when the record-buying public was rewarding craftsmen, Mitchell seemed to be steadfastly carrying the torch for art. Her sales suffered, but this direction was leading to a historic juncture in her career.

Word first reached her in early 1978 that Charles Mingus was trying to get in touch with her. The legendary bassist-band leader had been battling Lou Gehrig's disease out of the public eye. She contacted him and they began a long-distance friendship. Mingus had noticed her ambitions and wondered if she would assist him by condensing T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*; recite it and play guitar behind it for a composition he had been working on. She read the book and called him back. "I'd rather condense the Bible," she told him, and Mingus said he could dig it. They didn't speak for a time. Then, another phone call.

Mingus had written what would later become his last six melodies ("Joni I-VI," he called them), and he wanted Mitchell to write and sing the lyrics for them. She spent the last year and a half working on the project, her first collaboration, working mostly in her apartment in New York's Regency Hotel.

When Mingus died on January 26th this year, Mitchell continued writing and recording and

finally finished in late spring. Including tape recordings of Mingus' voice as segues between tracks, she eventually chose to simply title the album *Mingus*.

About marketing an all-jazz Joni Mitchell album, Elektra/Asylum Chairman of the Board Joe Smith says this: "She has taken a chunk out of her career and accomplished something truly monumental. When we received this album, I got on a conference call and talked with all our promotion men. If any radio station calls itself a trend setter, it must recognize this album and Charles Mingus. I'm also having a contest for my promotion men," he laughed, "first prize is they get to keep their jobs."

Had Smith, in the course of running the company, ever discussed commercial direction with Mitchell?

"You don't tell Joni Mitchell what to do," he said.

It was Joni Mitchell's idea to do this, her first in-depth interview in over ten years. She entered the office of her manager, Elliot Roberts, one afternoon and sat down on a sofa. She wore no makeup, a tau blouse and slacks.

"Let's turn the tape on," she said, addressing my recorder. "I'm ready to go."

An enthusiastic conversationalist, Joni Mitchell speaks quickly and purposefully, structuring her thoughts like a writer's third draft. The sessions continued at various locations over the next three days.

"If I'm censoring for anyone," she warned, "it's for my parents. They are very old-fashioned and moral people. They still don't understand me that well. I keep saying, 'Mama, Amy Vanerhild killed herself. That should have been a tip-off that we're into a new era....'"

Would you like to shatter any preconceptions?

I do have this reputation for being a serious person. I'm a very analytical person, a somewhat introspective person; that's the nature of the work I do. But this is only one side of the coin, you know I love to dance. I'm a rowdy; I'm a good-timer. Mind you, I haven't seen too many good parties since I left my hometown. People go to parties here mostly to conduct business.

There's a private club in Hollywood that usually is very empty, but on one crowded evening, I stumbled in there to this all star cast. Linda Ronstadt was running through the parking lot being pursued by photographers, Jerry Brown was upstairs, Bob Dylan was full of his new Christian enthusiasm—"Hey Jerry, you ever thought of running this state with Christian government?" Lauren Hutton was there, Rod Stewart... There were a lot of people and this little postage stamp of a dance floor, and nobody was dancing on it. These are all people who dance, in one way or another, in their acts.

So the renowned introvert comes in, and I just wanted to dance. I didn't want to dance alone, so I asked a couple of people to dance with me and nobody would. They were all





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incredibly shy. So I went to the bathroom, and a girl came in and hollered to me from the sink over the wall, "Is that you? I'll dance with you." I said, "Great." It was just like the Fifties, when none of the guys would dance. And it was at this moment that the girl confided to me, "You know, they all think of you as this very sad person." That was the first time that it occurred to me that even among my peer group I had developed this reputation. I figured, these guys have been reading my press or something. [Laughs] But as far as shattering preconceptions, forget it. I feel that the art is there for people to bring to it whatever they choose.

*I wonder if you feel like you've beaten the odds at this point? Even the biggest pop performers usually become the victims of a fickle audience.*

It's typical in this society that is so conscious of being number one and winning; the most you can really get out of it is a four-year run, just the same as in the political arena. The first year, there's the courtship prior to the election—prior to, say, the first platinum album. Then suddenly you become the king or queen of rock & roll. You have, possibly, one favorable year of office, and then they start to tear you down. So if your goals end at a platinum album or being king or queen of your idiom, when you inevitably come down from that office, you're going to be heartbroken. Miserable. Nobody likes to have less than what he had before.

My goals have been to constantly remain interested in the music. I see myself as a musical student. That's why this project with Charles [Mingus] was such a great opportunity. Here was a chance to learn, from a legitimately great artist, about a brand new idiom that I had only been flirting with before.

*How did you decide to make this commitment?*

Every year, when I've completed a project, I ask myself, "What am I going to do now?" In the process of asking myself that question, a lot of possibilities come up. I heard on the street that Charles was trying to contact me. He tried through normal channels and never made it. People thought it was too far-out to be true. They had all sorts of reasons for thinking it was an impossible or ridiculous combination. To me, it was fascinating. I was honored. I was curious.

*Mingus was a man who generally was difficult to*

*get close to. When did you know that you had really made the connection with him?*

Oh, immediately. Immediately I felt this kind of sweet giddiness when I met him. Like I was in for some fun. He teased me a lot. He called me hillbilly; it was charming. We went through some of the old songs. "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat" was the one we decided on immediately. So there was this search for another one, and he played me a lot of material. Charles put on this one record, and just before he played it, he said, "Now this song has five melodies going all at once." I said, "Yeah, I bet you want me to write five different sets of words for each of the melodies, right?" And he grinned and said, "Right." He put on the record, and it was the fastest, smokingest thing you ever heard, with all these melodies going on together.

*Did you find yourself cast in the role of easing Mingus from his fear of dying?*

No, that was up to him. You can't do too much to assuage someone of their fears. I wasn't in that personal a role that I was his comforter. It was a professional partnership with a lot of affection. But one day I called him up and I said, "How are you, Charles?" I never really asked him too much about his illness, but that day I did. And he said, "Oh, I'm dying. I thought I knew how to do it, but now I'm not sure." At that point I had three songs finished, and I thought, "Oh boy, I want him to be in the studio when I start to cut them. I want his approval on this. I want him to like my direction."

This was a unique position. I've never worked for somebody else before. Although in the treatment of the music, it was much more my version of jazz. As far as the music was finally recorded. He's more traditional in a way—antielelectronics and anti-avant-garde. I'm looking to make modern American music. So I just hoped that he would like what I was doing. I was taking it someplace where I would be true to myself. It was never meant as a commemorative album while we were making it. I never really believed completely that he was going to die. His spirit was so strong.

*Did he hear all the songs before his death?*

He heard everything but "God Must Be a Boogie Man," which he would have liked, since it is his point of view about himself. It's

based on the first four pages of his book [*Beneath the Underdog*].

*How did you go about writing lyrics to "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat"? This is a classic piece of music that has...*

... Been around. That was a very difficult one. I had to find my own phrasing for the notes. The real difficulty for me was that the only thing I can believe is what has happened to me firsthand, what I see and feel with my own eyes. I had a block for three months. It's hard for me to take someone else's story and tell only his story in a song.

Charlie assailed me with historical information about Lester Young [in whose memory "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat" was written] and his family background, concerning his early playing days. He used to tap dance in his family band with his father and mother. He was married to a white woman, traveling through the South in a time when that was just taboo. A lot of the great black musicians were forced into cellars or the chitlin circuit. So I had all these details, but I still couldn't, with any conscience, simply write a historical song.

Then something very magical happened. One night Don Alias and I—he plays congas on the album, and he and I have been very close for the period of the last two years—were on the subway, and we got off, I don't know why, two stops early. We came up into this cloud of steam coming out of a New York manhole. Two blocks ahead of us, under these orangeish New York lights, we see a crowd gathered. So we head toward the crowd. When we get up on it, it's a group of black men surrounding two small black boys. It's about midnight, and the two boys are dancing this very robotlike mime dance. One of the guys in the crowd slaps his leg and says, "Isn't that something, I thought tap dancing was gone forever." Immediately I'm thinking about Lester Young. They were dancing under one of those cloth awnings that goes out to the curb of a bar. I look up—and the name of the bar is the Pork Pie Hat. The music they were dancing to was jazz coming off the jukebox inside. There were big blown-up pictures of Lester Young all around the place. It was wild.

So that became the last verse of the song. In my mind, that filled in a piece of the puzzle. I had the past and the present, and the two boys represented the future, the next generation. To me, the song then had a life of its own.

?

*Looking back, how well did you prepare for your own success?*

I never thought that far ahead. I never expected to have this degree of success.

*Never? Not even practicing in front of your mirror?*

No. It was a hobby that mushroomed. I was grateful to make one record. All I knew was, whatever it was that I felt was the weak link in the previous project gave me my inspiration for the next one. I wrote poetry and I painted all my life. I always wanted to play music and dabbled with it, but I never thought of putting them all together. It never occurred to me. It wasn't until Dylan began to write poetic songs that it occurred to me you could actually sing those poems.

*Is that when you started to sing?*

I guess I really started singing when I had polio. Neil [Young] and I both got polio in the same Canadian epidemic. I was nine, and they put me in a polio ward over Christmas. They said I might not walk again, and that I would not be able to go home for Christmas. I wouldn't go for it. So I started to sing Christmas carols and I used to sing them real loud. When the nurse came into the room I would sing louder. The boy in the bed next to me, you know, used to complain. And I discovered I was a ham. That was the first time I started to sing for people.

*Do you remember the first record you bought?*

The first record I bought was a piece of classical music. I saw a movie called *The Story of Three Loves*, and the theme was [*she hums the entire melody*] by Rachmaninoff. I think. Everytime it used to come on the radio it would drive me crazy. It was a 78. I mean, I had *Alice in Wonderland* and *Tubby the Tuba*, but the first one that I loved and had to buy? "The Story of Three Loves."

*How about pop music?*

You see, pop music was something else in that time. We're talking about the Fifties now. When I was thirteen, *The Hit Parade* was one hour a day—four o'clock to five o'clock. On the weekends they'd do the Top Twenty. But the rest of the radio was Mantovani, country & western, a lot of radio journalism. Mostly country & western, which I wasn't crazy about. To me it was simplistic. Even as a child I liked more complex melody.

In my teens I loved to dance. That was my thing. I instigated a Wednesday night dance 'cause I could hardly make it to the weekends. For dancing, I loved Chuck Berry. Ray Charles. "What I'd Say." I liked Elvis Presley. I liked the Everly Brothers. But then this thing happened. Rock & roll went through a really dumb vanilla period. And during that period, folk music came in to fill the hole. At that point I had friends who'd have parties and sit around and sing Kingston Trio songs. That's when I started to sing again. That's why I bought an instrument. To sing at those parties. It was no more ambitious than that. I was planning all the time to go to art school.

*[Informed of the time, Mitchell realizes with a familiar shudder that she is already an hour late for a hairdresser's appointment. There are several more errands to be run before an evening photo session with Norman Seeff, and Mitchell invites the interview to continue along with her.]*

*After a short drive down Sunset Boulevard, we arrive at the shop, situated directly across from a gigantic Bee Gees billboard. She is greeted warmly by the attendants, who find her exactly "on schedule," as usual. We resume the interview with Mitchell under the hair dryer, cloaked in a plastic coverall that coincidentally bears a repeating pattern of two be-bopping couples and the phrase, THE JAZZ AGE.]*

*What kind of student were you?*

I was a bad student. I finally flunked out in the twelfth grade. I went back later and picked up the subjects that I lost. I do have my high-school diploma—I figured I needed that much, just in case. College was not too interesting to me. The way I saw the educational system from an early age was that it taught you what to think, not how to think. There was no liberty, really, for free thinking. You were being trained to fit into a

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1968: Mitchell after move to New York City

society where free thinking was a nuisance. I liked some of my teachers very much, but I had no interest in their subjects. So I would appease them—I think they perceived that I was not a dummy, although my report card didn't look like it. I would line the math room with ink drawings and portraits of the mathematicians. I did a tree of life for my biology teacher. I was always staying late at the school, down on my knees painting something.

*How do you think other students viewed you?*

I'm not sure I have a clear picture of myself. My identity, since it wasn't through the grade system, was that I was a good dancer and an artist. And also, I was very well dressed. I made a lot of my own clothes. I worked in ladies' wear and I modeled. I had access to sample clothes that were too fashionable for our community, and I could buy them cheaply. I would go hang out on the streets dressed to the T, even in hat and gloves. I hung out downtown with the Ukrainians and the Indians; they were more emotionally honest and they were better dancers.

When I went back to my own neighborhood, I found that I had a provocative image. They thought I was loose because I always liked rowdies. I thought the way the kids danced at my school was kind of, you know, *funny*. I remember a recurring statement on my report card—"Joan does not relate well." I know that I was aloof. Perhaps some people thought that I was a snob.

There came a split when I rejected sororities and that whole thing. I didn't go for that. But there also came a stage when my friends who were juvenile delinquents suddenly became criminals. They could go into very dull jobs or they could go into crime. Crime is very romantic in your youth. I suddenly thought, "Here's where the romance ends. I don't see myself in jail...."

*So you went to art school, and at the end of your first year decided to go to Toronto to become a folk singer.*

I was only a folk singer for about two years, and that was several years before I ever made a record. By that time, it wasn't really folk music anymore. It was some new American phenomenon. Later, they called it singer/songwriters. Or art songs, which I liked best. Some people get nervous about that word. Art. They think it's a pretentious word from the giddyap. To me, words are only symbols, and the word *art* has never lost its vitality. It still has meaning to me. Love lost its meaning to me. God lost its meaning to me. But art never lost its meaning. I always knew what I meant by art. Now I've got all three of them back [laughs].

*Did your folk-singing period include the time you spent in Detroit working with Chuck Mitchell?*

Yes. We never really were a full-fledged duo. I'm a bad learner, see. I bypass the educational system. I learn by a process more like osmosis. It's by inspiration and desire. So when we would try to work up songs together, we would bang into differences of opinion. Some people say, "Oh, Joan, that's just because you're lazy." But in a way, more than laziness, it's a kind of block that runs all through my rebellious personality. If someone tries to teach me a part that I don't find particularly interesting, it won't stick. I'll end up doing what I wanted to do in the first place, and then they're annoyed.

'I HAD  
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the bank. I  
thought  
I was filthy  
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?

We had a difference of opinion in material. It was more like two people onstage at the same time, sometimes singing together. We had a difficult time.

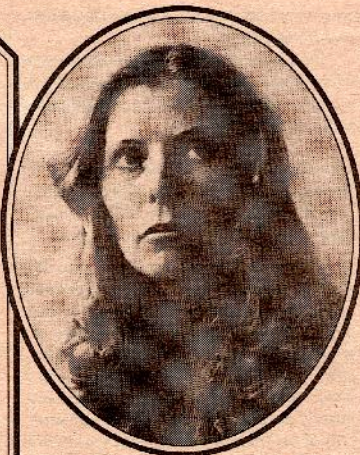
*When your marriage broke up, you moved to New York City, and artists like Tom Rush began covering your songs. You became totally self-sufficient—booking your own tours and handling all your financial affairs. Was that your nature, or was it a reaction to the end of the marriage?*

Both. At that point, I didn't know how far it was going to carry me. I had a little circuit of clubs that I could go in and say, "Okay, your capacity is such and such. I've got you up to full capacity now. Last time I made *this* much; this time, why don't you pay me *this* much more, and you can still make a profit. Let's be fair." People were starting to record my songs; I drew [audiences] even though I didn't have a record out. I really felt self-sufficient. I was working constantly, every night, and I was trying to build up a bank account because I didn't think it was going to last too long. I thought I was going to have to go back into what I knew, which was women's wear. Become a buyer for a department store. But I was going to go on with it as long as I could. Or maybe go into commercial art. Whatever.

*So you were less sure then that the songs would keep coming?*

In some ways I had more confidence. I was outspoken. I enjoyed performing. I loved the compliments I received when I came onstage. Everything seemed to be proportionate to me. I had \$400 in the bank. I thought I was *filthy rich*. I liked the liberty of it all. I liked the idea that I was going to North Carolina, visiting all these mysterious states. I used to tell long, rambling tales onstage. It was very casual.

I remember the first time I played the Newport Folk Festival. It was the first glimmer of what was to come. We went to a party—it was held at a fraternity house and it was guarded. Only people who were supposed to be there were there. I was with a road manager at that point, a girlfriend who was helping me out. They said, "You can't come in." My girlfriend said, "Do you know who this is?" She said my name and these people standing by the door let out this *gasp*. My eyes bugged out of my head. I had the strangest reaction: I turned on my heel and I



1974: Backstage during the 'Court and Spark' tour

ran for ten blocks in the other direction. It pumped me so full of adrenalin, I bolted like a deer. I came back to Janie and said, "I'm so embarrassed, man, why did I do that? It's a mystery to me." Well, she had lived with... [laughs] retarded children, right. And a retard is smart in a lot of ways. They're simplified down to a kind of intelligence that a more complex mind is not hip to, Janie said, "I think that's one of the sanest things I have ever seen, you know."

Then it began to get really disproportionate. I couldn't really enjoy it after that. I know it was *good*, but the adoration seemed out of line. The next thing was going through the primary adjustments, where more people are attracted to you because you smell of success. And they're simultaneously saying to you, "Don't change." But as soon as you have so many hangers-on, you have to change, and then you go through the pains of heating that you "Changed, man." It goes to your head. There's a whole lot of levels of adjustment. There are no books written on it; nobody tells you what to expect. Some people get all puffed up and say, "I deserved it." I thought it was too much to live up to. I thought, "You don't even know who I am. You want to worship me?"

That's why I became a confessional poet. I thought, "You better know who you're applauding up here." It was a compulsion to be honest with my audience.

*You and Neil Young have always been close. How did you first meet?*

I was married to Chuck Mitchell at the time. We came to Winnipeg, playing this Fourth Dimension [folk] circuit. We were there over Christmas. I remember putting up this Christmas tree in our hotel room. Neil, you know, was this rock & roller who was coming around to folk music through Bob Dylan. Of course. Anyway, Neil came out to the club, and we liked him immediately. He was the same way he is now—this offhanded, dry wit. And you know what his ambition was at the time? He wanted a *hearse*, and a chicken farm. And when you think of it, what he's done with his dream is not that far off. He just added a few buffalo. And a fleet of antique cars. He's always been pretty true to his vision.

But none of us had any grandiose ideas about the kind of success that we received. In those days it was *really* a long shot.

Especially for a Canadian. I remember my mother talking to a neighbor who asked, "Where is Joan living?" And she said, "In New York; she's a musician." And they went, "Ohhh, you poor woman." It was hard for them to relate.

Later, you know, Neil abandoned his rock & roll band and came out to Toronto. I didn't know him very well at the time we were there. I was just leaving for Detroit. We didn't connect then. It was years later, when I got to California—Elliot [Roberts] and I came out as strangers in a strange land—and we went to a Buffalo Springfield session to see Neil. He was the only other person I knew. That's where I met everybody else. And the scene started to come together.

*By this time, David Crosby had "discovered" you singing in a club in Coconut Grove, Florida. What was he like back then?*

He was tanned. He was straight. He was clearing out his boat, and it was going to be the beginning of a new life for him. I was paranoid about his hair, I remember. I having long hair in a short hair society. He had a wonderful sense of humor. Crosby has enthusiasm like no one else. He can make you feel like a million bucks. Or he can bring you down with the same force. Crosby, in producing that first album, did me an incredible service, which I will never forget. He used his success and name to make sure my songs weren't tampered with to suit the folk-rock trend.

I had just come back from London. That was during the Twiggy-Viva era, and I remember I wore a lot of makeup. I think I even had on false eyelashes at the time. And Crosby was from his scrub-faced California culture, so one of his first projects in our relationship was to encourage me to let go of all of this elaborate war paint [laughs]. It was a great liberation, to get up in the morning and wash your face... and not have to do anything else.

*Is there a moment you can look back on when you realized that you were no longer a child, that you had grown up?*

There's a moment I can think of—although I'm still a child. Sometimes I feel seven years old. I'll be standing in the kitchen and all of a sudden my body wants to jump around. For no reason at all. You've seen kids that suddenly just get a burst of energy? That part of my child is still alive. I don't repress those urges, except in certain company.

My artwork, at the time I made the first album, was still very concerned with childhood. It was full of the remnants of fairy tales and fantasia. My songs still make references to fairy tales. They referred to kings and queens. Mind you, that was also part of the times, and I pay colonial allegiance to Queen Lizzy. But suddenly I realized that I was preoccupied with the things of my girlhood and I was twenty-four years old. I remember being at the Philadelphia Folk Festival and having this *sensation*. It was like falling to earth. It was about the time of my second album. It felt almost as if I'd had my head in the clouds long enough. And then there was a plummeting into the earth, tinged with a little bit of apprehension and fear. Shortly after that, everything began to change. There were fewer adjectives to my poetry. Fewer curlicues to my drawing. Everything began to get more bold. And solid in a way.

By the time of my fourth album [Blue,

1971], I came to another turning point—that terrible opportunity that people are given in their lives. The day that they discover to the tips of their toes that they're assholes [solenn moment, then a gale of laughter]. And you have to work on from there. And decide what your values are. Which parts of you are no longer really necessary. They belong to childhood's end. *Blue* really was a turning point in a lot of ways. As *Court and Spark* was a turning point later on. In the state that I was at in my inquiry about life and direction and relationships, I perceived a lot of hate in my heart. You know, "I hate you some, I hate you some, I love you some, I love you when I forget about me" ["All I Want"]. I perceived my inability to love at that point. And it horrified me. It's something still that I... I hate to say I'm working on, because the idea of work implies effort, and effort implies you'll never get there. But it's something I'm noticing.

*Having laid so much of your life out for public ears, do you now look back on some things and wince?*

The things that I look back on and sort of shrug off, maybe in a weak moment grimace over [smiles], are the parts when I see myself imitating something else. Affectations as opposed to style. It's very hard to be true to yourself. For instance, I don't care too much for the second album I made [*Clouds*]. I like the first one, the first one's honest. *Blue* is an honest album. *Clouds* has some honest moments on it, but at the time, I was singing a lot with Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, and they had a style, out of necessity, to blend with one another. They had a way of affecting vowel sounds so that when they sang together, they would sing like a unit. I picked up on that and there's a lot of that on the album. I find it now kind of irritating to listen to, in the same way that I find a lot of black affectations irritating. White singers sounding like they come from deep Georgia, you know? It always seems ridiculous to me. It always seemed to me that a great singer—now we're talking about excellence, not popularity—but a great singer would sing closer to his or her own speaking voice.

I think Billie Holiday was a very natural singer. In the context of opera, Maria Callas was an excellent singer. I think the lead singer from the Doobie Brothers [Mike McDonald] is a very natural singer.

*"I think Bob Dylan had the right idea when he wore the same leather jacket for ten years," Mitchell says on the way back to her Bel Air home to pick up several changes of clothes. "Georgia O'Keeffe has got it down to a uniform she wears every day."*

*She buzzes open her gate, whips her Mercedes sedan into the garage and disappears into an upstairs bedroom. Her home is spacious, filled with plants and with her own paintings. The Mingus oil works—done at the Regency during her worst periods of writer's block—lie stacked in the hallway just outside the kitchen.*

*A few minutes later, Mitchell comes bustling into the living room with a small wardrobe, and it's back down Sunset Boulevard to Norman Seeff's studio. It's her fourth session in as many years with the photographer, and they work well together. Both coach each other. Mitchell lectures him on how "you try celebrities here, you push them to the limit, test them against your zen training." Seeff shouts at her to be quiet and "transcend yourself." Every now and then Seeff puts down the camera and they have a brief*

*cross-fire philosophical discussion. They continue working all night.*

*The interview continued the next afternoon by Mitchell's pool. We sat in a small nook under the scorching sun, and for several hours, she talked with unflinching energy. ]*

*Ten years ago, you had begun to represent the Woodstock ethic. Someone could say, "There is a Joni Mitchell type," and you would know exactly what he meant. Was that a concern of yours?*

Very much so. I remember showing up at a Carole King concert in Central Park in a pair of Yves St. Laurent pants. And a good shirt. They were simple clothes, but they were of a good quality. And I felt... really uncomfortable. I felt there were certain things that I liked, that were a part of me, that were outside the hippie guard. Things that were a part of me from before this delicious period in the Sixties when we were fresh and were thinking fresh things... It was a good time period. It was a healthy idea that we were working toward, but there came a time when it had become a ritual, a flat-out style.

I began to make this transition, under a lot of peer pressure. I remember seeing, even when I went to *The Last Waltz*, "Miss Mitchell showed up looking like a Beverly Hills housewife." I was outside the uniform of rock & roll and it was annoying to some people. And as a reply to this prejudice, I wrote that song, "The Boho Dance": "Nothing is capitalized in me. In either side of town." As a demand for liberty.

*There was a time when you and Laura Nyro were considered to be the two purveyors of female singer/songwriting. Now it's all but taken for granted that Laura Nyro wasn't "tough enough" to survive in the business. Do you think that your own survival has meant a certain toughness?*

Gee, I don't know if that's the case. Inspiration can run out, you know. Laura Nyro made a choice that has tempted me on many occasions. And that was to lead an ordinary life. She married a carpenter, as I understand, and turned her back on it all. Which is brave and tough in its own way. Many, many times as a writer, I've come to a day where I say, "None of this has any meaning." If you maintain that point of view, if you hold onto it and possess it, that's it for you. There's a possibility that you can come firmly to that conclusion, as Rimbaud did, and give it up. I've always managed to move out of those pockets.

At a certain point, I actually tried to move back to Canada, into the bush. My idea was to follow my advice and get back to nature. I built a house that I thought would function with or without electricity. I was going to grow gardens and everything. But I found that I was too spoiled already. I had too much choice. I could take the more difficult, old-fashioned way for a short period of time, but the idea of doing it forever would not work. I have reclusive fits, though, all the time. Not that it isn't rewarding, you know. It is. I mean, I do it for myself first, but I don't want to do it for myself only. I feel I can still share my work with people and they appreciate it. I guess it is my calling.

*Around 1971, after 'Blue,' it was reported that you had retired from the road. You returned a year and a half later with 'For the Roses.' Was that material that you had written up in Canada?*

Yes. Most of *For the Roses* was written there.

*What did your parents think of the inside shot?*

I remember my mother putting on glasses to scrutinize it more closely. Then my father said, "Myrtle, people do things like this these days." Which was a great attitude. It was the most innocent of nudes, kind of like a Botticelli pose. It was meant to express that line: "I'm looking way out at the ocean, love to see that green water in motion, there's this reef around me" ["Lesson in Survival"]. Joel Bernstein is the only photographer I would feel comfortable enough to take off my clothes for. It was part of our concept for the cover when we were going to call the album *Judgment of the Moon and Stars*. We were originally going to set that photograph in a circle and replace the daylight sky with the starry starry night, so it would be like a Magritte. At that time, no one was paying homage to Magritte. Then Elliot said, "Joan, how would you like to see \$5.98 plastered across your ass?" [Laughs] So it became the inside.

*How aware were you that your songs were being scrutinized for the relationships they could be about? Even ROLLING STONE drew a diagram of your supposed brokenhearted lovers and also called you Old Lady of the Year.*

I never saw it. The people that were involved in it called up to console me. My victims called first [Laughs]. That took some of the sting out of it. It was ludicrous. I mean, even when they were drawing all these broken-hearted lines out of my life and my ability to love well, I wasn't so unique. There was a lot of affection in those relationships. The fact that I couldn't stay in them for one reason or another was painful to me. The men involved are good people. I'm fond of them to this day. We have a mutual affection, even though we've gone on to new relationships. Certainly there are pockets of hurt that come. You come a little battered out of a relationship that doesn't go on forever. I don't live in bitterness.

I'm a confronter by nature. I have a tendency to confront my relationships much more often than people would care. I'm always being told that I talk too much. It's not that I like to, but I habitually confront before I escape. Rather than go out and try to drown my sorrows or something, I'll wallow and muddle through them. My friends thought for a long time that this was

done out of some act of masochism. I began to believe it myself. But at this time in my life, I would say that it has paid some dividend. By confronting those things and thinking them through as deeply as my limited intelligence would allow, there's a certain richness that comes in time. Even psychiatrists, mind whores for the most part, don't have a healthy attitude toward depression. They get bored with it. I think their problem is they need to be deeply depressed.

My relationship with Graham [Nash] is a great, enduring one. We lived together for some time—we were married, you might say. The time Graham and I were together was a highly productive period for me as an artist. I painted a great deal, and the bulk of my best drawings were done in '69 and '70 when we were together. To contend with this hypercreative woman, Graham tried his hand at several things. Painting. Stained glass. And finally he came to the camera. I feel he's not just a good photographer, he's a great one. His work is so lyrical. Some of his pictures are worth a thousand words. Even after we broke up, Graham made a gift of a very fine camera and a book of Cartier-Bresson photographs. I became an avid photographer myself. He gave the gift back to me. Even though the romance ended, the creative aspect of our relationship has continued to branch out.

This is the thing that ROLLING STONE, when it made a diagram of broken hearts, was being very simplistic about. It was an easy target to slam me for my romantic alliances. That's human nature. That hurt, but not nearly so much as when they began to tear apart *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*. Ignorantly I couldn't get together, in any way; it being human nature to take the attacks that were given certain projects. I got very frustrated at the turning point, when the press began to turn against me.

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*When did you first meet Bob Dylan?*

The first official meeting was the *Johnny Cash Show* in 1969. We played that together. Afterward Johnny had a party at his house. So we met briefly there.

Over the years there were a series of brief encounters. Tests. Little art games. I always had an affection for him. At one point we were at a concert—whose concert was that?

'I WAS  
outside  
the uniform of  
rock & roll,  
and it annoyed  
people.'



1976: The post-Woodstock Mitchell during her last tour



[Shrugs] How soon we forget. Anyway, we're backstage at this concert. Bobby and [Dylan's friend] Louie Kemp were holding up the wall. I went over there and opened up the conversation with painting. I knew he was discovering painting. At that point I had an idea for a canvas that I wanted to do. I'd just come from New Mexico, and the color of the land there was still very much with me. I'd seen color combinations that had never occurred to me before. Lavender and wheat, like old-fashioned licorice, you know, when you bite into it and there's this peculiar, rich green and brown color? The soil was like that, and the foliage coming out of it was vivid in the context of this color of earth. Anyway, I was describing something like that, really getting carried away with all of the colors. And Bobby says to me [in inspired imitation]: "When you paint, do you use white?" And I said, "Of course." He said, "'Cause if you don't use white, your paint gets muddy." I thought, "Aha, the boy's been taking art lessons."

The next time we had a brief conversation was when Paul McCartney had a party on the *Queen Mary*, and everybody left the table and Bobby and I were sitting there. After a long silence he said, "If you were gonna paint this room, what would you paint?" I said, "Well, let me think. I'd paint the mirrored ball spinning, I'd paint the women in the washroom, the band..." Later all the stuff came back to me as part of a dream that became the song "Paprika Plains." I said, "What would you paint?" He said, "I'd paint this coffee cup." Later, he wrote "One More Cup of Coffee."

Is it true that you once played Dylan a just-finished tape of 'Court and Spark' and he fell asleep?

This is true.

What does this do to your confidence when Bob Dylan falls asleep in the middle of your album?

Let me see, there was Louie Kemp and a girlfriend of his and David Geffen [then president of Elektra/Asylum Records] and Dylan. There was all this fussing over Bobby's project, 'cause he was new to the label, and *Court and Spark*, which was a big breakthrough for me, was being entirely and almost rudely dismissed. Geffen's excuse was, since I was living in a room in his house at the time, that he had heard it through all of its stages, and it was no longer any surprise to him. Dylan played his album [Planet Waves], and everybody went, "Oh wow." I played mine, and everybody talked and Bobby fell asleep. [Laughs] I said, "Wait a minute, you guys, this is some different kind of music for me, check it out." I knew it was good. I think Bobby was just being cute [laughs].

Prior to 'Court and Spark,' your albums were mostly kept to sparse interpretations. Had you always heard arrangements like that in your head?

Not really. I had attempted to play my music with rock & roll players, but they couldn't grasp the subtlety of the form. I've never studied music, so I'd always be talking in abstractions. And they'd laugh, "Aww, isn't that cute? She's trying to tell us how to play." Never negatively, but *appeasingly*, you know. And finally it was Russ Kunkel who said, "Joni, you'd better get yourself a jazz drummer."

One night I went down to the Baked Potato [an L.A. jazz club] to hear the L.A. Express play. I knew Tom Scott, I'd done some work on *For the Roses* with him. When I heard the band, I was very enthusiastic, and I asked them to play on my next session.

When they got in the studio, it was the same problem. They didn't really know how heavy to play, and I was used to being the whole orchestra. Many nights I would be very discouraged. But one night we suddenly overcame the obstacles. The next thing we knew, we were all aware we were making something quite unique.

A commonly asked question among your long-term fans right now is, what happened to the melodies?

The album with Charles is incredibly melodic. What it is, is *more* melody. Granted, "Coyote" is not a melodic tune. It's rhythmic, it's almost chantlike. A lot of it is spoken: "No regrets, Coyote." But I've always been a lover of melody. I don't think that I've ever lost that. It's just that at a certain point, my poetry began to spill out of the form and into something more relative to a jazz sense of melody, which was restating the melody in variation. If you have four verses, maybe it'll be slightly different everytime it comes around. But that's just different. It doesn't always have to be melodic. So what, you know? You take a painter, and maybe he's been painting multicolored canvases. All of a sudden he decides to paint two-tone compositions. I figure anything Picasso could do [laughs]....

Don't you believe in compromise?

I don't believe so much in compromise as I don't believe in art that has become so elitist that only fourteen people in the world can appreciate it. For instance on this project, there was a possibility that people would have this prejudice — "Oh, it sounds like cocktail lounge music." Or, "That sounds like Johnny Carson show music." I wanted somehow or other to make something that transcended that prejudice. I feel that I solved that problem. It remains to be seen, but I feel that the music, while being very modern, still contains an almost folk-music simplicity. I don't think that it's intimidating. Some people get intimidated by jazz. It's like higher mathematics to them.

Was 'The Hissing of Summer Lawns' more of an L.A. album for you than 'Court and Spark'?

Yes, because *Court and Spark* still contains a lot of songs written up in Canada. The song "Court and Spark" itself was written up on my land there. It deals with a story based on Vancouver and the Sunshine Coast.

*The Hissing of Summer Lawns* is a suburban album. About the time that album came around I thought, "I'm not going to be your sin eater any longer." So I began to write social description as opposed to personal confession. I met with a tremendous amount of resentment. People thought suddenly that I was secure in my success, that I was being a snob and was attacking them. The basic theme of the album, which everybody thought was so abstract, was just any summer day in any neighborhood when people turn their sprinklers on all up and down the block. It's just that *hiss* of suburbia.

People thought it was very narcissistic of me to be swimming around in a pool, which I thought was an odd observation. It was

an act of *activity*. As opposed to sexual posturing, which runs through the business — nobody ever pointed a finger at narcissism there. I had stopped being confessional. I think they were ready to nail me anyway. They would have said, "More morose, scathing introspection." They were ready to get me; that's the way I figure it. It was my second year in office. The cartoonists had their fun. There weren't enough good jokes left, so it was time to throw me out of office and get a new president. It's politics.

It sounds like it surprised you when it actually happened.

It really surprised me. In retrospect, it

'I DON'T believe in art that only 14 people in the world can appreciate.'

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1979: During the May antinuke demonstration in Washington D.C.

doesn't surprise me at all. I listened to that album recently, 'cause I was going to rework "Edith and the Kingpin." I was surprised. I feel that the times have caught up with it. At that time, I was beginning to introduce — for lack of a better word — jazz overtones. Nobody was really doing that. In the two years that followed, it became more acceptable, and when Steely Dan finally made *Aja*, with some of the same sidemen, it was applauded as a great, if somewhat eccentric, work. I fail even to see the eccentricity of it, myself. Perhaps there was a weary tone in my voice that irritated people, but there was so much of it that was accessible.

I remember having a conversation with you about a year ago. Months had gone by and you were still smarting over the criticism you'd received for your last album, 'Don Juan's Reckless Daughter.' What exactly was your frustration?

If I experience any frustration, it's the frustration of being misunderstood. But that's what stardom is — a glamorous misunderstanding. All the way along, I know that some of these projects are eccentric. I know that there are parts that are experimental, and some of them are half-baked. I certainly have been pushing the limits and — even for myself — not all of my experiments are completely successful. But they lay the groundwork for further developments. Sooner or later, some of those experiments will come to fruition. So I have to lay out a certain amount of my growing pains in public. I like the idea that annually there is a place where I can distribute the art that I have collected for the year. That's the only thing that I feel I want to protect, really. And

that means having a certain amount of commercial success.

It's a credit to the people that have supported me in spite of the bad publicity of the last four years — the out-and-out panning of a lot of fine and unusual projects — that at least they felt this work had some moments of accessible beauty. If a reviewer sits down and he plays [one of these albums] two or three times, it's just going to sound freaky to him. There are moods I'm in when I can't stand to listen to some of my own music. I don't expect it to always be appropriate. But come the right moment, where we're on the same wavelength, it might slip in on you.

I feel frustrated sometimes. I feel bitter-

ness, but I'm not embittered. Feelings pass. A lot of the humor in the music is missed. They insist on painting me as this tragic... well not even a tragic, because in this town people don't understand tragedy. All they understand is drama. You have to be moral to understand tragedy [laughs].

Elliot Roberts, your manager, realized not too long ago that he had canceled more shows than you'd actually played. Was there an instance when you walked offstage after two songs?

There was one time that I was onstage for one song. And I left. I felt very bad for the audience. It was impossible for me to continue. There's that old show-business axiom that the show must go on. But if I listed for you the strikes that were against me that night, I think that you could dig it. It's not easy to leave an audience sitting there. I was still in bad health from going out on Rolling Thunder, which was *mad*. Heavy drama, no sleep — a circus. I'd requested before the show went on to get out of it. But it was too late. I had bronchitis. A bone in my spine was out of place and was pinching like crazy. So I was in physical pain. I was in emotional pain. I was going with someone in the band and we were in the process of splitting up. We were in a Quonset hut and the sound was ricocheting. And I just made the decision.

That can get to be costly.

The money is not the motivation anyway. I use one of two analogies all the time with Elliot. One that I was his racehorse. Or if I really wanted out of something I would say to him, "Be a good pimp, Elliot, don't put me out [laughs]."

I stopped touring for a while for a couple of reasons. One of them was that I felt it threatened my writing, that it limited my experience to that of a traveling rock & roll singer. I didn't want only to be a scribe to that particular facet of life, a minority experience. There were so many people documenting that already. That's rock & roll calling itself rock & roll simply by talking about rock & roll.

*You may tour this summer with a band including Pat Metheny and Jaco Pastorius, presumably to play material from the Mingus album. What kind of set would you do?*

With these players, we're talking about young musicians who have no real musical or categorical preferences. We all love rock & roll. We all love folk music. And we all love jazz. If anything, we want to be considered a musical event. We're going to do some traditional African ceremonial drum pieces. I would like to get loose enough to dance. Jaco, you know, is a bass player, but he's also a fantastic keyboard player. In this band, we're going to try to switch instruments. It should be very creative.

*What were the origins of 'Hejira'? That album seems to have a sound all its own...*

Well, after the end of my last tour, it was a case of waiting again. I had an idea; I knew I wanted to travel. I was sitting out at the beach at Neil's [Young] place and I was thinking, "I want to travel, I don't know where and I don't know who with." Two friends of mine came to the door and said, "We're driving across country." I said, "I've been waiting for you; I'm gone." So we drove across country, then we parted ways. It was my car, so I drove back alone. The *Hejira* album was written mostly while I was traveling in the car. That's why there were no piano songs, if you remember.

*Hejira* was an obscure word, but it said exactly what I wanted. Running away, honorably. It dealt with the leaving of a relationship, but without the sense of failure that accompanied the breakup of my previous relationships. I felt that it was not necessarily anybody's fault. It was a new attitude.

2

*You were nowhere to be found in the Dylan film from Rolling Thunder—"Renaldo and Clara."*

Yes. I asked not to be in it.

*Why?*

I joined Rolling Thunder as a spectator. I would have been content to follow it for three cities just as an observer, but since I was there I was asked to participate. Then, for mystical reasons of my own, I made a pact with myself that I would stay on the thing until it was over. It was a trial of sorts for me. I went out in a foot soldier position. I made up songs onstage. I sang in French, badly. I did a lot of things to prevent myself from getting in the way. What was in it for me hadn't anything to do with applause or the performing aspect. It was simply to be allowed to remain an observer and a witness to an incredible spectacle. As a result, the parts of the film that I was in...for all I know, it was powerful and interesting footage. But I preferred to be invisible. [Laughs nervously] I've got my own reasons why.

*Do you make it a point to check out some of the newer female songwriters—like the Wilson sisters from Heart or Rickie Lee Jones?*

I'll tell you, the last three years I have been very narrow. In a way, I turned my back on pop music and rock & roll. I was concentrating mostly on jazz, modern classical music, Stravinsky, polyphonic music. During that time I developed a lack of appreciation for pop music.

*Out of cynicism?*

No no. It was part of an artistic process. It seemed to me, in the context of what I was exploring, there was no reason in the world you should be comparing Stravinsky to Heart. But if you're given Heart or Stravinsky, I was more interested in Stravinsky. Or *In a Silent Way*.

Now I don't even listen to the jazz station in my car. The jazz station is full of mediocrity, too. I listen to AM, and I like what I hear. There's only a certain amount of fine work in any idiom. The rest of it is just copyists. Regurgitation. Obvious rip-offs. Mingus has a song, "If Charlie Parker Was a Gunslinger, There'd Be a Whole Lot of Dead Copycats." Sometimes I find myself sharing this point of view. He figured you don't settle for anything else but uniqueness. The name of the game to him—and to me—is to become a full individual. I remember a time when I was very flattered if somebody told me that I was as good as Peter, Paul and Mary. Or that I sounded like Judy Collins. Then one day I discovered I didn't want to be a second-rate anything. I have to remember to be compassionate. Otherwise it really pisses me off to hear somebody getting a whole lot of public roar and, "Oh this is the newest and the greatest," when it's really the newest and greatest copy. There are bands coming now that are really good. They're interesting; they've got some vitality and some fire, but—say they're Englishmen who sound like Bob Dylan. I listen to it and it's pleasant on the radio, but as an artist I say to myself, "If you're that good, how come you can't be yourself?"

*Has anyone played you Elvis Costello? Any New Wave music?*

I don't know enough to talk about it. It's ignorance speaking a bit, but one of the things I like that's coming out in rock & roll now is the Archie and Betty and Veronica aspect of the characters. I like the way [Rick Nielsen] wears a high-school sweater and bow tie and beanie. [Bun E. Carlos] will have an accountant's short-sleeved shirt and short haircut and wire-rimmed glasses. I love the look of Cheap Trick.

I understand the punk movement. It reminds me of a very exciting time in my own life. It's nothing new—I was a punk in the Fifties. Devo, I think, is great. I love them. They are like Dadaists to me. Everything that they express is a complete reaction against everything that we stood for. But they do it so well, theatrically speaking. And with a great sense of humor. I love it. Now as far as putting on a Devo album? It wouldn't be something I would do. It's the visuals that make them fresh and fascinating to me.

*Do you think you've achieved greatness?*

[Long pause] Greatness is a point of view. There is great rock & roll. But great rock & roll within the context of music, historically, is slight. I think that I am growing as a painter. I'm growing as a musician. I'm growing as a communicator, a poet, all the time. But growth implies that if you look

back, there was improvement. I don't see necessarily that this album is any, to use your word, greater than the *Blue* album. This has a lot more sophistication, but it's very difficult to define what greatness is. Honesty? Genius? The *Blue* album, there's hardly a dishonest note in the vocals. At that period of my life, I had no personal defenses. I felt like a cellophane wrapper on a pack of cigarettes. I felt like I had absolutely no secrets from the world and I couldn't pretend in my life to be strong. Or to be happy. But the advantage of it in the music was that there were no defenses there either.

The vocals are real on this *Mingus* album. The interplay between the musicians is spontaneous and real. I can put my dukes up now if I have to in life, but out of appreciation for honesty. I won't settle for anything less in the studio. So much of music is politics. It's going for the big vote. It amounts to a lot of baby kissing.

*Do you listen to Fleetwood Mac?*

I enjoy them. To make a whole album like that, I think, would leave me wanting something more. For my own self. Not to put them down in any way. I'm still obsessed with pushing the perimeters of what entails a pop song. I can't really let go of that impulse yet. I don't know where I'm going. I never really do. My songs could come out any shape at this point. I am thinking now of keeping it simpler. Quite naturally, my experimentation has led me to a conclusion, and I feel myself returning more to basics and to my roots in folk music. But I don't even know what that simplicity might turn out like.

*Do you still feel a comradeship with the Eagles, Jackson Browne and Linda Ronstadt?*

The Eagles have really stretched out thematically. Jackson writes fine songs. Linda is very special. I'm a great appreciator of all those people. But at a certain point, I don't know if it was to protect me from getting a swelled head or what, I was denied any kind of positive feedback from a lot of sources. Like I go to a party and everybody shows up. I figure everybody must have a tape of their album on 'em. I figure, "Let's sit down and play these things." Right? A lot of times it would end up where I would be the only one who would end up being that pushy.

I always had this childhood idea that artists in a scene, you know, compared and discussed and disagreed with each other. But it was all done openly, perhaps in a shadowy cafe over wine. But because of this pressure for commercial success, maybe in a way we're deprived of this interchange.

*[Mitchell adjoins the day's session with a quick and soundless dive into her pool.*

*As I walk into her kitchen the next day to finish the interviews, she is on the phone with a friend who is inquiring about the possibility of visiting Georgia O'Keeffe, the reclusive, great American artist, at her home in New Mexico. Mitchell herself became friendly with O'Keeffe only after several tenuous meetings; once she turned around and returned to Los Angeles before even knocking on O'Keeffe's door and introducing herself. Now in her nineties, O'Keeffe has few visitors, and Mitchell was careful about providing instructions to the house.*

*Later I would learn the caller was Warren Beatty, who, in researching his next film, about the revolutionary John Reed, wanted to speak*

*with people who were alive in his day.*

*"I don't know," Mitchell allows with great affection. "Georgia might say, 'Ah yes, it was a very... yellow time period.'"*

*Have you moved to New York City?*

I consider myself spread across this continent in a very disorganized manner. I have three residences. One is wild and natural. One is New York, which needs no description. California, to me, represents old friends, and health. I love to swim. If there's anything that I love about this place here it's the luxury of being able to swim, which is like flying to me. I could get in the pool, float around for about two hours and never touch the sides. That's better than any psychiatrist to me. I'm working out my body, working out my lungs—the poor things are blackened with cigarette smoke—and looking at nature. I don't have that in New York.

New York gives me an opportunity to flex a muscle that I don't really get to use; for instance, out there there is directness. I find that it makes me stronger. You don't have so many anonymous encounters out here. In New York, constantly, the street is challenging you to relate to it.

*What do you think of the theory that great art comes from hunger and pain? You seem now to be living a very comfortable life.*

Pain has very little to do with environment. You can be sitting at the most beautiful place in the world, which doesn't necessarily have to be private property, and not be able to see it for pain. So no. Misery knows no rent bracket [laughs]. At this time in my life, I've confronted a lot of my devils. A lot of them were pretty silly, but they were incredibly real at the time.

I don't feel guilty for my success or my lifestyle. I feel that sometimes having a lot of acquisitions leads to a responsibility that is more time-consuming than the art. That's probably one of the reasons why people feel the artist should remain in poverty. My most important possession is my pool—it's one luxury I don't really question.

*Do you have many close women friends?*

I have a few good women friends. I like them and I trust them. But generally speaking, I'm a little afraid of women. I don't know, it's a funny time for women. We demand a certain sensitivity. We've made our outward attacks at machoism, right, in favor of the new sensitive male. But we're just at the fledgling state of our liberty where we can't handle it. I think we ask men to be sensitive and equal, but deep down think it's unnatural. And we really want them to be stronger than us. So you get into this paradoxical thing.

I believe in equality. I believe that I am male and I am female. Not that I'm saying I'm bisexual—I believe in heterosexuality. I think ultimately it's the most difficult and nourishing of them all. But I do understand homosexuality in these times. It seems to be a peculiar, in many cases, necessary, alternative to this mess that's happening between the men and the women. I know a lot of women now who have come through the whole gamut and they're at the position where they almost don't want to deal with it anymore. They want to be celibate. Men are not at this place at all. The new woman is embracing this as a possibility. If there wasn't always this intense sexual competition between women, it might provide a climate for them to develop a camaraderie.



In my observation, what passes for feminine camaraderie is conspiracy. I would love to make new women friends, but I hardly have time to do justice to the ones I have.

*Did it change your concept of dying to spend the last year and a half with Charles Mingus?*

Not completely. See, in my lifetime, I've had so many brushes with death myself, not that I'm saying that I'm not afraid to die — of course I still am. *Afraid* of it. 'Cause it's so final, you know. As far as a ceremony, of how I would like it to be treated, I'm not really sure. I mean it's an inevitable thing. I feel I'll live a long time. I'm confident that I'll live to be in my eighties. So I have a more immediate problem than confronting death.

*Filling those years?*

Aging gracefully. Which is easier in some societies than in this one. Especially in this very glamour-conscious town where women become neurotic at a certain age and go for surgery and any number of things to disguise that fact.

I had an interesting experience concerning aging in Hollywood. A friend of mine and I went into this Beverly Hills restaurant. It happened to be Fernando Lamas' birthday. So, sitting at the table next to us was this long supper of the old Hollywood. They were drinking toasts to Marilyn Monroe and there were lots of stories flying around about celebrities and people who they had known. There was a tremendous amount of glamour represented. *Well-tended* glamour. The fourth face-lift. Maintaining the youthful silhouette. I looked around and thought,

"Is this the way that we must go in this town?" Is our hippie philosophy going to surrender to this?

I think if you're healthy, aging can be quite a beautiful process, and I think we've created an artificial problem for ourselves. Generally speaking, men are very generous. But I think that's the main problem, you know, at thirty-six, I'm examining.

*You hold Georgia O'Keeffe as an ideal. Yet there she is in her nineties, living in the middle of the desert with only her art. She has no children. It seems like it could be a very lonely life...*

That's the part about it. I don't know, really, what your choices are. Obviously that's a constant battle with me. Is my maternity to amount to a lot of black plastic? Am I going to annually bear this litter of songs and send them out into the marketplace and have them crucified for this reason or that...

*Or praised.*

Or praised. Let me not get lopsided about that. I certainly get my fair share of appreciation. You know, in a few years, I'll be past a safe childbearing age. I don't see many women raising children successfully alone, and as yet I haven't been able to bond with a man who I could see myself with in constant company for the twenty years that're necessary to do a good job of that. I would take that job seriously. I wouldn't just frivolously get pregnant and bring a child into this world, especially a world that has such a difficult future as the one we're facing. Also, the children of celebrities have been notoriously troubled. But when it comes to the

business of raising children, I finally feel emotionally stable enough to deal with it. It's taken me this long, but it may be something that's denied me. It may be one of my little regrets in my old age. I still leave the future open, and given the right relationship, even if I thought the relationship had a potential longevity of, say, six years. I might do it.

*David Crosby once said this about you, with all affection: "Joni Mitchell is about as modest as Mussolini." [She smiles, shakes head] And while it's been my observation that you have a much better sense of humor than Mussolini, it's also true that you have no apologies to offer for anything in your career.*

I like to work myself up to a state of enthusiasm about anything I do, otherwise, what's the point? I see a lot of people and say, "Hey, you got an album coming out, what's it like?" They say, "Oh, it's okay." I say, "Gee, you're putting out an album and you think it's okay? Where is your enthusiasm, man?" They don't like to hear that. I'm not talking about arrogance, but I believe in real enthusiasm. That's probably where Crosby's quote comes from.

*There is also a deeper point to be made. In looking back over all that we've talked about, it seems that everything about you is geared to your creative muse, and it is to that muse that you have remained true. At any expense.*

I'll tell you, any acts of frustration or concern or anxiety in my life are all peripheral to a very solid core. A very strong, continuing course I've been following. All this other stuff is just the flak that you get for engaging

in the analytical process in the first place. Even Freud knew that; to me it was the hippest thing he ever said: "Dissection of personality is no way to self-knowledge." All you get out of that is literature, not necessarily peace of mind. It's a satisfying, but dangerous, way to learn about yourself.

*Ever find yourself the only one speaking out on certain subjects?*

All the time. On many nights I go home and say, "Mitch, you know, you're gonna have to start going only to comedies now. And only reading Kurt Vonnegut. Put those Nietzsche books away."

*Last question. What would you have listed, as Woody Allen did at the end of 'Manhattan', as your reasons why life is worth living?*

It would be very similar to his. I would name different musicians, but it might finally be a beautiful face that would make me put the microphone down. I would just be thinking fondly of someone who I love, you know. And just dreaming off... Basically if you want to say it in one word? Happiness?

It's a funny thing about happiness. You can strive and strive and strive to be happy, but happiness will sneak up on you in the most peculiar ways. I feel happy suddenly. I don't know why. Some days, the way the light strikes things. Or for some beautifully immature reason like finding myself running to the kitchen to make myself some toast. Happiness comes to me even on a bad day. In very, very strange ways. I'm very happy in my life right now.