

Entertainment

The Spectrum Deflates Joni Mitchell's Show

by Chuck Mungan

The last time Joni Mitchell visited the Philadelphia area she appeared at the acoustically dynamic Temple Music Fair in Ambler. This time around, she agreed to play in the sonically atrocious Spectrum sports arena. So, it goes without saying that Ms. Mitchell and her accompanists, The L.A. Express, were at a disadvantage to begin with and that it would be an uphill battle to overcome the environment in which she found herself this past Monday evening.

For powerful rock acts like Led Zeppelin and the Rolling Stones, the size of the complex can be utilized to an advantage. However, for a presentation spotlighting a singer-song writer from the 1960's folk genre with touches of conventional jazz-rock influences, from the 1970's, the Spectrum was a monumental challenge.

Instead of providing a set that would be musically serviceable under the situation Mitchell simply approached the concert as she would were it being staged at an intimate coffee house. Numbers with the full piece band were few and far between while she relied basically on her lone acoustic guitar to augment her especially melodious vocal delivery. With this kind of framework it appeared that only the immediately near patrons in the hall could evoke any level of enjoyment even approaching 100%.

Joni was aptly garbed for the occasion in a stark black jumpsuit highlighted by a pair of embroidered roses on each arm. At



Joni Mitchell

times during the performance she sported a wide brimmed chapeau and a beaked policeman's hat and at other segments of the show she cavorted around in a long feathered shawl. But, this was the extent of the evenings

theatricality.

The majority of the recital's musical selections were chosen from Ms. Mitchell's two most recent studio albums, the extremely commercial *Court and*

Spark collections and the profoundly enterprising *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*. Also, various pieces from her live *Miles of Aisles* package were featured. The more well known moments of the two hour set afforded the greatest audience response. Song reproductions that deserved acclaim were "Free Man In Paris" with its vivacious saxophone backing, "Big Yellow Taxi" delivered with a specially tuned acoustic guitar, her uplifting new single "In France They Kiss On Main Street" and "Rainy Night House" performed with that distinctive Joni Mitchell vocalese.

"Raised on Robbery," the artist's first rate attempt at rock 'n roll, brought the affair to a high pitch, while a heavily syncopated African tribal rhythm set the pace for a tune called "The Jungle Line" and a very offbeat ending. A scat presentation of "Twisted" was the compulsory encore of a show that hit a distressing number

of low points. Ms. Mitchell included several new compositions. Their ultra-mellow stance along with their free from verse tempo tended to elicit a certain sameness that presented boredom as a real possibility, especially considering the venue in which the event was produced and the unfamiliarity of the material.

One option Joni Mitchell might consider is not returning to the echo chamber Philadelphia's endearingly call the Spectrum. After, all, Electric Factory does have a monopoly of sorts in this city.

This would seem to be the most preferential solution if she is to continue to offer her acoustic extravaganzas which continue to be the emphatic offbeat hub of her craft. A suggestion that she should consider is limiting her performance to her strongest creations, not necessarily the best known work, but the pieces that display the quintessential art of Joni Mitchell.

Cat Stevens Fails, Queen Succeeds

by Chuck Mungan

The initial facade that the cover art of *Numbers*, Cat Stevens' latest recorded venture, presents is that it is indeed a classic mathematical treatise with the implications of a *Sphereland*, Dignys Burger's classic novella of geometrical phantasy, because — let's face it — a designation the caliber of "A Pythagorean Tale" promises some pretty weighty subject matter. However, the inner sleeve in-

cludes a notice to any and all would be critics that, "This album is not to be taken 2 seriously" (sic).

I beg to differ with the basic innuendos of that brief parenthetical explanation, but *Numbers* is a collection of songs that should be viewed very solemnly. After two years of relative inactivity which saw the release of two rather mediocre singles, a remake of Sam Cooke's "Another Saturday Night" reggae style and a specially contrived "Two Fine People" both of which appeared on his *Greatest Hits* package, Cat Stevens has not been able to come up with anything more than an assortment of commonplace melodies masked by a blatant over-production job and an inconsistent story line that pretends to be a rock opera. Only three songs actually contribute to any sense of plot.

With few exceptions, Stevens' vocal delivery is discordant and choppy, a distracting element that

has been increasingly obvious on every one of the artist's platters since his classic L.P.s *Tea For The Tillerman* and *Teaser And The Firecat*. The musical arrangements, save the notable exclusions "Novim's Nightmare," "Jezero," and "Home," include no emphatic hooks but continue at a monotone beat with little or no rhythmic high points. Jean Rousset's inventive keyboard punctuations along with his interesting string and brass schemes are sadly wasted on this banal material.

A prime example of the cacophonous nonsense that overwhelms this album is the single culled from its contents, "Banapple Gas." Instruments and vocalists galore are thrown into the stuffy mix. A heavy handed double bass sets the pace to which the ill-suited and meaningless lyrics are incompatible. Our hero sounds as if he's going to have a coronary arrest as the charade winds down.

Once an enrapturing singer-song writer, Cat Stevens has simply chosen to assume a patterned mediocrity. Until he can come up with at least an equal of his reasonably successful *Buddha And The Chocolate Box*, I suggest he refrain from tormenting us with superficial excursions like *Numbers*.

The royal new effort from Queen, Britain's consummate punk rock organization, is not exactly a rock opera either, but it surely has operatic qualities where the group's sonant powers are concerned. Never before has the effective blend of their high pitched voices been so inventively utilized.

Rich, full harmonies and counter-harmonies abound on *A Night At The Opera*, but the striking authority of the disc lies in its great array of musical styles. It includes hard rock, soft rock, pop balladry, ragtime, traditional British folk, hints of honky tonk syncopation, and many European

and Japanese classical undertones — all perfect vehicles for the versatile choral trio of Roger Taylor, Brian May and Freddie Mercury.

"Death On Two Legs" gets things underway. Reminiscent lyrically and melodically to "Flick Of The Wrist" from *Sheer Heart Attack*, it is the hybrid Queen rock that the band is commonly associated with featuring fluid guitar breaks and upbeat rhythm backing from the heavily intoned bass and drum accompaniment. Also in this category are "I'm In Love With My Car," "You're My Best Friend" and "Sweet Lady."

The variety of ragtime settings that they take advantage of on this, their fourth musical adventure, was only hinted at previously with "Bring Back Leroy Brown" from the last album. "Lazing On A Sunday Afternoon," "Seaside Rendezvous" and "Good Company" all get their basic inspiration from the crooners and flappers of the early 1900's. Ragtime instrumentation is especially well emblazoned on the latter of the three tracks with its ukelele and jazz band accessories.

A joyous ditty named "39" counters conventional Anglo-Saxon folkies Fairport Convention and Strawbs at their own game. A tune called "Love Of My Life" is a grade A tear jerking lament complete with John Deacon's Chopin-esque progressions on electric piano and Brian May's lilting ticklings on the harp. However, the perfect molding of Queen's musical experimentations to date are the supremely intricate titles "Bohemian Rhapsody" and "The Prophet's Song" with their interwoven melodies and operatic styled vocal segments... **A Night**

At The Opera is most certainly the hiatus of the band's career. As with its predecessors, it is made perfectly clear there are absolutely no synthesizers. Except for the orchestral backdrops, it's all Queen.

SA Plans Spring Musical

by Louis Mayer

"Playgoers, I bid you welcome!" declares a character in the SA funded, student production of "A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum" which will be performed during the second week in March. While the idea for this musical comedy had been formulated since the fall production of "Promises Promises," there was uncertainty as to whether the show would go on due to a conflict concerning the use of Bluett Theatre.

The Twilight Players, drama group of the Evening College, had already made arrangements to reserve the theater for the third week of March. Their permanent set is to be constructed during Spring break, which would have conflicted with the SA's intended use of the stage for the second week of March. However, an agreement has been reached and through the courtesy and cooperation of the Twilight Players — as co-producer Richard Devine, '76, asserted — "The show will go on."

"A Funny Thing Happened..." is a musical comedy, taking place on a spring day in Rome, 200 years before Christ. The plot deals with the misadventures of a Roman slave, Pseudolus (played by Thomas Balleszi) who is trying to both gain his freedom and provide his master with the woman of his dreams, Phyllis (played by Mary Elizabeth Fitzpatrick). Conquerors, courtesans, and mistaken identities combine

to form an "unusual" outcome.

Co-produced by Devine and Joseph Abbott, '76, the two-act comedy includes a cast of 16 students. The musical is on a budget of \$3,650, so to save money students will be hand-making many costumes. Anna Leadon is already working on costuming. The show's director, Frank Martin, will be assisted by Larry Esposito as musical director.

*** Cheap Dates ***

by Ann Dorton

February 20-22 is a special week-end at the Main Point, 874 Lancaster Avenue, Bryn Mawr, with all shows priced at \$3.75. Friday night an evening with Hickory Wind, first billed last year as an opening for John Hartford, now soloing in a sojourn back to West Virginia working songs and mountain string band music, with ragtime variations and original works.

Saturday and Sunday at the Main Point Chris Smithers performs a combination of traditional blues and his own compositions. Questions about Main Point performances can be directed to Elizabeth Kline, at LA 5-5825.

If you're free Sunday afternoon, try a free concert by the Temple University Wind Ensemble. Laurence Wagner will conduct the 44-piece ensemble at 3 o'clock on February 22 in the auditorium of Mitten Memorial Hall, Broad and Berks Sts. Free, attended parking in Lot No. 1 on 15th St. below Norris. Or, see the Arthur Hall dancers at the Free Library, Logan Square at 2 p.m.

The Theatre of the Living Arts, in cooperation with the American Film Institute, is presenting Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in eight of the best musicals of the thirties on four consecutive Mondays and Tuesdays. February 22-23 it's *Top Hat* and *Follow the Fleet*. Regular admission is \$2.50, students \$1.50. Call WA 2-6011 for showtimes at the TLA, 334 South Street.

Back on campus, this week-end is your last chance to catch the Cap & Bells production of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, in Bluett Theatre. February 20 and 21 at 8:00 p.m., February 20 at 2:00 p.m. A good buy, and close to home.