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4B

Variety

Joni Mitchell shines in St. Paul

Reviewed by PETER ALTMAN
The Star's Books and Arts Editor

Six years ago in a small club in Washington holding perhaps 100 people, I saw Joni Mitchell for the first time.

She was a skinny young woman with long straight blond hair who, obviously uneasy performing, held her guitar before her like a protective shield. She al-

ready had begun to earn admiration as a songwriter, and there was clearly something special about her on stage, but her voice was reedy and her singing showed strain.

Last night, Miss Mitchell made her long overdue Twin Cities debut in a concert in the St. Paul

Civic Center Arena. A crowd of about 14,000 was on hand. The evening was a triumph.

REVIEW

Composer - interpreter now of half a dozen much esteemed albums, light years from the shy Sas-

katchewan girl she once was, she gave a show that absolutely dominated the vast auditorium. Her musicianship was consistently excellent. She had poise. She knew how and when to be still. When she went into motion, it was purposefully and stirred things up. She worked well with her band, and she was superb when she was alone.

written include some of the finest of contemporary popular music, with vivid word images, rich and subtle harmonies, imaginative rhythms that stay fresh and enduring ability to spark new recognitions, her two long sets transcended customary standards of excellence.

Miss Mitchell looks a different person than she did in 1968. She now moves assuredly, at times virtually gliding and rippling. Although her face recalls visages seen in Victorian lockets, she has acquired a quality that can only be called glamour.

Her voice has mellowed and strengthened. She sings with more confidence, but that's not all there is to it. Her lower register is much more solid. Her timbre has become consistent. She's developed a warm, breathy manner which she showcases very smartly. Her pitch has become so sure that she now can dart around melody securely, even frequently ornamenting her line in

Since the songs she has



JONI MITCHELL

Books and Arts

the manner of the great jazz singers.

Yesterday's expressions defied generalizations. Miss Mitchell sang perhaps three dozen numbers, accompanying herself variously on two guitars, piano and dulcimer.

There were rockers, songs of exhilaration, introspective lyrical poems delicately set, songs about people and situations, and works such as "Big Yellow Taxi" that can only be described as yonously comic. Most compositions were familiar from Mitchell recordings, but several were played in different ways and there were also two interesting new songs.

The manner of delivery almost always was ideally selected. The juicy chords and mood-evoking force of "Blue" and "For Free" were highlighted by their being sung with solo piano. The radiant appeal of "All I Want" and "A Case of You" were enhanced by fine dulcimer picking.

"Both Sides Now," perhaps Miss Mitchell's most famous work, received the best interpretation I have ever heard of it: country-flavored, with the singing relaxed and all sorts of apt instrumental spicing.

Three very high points were songs—the poignant "Rainy Night House," the exuberant "Carey" and Lambert, Hendricks and Ross' classic "Twisted" (the only non-Mitchell composition performed) — during which the star didn't play an instrument at all. In these selections the night's most sophisticated and inventive vocalism was probably heard.

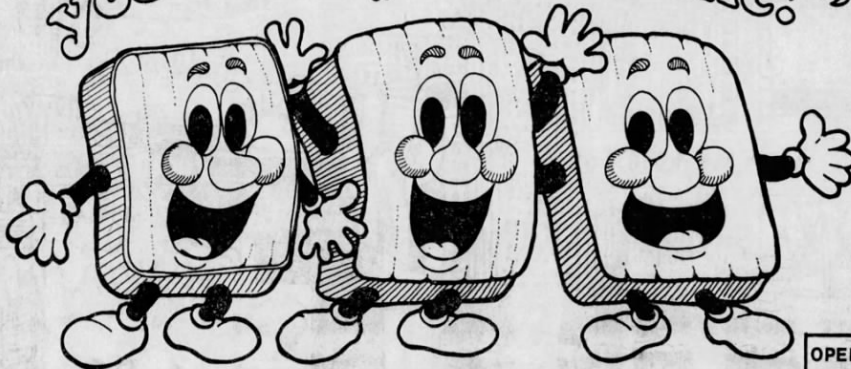
An exceptionally cohesive and tasteful quintet, Tom Scott and the L.A. Express, which provided admirable accompaniment throughout, stood out especially in uptempo pieces such as "Carey" and the saucy "Raised on Robbery."

The group, featuring Robin Ford (electric guitar), Larry Nash (electric piano), Max Bennett (fender bass), John Guerin (drums) and Scott (reeds), also provided a solidly skillful if not overly distinctive jazz warm-up.

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