



Joni Mitchell and Bob Dylan played separate sets at Maple Leaf Gardens last night. Roots rocker Dave Alvin opened for the musical legends.

ANDREW WALLACE/The Globe and Mail

## LEGENDS

# Dylan, Mitchell play on their own terms

*Disappointing crowd of 8,000 turns out for performances of mostly newer material*

Pop music has traditionally fed on its past. Who can forget, for example, those great Golden-Oldie bills that used to roll into the old Ontario Place Forum — The Grassroots, The Outsiders, Herman's Hermits and Gerry and the Pacemakers, all playing nothing but Top Ten hits for 25 minutes apiece?

Yeah, well, last night's pairing of Bob Dylan and **Joni Mitchell** — played out before a disappointing crowd of 8,000 — decidedly wasn't one of those shows, even though both artists are legitimate contemporaries of the previously mentioned bands.

These are two artists who — though their fans might prefer otherwise — have consciously decided not to wallow in nostalgia. Instead, they continue to perform on their own terms, not the terms of customers paying the freight.

While Dylan at least superficially delves into his storied past (although many of the songs are so reworked as to be, at times, virtually unrecognizable), the enigmatic Ms. Mitchell almost seems to sneer at hers. Last night's appearance centred almost exclusively on either newer material or lesser-known older album cuts. With only a couple of exceptions (*Big Yellow Taxi* and *Woodstock*, which opened and closed her performance), Mitchell's set list contained numbers known to only her most dedicated fans.

Backed by a quartet — which contained, as usual, "my dear ex-husband Larry Klein" on fretless bass — Mitchell was at times somber (*Harry's House*), at times upbeat (*Black Crow*) and at times angry and aggressive (*Sex Kills*). But she was rarely playful or accommodating. In fact, the two numbers which did strike a familiar chord were played solo, oddly enough, with *Woodstock* as a virtual lament.

Predictably, many in the audience grew restless and annoyed (calls to "play something" and for "Boooobbbb" occasionally rained down), but Mitchell carried on regardless. It was, overall, a somewhat self-indulgent set met with

### POP REVIEW

**Bob Dylan & Joni Mitchell at Maple Leaf Gardens on Thursday**  
Reviewed by Alan Niester

what can only be described as a mixed reaction.

The last few times Dylan played Toronto, he came across as something like Donald Duck fronting The Grateful Dead, his pinched vocals being laid over top long and satisfying rock grooves.

Last night, he came across as more approachable, earthier and more humanistic. With the band performing a large portion of the set acoustically, this time he came across more like Donald Duck fronting The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band.

Like Mitchell's, his set list was totally unpredictable and he dredged up numbers that few would have expected to hear on this night. He opened with *Serve Somebody*, a song that seemed to suggest that this would be an evening of decipherable lyrics. But as soon as he launched into *Million Miles*, from last year's stunning comeback album *Time Out Of Mind*, he was pretty much back into garbled slurs.

But for Dylan fans, this was a night of considerable treats, as numbers like *Younger Than Yesterday* and *Masters Of War* were dredged up from the archives. Particularly enjoyable was his revisiting of *Tangled Up In Blue* from 1975's *Blood On The Tracks* album, a number that had the audience up and on their collective feet.

The long evening was opened by roots rocker Dave Alvin, who parlayed a Johnny Cash singing voice, some Woody Guthrie numbers (notably *Promised Land* and *Dough-Re-Mi*) and Little Richard-styled retro-rock into a short set that — had more people been around early in the evening to see it — could very nearly have stolen the headliners' thunder.