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BOB-AND-JONI SHOW

Forget the nostalgia trip — Dylan and Mitchell have much more to offer on their duo tour.

It would be easy to characterize tonight's Bob Dylan/Joni Mitchell double bill at Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto as an exercise in nostalgia. These are, after all, two 1960s icons, and you can count on baby boomers being out in force. They'll bring with them the ironies that arise when middle-aged affluence revisits youthful rebellion, when folks hum tunes about social justice in the back of a rented limousine. But sweep aside the ironies for a moment, pull your eyes from the receding hairlines and expanding tummies and focus on the music: it's clear that both Dylan and Mitchell have escaped the nostalgia trap.

The evidence is apparent both on disc and on stage. While the Rolling Stones have, since the late seventies, recorded dud after dud to justify lavish tours, both Dylan, 57, and Mitchell, 54, have recently released albums that can stand alongside their best work and that offer rich portraits of life after youth. Dylan's 1997 release *Time Out of Mind* was a revelation — a fierce, haunting look at love and death couched in the direct language of the blues. Dylan may not be the same firebrand who sneered back at his jeering English audience in 1966, as documented on the recently released *Live 1966: The Royal Albert Hall Concert*, but then, it would be kind of pitiful if he was. Instead, his songs seem to come from peering into the dark corners of life, ones the younger man could not even have known to exist.

While two generations of Mitchell fans continue to wallow in the moody introspection of her classic 1971 album *Blue*, the singer herself has moved on. Her latest,



Joni Mitchell, left, in Vancouver and road warrior Bob Dylan, right.

Taming the Tiger, offers a self-portrait of the artist as curmudgeon — the title track is grumpy swipe at the music biz — and of a mature woman warming herself in the fire of love. "I'm middle-aged, mama/And



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times moves swift," she sings in *Face Lift*, shrugging off her mother's objections to her affair with Saskatoon songwriter Don Freed, "Love takes so much courage/Love takes so much shit!"

While both Dylan and Mitchell have both ended up comfortable in middle-age, they've travelled very different paths. While Mitchell has recorded sparingly and almost never toured, Dylan has been a veritable road warrior over the last decade or so. His never-ending tour has not always been pretty. There have been plenty of perfunctory performances, much mangling of old favorites and no shortage of frustrated fans; ("Do you know how many Dylan shows I've walked out of in the last 15 years because I couldn't recognize one damn song?" said one diehard fan.) But things have changed; Dylan's show at a Vancouver club earlier this year, staged as a prelude to a West Coast swing with Mitchell and Van Morrison, was a revelation. Backed by a tight, hard-hitting band, Dylan danced and duck-walked, played a mean guitar and tore into rollicking, fiery versions both his new material and old songs such as *Tangled Up in Blue*, *Highway 61 Revisited* and *Silvio*. Mitchell hasn't been nearly as busy (illness has kept her off the road for much of the last decade) and when she's appeared she hasn't been so eager to play the crowd-pleaser. Her show at GM Place last summer focused almost exclusively on her jazz-fusion repertoire — plenty from *Hejira*, nada from *Court and Spark* — until she tossed in *Big Yellow Taxi* as a grudging encore. In recent performances, she's added a radically reworked version of *Woodstock* to the set, but a greatest hits set is not in the cards. With her insistence that she's an artist, not a jukebox, Mitchell keeps nostalgia at bay.

Bob Dylan and Joni Mitchell play Toronto's Maple Leaf Gardens today, starting at 7:30 p.m. They also play the Corel Centre in Ottawa tomorrow.