



Joni Mitchell Triumphs

Concert A Delight

Johnson Gym is an ugly place to have a concert. I knew that, but I had forgotten, because the Joni Mitchell concert last Thursday night was the first one held there since the Traffic disaster last January (which resulted in a minor riot), and it had been about nine months before that since I had attended a show there.

I damn near broke my neck stumbling down the bleachers, trying to get to the floor—it seemed much darker than at the Arena or Popejoy Hall. Which made the bright lights from the entranceways above and behind the stage all the more distracting. Acoustically, J. Gym makes the Civic seem like Popejoy Hall. If you're in the right (wrong) place, you get double your money's worth as the sounds (especially bass notes) come bouncing off the back wall. The sound was often bad to begin with, with a lot of technical problems especially in the first half. Friends who sat to the side of the stage told me it was even worse there. Many people were displeased weeks before the concert because of the foul-up with tickets that left people either with poorer seats than they might have been able to buy or thinking that was the case, which is just as bad. Add to it Jerry Buckner's orange-vested goons who are still more surly and pushy than they need to be, and you've got a delightful concert atmosphere.

But even in our world of 1974 Johnson Gyms, there are still magic people, those who possess the aesthetic gifts that transcend such mondo distractions and carry us to another place of pure light. Joni Mitchell is one of those rare and precious people, and her concert here was a definite success, a beautiful red rose climbing out of a foundation of thorns.

The distractions, especially the sound, seemed to bother her at first, and later she admitted the crowd reaction was not what she had expected. When the small audience (3750) finally let loose with some yells, she smiled broadly and said, "Yeah—that's

what we expected, a bunch of rowdies. You scared us half to death with all that silence in the first half."

The show was long (she was on stage for over two hours), full, and fast-paced. She seemed to warm up more after the intermission and talked more to the audience, but nothing she said added anything to what we know of her, except perhaps to confirm that Joni Mitchell is indeed the shy, sometimes awkward person, without the magnified ego that seems to be standard equipment for most performers, that she writes about in many of her brilliant (self-) portraits.

Her stage show revealed her many sides, as do her songs. She began in blue jeans and a light blue work shirt, with a scarf around her head; after intermission the lady appeared in a beautiful ankle-length blue dress. She was constantly changing instruments, moving from guitar to piano to dulcimer, sometimes playing alone and sometimes backed by all or part of her outstanding band, Tom Scott & the L.A. Express. (They did a 45-minute warm-up that was mostly jazz, definitely fine.) She did most of the songs from her new album, "Court and Spark," many from "Blue," and a few oldies. It really didn't matter what she did—it was obvious a majority of the crowd was made up of ardent admirers for whom she can do no wrong.

It was a low-key yet dazzling exhibition of the many talents of Joni Mitchell. The presence, the emotion, the wide instrumental skill, and that incredible voice that effortlessly leaps higher up the scales than you ever expect. . . . But I'll once again display my rock and roll instincts by admitting the number I enjoyed most was her rocking version of "Raised on Robbery"—it was a surprise, it moved (it ran!), and the crowd roared. I love you, Joni Mitchell, and I've got you up on that same pedestal so many others rightly worship beneath, but listen, lady—have you ever considered being the leader of a rock 'n' roll band?