



Daily Photo by STUART HOLLANDER

Joni Mitchell

Joni Mitchell: A versatile artist with 'superstar' aura

By DIANE LEVICK
Arts Editor

No doubt about it. Joni Mitchell can boogie. Touring for the first time with a jazz-boogie back-up band (Tom Scott and the L.A. Express), Joni "knocked 'em dead" at Hill Aud. — or at least into an admiring stupor — with her versatility Saturday night. Surrounded by the true "superstar" aura, she delivered her rousing rock and roll "Raised on Robbery" as well as her gentle but piercing dulcimer tunes. And then she was gone. No press interviews. No backstage visits. Clutching a bouquet of red roses, Joni had barely a moment to greet well-wishers at Hill Auditorium's backdoor. A few words exchange with fans. An album signed. Her road manager and entourage spirited her back to Campus

Inn on her private bus comfortably decked out with curtains and bar service. The plush living-room style interior cost \$150,000 to remodel, according to one of Joni's sound men.

One wonders how much fame and fortune have changed Joni's view of her audience since the last time she played Ann Arbor in Canterbury House about five years ago.

See tomorrow's Arts Page for Kurt Harju's review of Joni Mitchell's new album.

Taking her privacy quite seriously these days, Joni now reveals herself only on record and onstage. Saturday night her most revealing and intense songs were those from her Blue album, accompanied only by her flowing dulcimer. The austerity of the music accented the powerful vocal on "A Case of You" as Joni flavored it with her characteristic bittersweetness.

Yet she played a mean acoustic rock guitar and made thorough use of open tunings which gave a full, loud sound. "Big Yellow Taxi," inspired by Joni's trip to touristy Hawaii, allowed Joni to do some of her own rocking and rolling without the back-up band. Not bad for a woman who learned guitar from a Pete Seeger album.

It was only during her solo set that Joni talked to her audience, offering a few scraps of explanation to those interested in pinpointing her lyrics' meaning. She described a selection

from For the Roses as "the first of many retirement songs... a farewell to show biz."

Humorously prefacing "People's Parties" from her new album Court and Spark, Joni told the audience of the party which provoked the acerbic treatment. The furniture was transparent, the food was transparent, and, said Joni, "I had the feeling that the people were transparent... I felt like cellophane myself."

To some, Joni Mitchell is a fine singer whose lyrics never quite strike home, for her words suggest an unusually extreme fragility of spirit. But to others, her compositions are poetry — and not in the Rod McKuen sense — bringing out the poet in all of us. Jamie Gibson (LSA, '75), for instance, attached a verse of his own song (inspired by Joni) to a red tulip and placed it hopefully onstage for the elusive singer Saturday night. Somehow Joni either didn't see it or ignored it. "I couldn't stand it any longer," explains Gibson, who screamed out to Joni to look at

his tulip. "It's not everyday you yell before four thousand, four hundred people."

So Joni read his note silently and then giggled a "thank you," never relating the note's content to the curious audience. It was probably the last line that got to her. A verse concerning unattainable dreams, it concluded: "But I sure wish you'd come up here on the hill and stand beside me and be my queen."

Quips Gibson, "Her next album is going to be "For the Tulips."

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'Grease' pleasingly parodies 1950's greaser raunchiness

By PENNY BLANK

Grease's pleasingly raunchy company proved to Power Center audiences this weekend just how crude, lewd and rude the 1950's were.

For the play's teenage boppers of Rydell High, being seniors in 1959 means monster movie drive-ins, pajama parties, making-out in the backseat of a souped-up Chevy, and chugging Thunderbird with the gang, not worrying about getting cooties.

This musical comedy, still a hit on Broadway, gives its viewers more fun and less introspection than other productions, such as American Graffiti, riding the 50's nostalgia wave. Grease is high energy and irreverent; social comment is zilch and the bawdy humor never quits, except to be momentarily replaced by parody of prudery. Seeing this production makes you want to drag out your old 45's and put on your boppin' shoes.

The plot revolves around some real cool dudes — The Burger Palace Boys, and their boss chicks — The Pink Ladies. They're not really bad kids or

degenerates, but they don't fit in the Class President or Head Cheerleader mold either.

Sandy, (Marcia McClain) the new girl in school, wants to fit in with the gang, but doesn't want to give up her chaste "Sandra Dee" image, her ponytail, beaded cardigan or white ankle socks. Her past summer love turns out to be the hotrod leader of the Burger Palace Boys.

Danny's black leather jacket, ducktail haircut and "Mr. Cool" ways are foreign to Sandy, and she claims he's not the boy she thought she knew. Sandy finally decides to come over to the greaser's way of life, donning tight capri pants and a Pink Ladies jacket.

The simple turn of events in Grease wouldn't be much without the wide variety of 50's settings, situations, costumes, mannerisms, music and slang which bring this polished parody of that era to life.

The set, framed by large high school yearbook photos, is backed by a collage of 1950's pictures, symbols and memorabilia. It is easily transformed into the

school cafeteria, the Burger Palace, a drive-in movie, or a hop in the gym — all the scenes of crucial events in a teenager's life.

The costuming is painfully authentic, right down to the white bucks and argyles of the school clod. Practically every character's costume change elicits groans from the older members of the audience remembering how they used to look in pink pedal pushers or leopardskin patterned tuxedos.

Under the direction of Tom Moore, every move of the cast is part of the familiar teenage rebel stereotype epitomized by James Dean, whose picture stares down on the proceedings. The importance of "maintaining your cool" is also an integral part of the good-natured cutting down of friends in Grease's dialogue.

The music in Grease is genuine rock 'n' roll, worthy of the hully-gully, hand jive or the stroll. Songs like "Beauty School Dropout", "It's Raining on Prom Night" and "Mooning" are choreographed with "shamefully crass gestures" (as a cheerleader in Grease puts it) and blatant, suggestive gyrations that banned the photographing of "Elvis the Pelvis" from the waist down on television.

An energetic, uninhibited cast gave equally good performances of the 1950's not so troubled, good-times-rolling youth. Grease is by far the funniest and most enjoyable play I've seen in a great while: dy-na-mite!

Warsaw ensemble displays excellence

By TONY CECERE

Modern Polish music rarely appears on concert programs in America, yet two such pieces, plus two old standards comprised last Sunday's Warsaw National Philharmonic concert.

Witold Rowicki, who founded the ensemble in 1950, directed it in Benjamin Britten's Les Illuminations for soprano and string orchestra, the Petrouchka Ballet Suite of Igor Stravinsky, the Concert Overture of Carol Szymanowski and Edward Boguslawski's Capriccioso Notturno.

The Concert Overture opened the program with a series of virile, romantic phrases reminiscent of Hollywood film scores and Richard Strauss. The brasses cut loose in this piece, playing loud passages throughout the piece. Maestro Rowicki gestured encouragingly to his players, resulting in a lyric reading.

Stefania Woytowicz sang the soprano solo in the Britten work in a dissatisfying manner. Overdramatizing the vocal line with a fast, wide vibrato, Woytowicz lent an unwanted Wagnerian sound to these light, impressionistic pieces. In contrast, the orchestra supported her with a velvety string sound that suited the folksong quality of the work.

The Boguslawski work, a 1971 composition, was well executed, but the work did not live up to its title. Notes followed each other in illogical patterns, resulting in 10 minutes of musical mediocrity. Certain sections of the work were ad libbed and the orchestra mem-

bers dutifully churned out oodles of musical noodles, to no positive result.

Petrouchka changed the mediocre atmosphere. Maestro Rowicki approached the Stravinsky with a songlike concept: modern harmonies supported long and graceful melodic lines that passed between instruments without a hitch. Sensitivity and grace were evident in the beautiful rendition of the flute cadenza. The trumpet and snare drum duet was absolutely perfect.

The Tarantella, a short vivacious work of Szymanowski, functioned as a fitting encore.

Maestro Rowicki and his musicians displayed sensitivity to the vocal quality in all the pieces performed. The Warsaw National Philharmonic proved itself to be an ensemble of uniform excellence.

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Walter Spink is professor of Eastern Art at U of M. Professor Spink will sign copies of his new book Saturday, Feb. 2, 2-3 p.m.

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