

THE ULTIMATE MUSIC GUIDE

JONI MITCHELL

UPDATED
DELUXE
EDITION

EVERY ALBUM
REVIEWED

CLASSIC
ENCOUNTERS,
REDISCOVERED

A Case Of You
JONI MITCHELL
THE FULL STORY

ARCHIVES
VOL 1:
THE VERDICT

HER 30
GREATEST
SONGS

THE 2020
COMEBACK

FROM THE MAKERS OF **UNCUT**

contents

6 “She wanted to be a big deal” **CLASSIC INTERVIEW** Half a century on, the story of a singer-songwriter’s remarkable rise

18 **SONG TO A SEAGULL** **ALBUM FEATURE** A fêted 23-year-old songwriter steps into the spotlight, with a maverick ex-Byrd producing

22 **CLOUDS** **ALBUM FEATURE** The world-weary ingénue embraces her own contradictions with soon-to-be-standard songs

26 **LADIES OF THE CANYON** **ALBUM FEATURE** Fame beckons as we hear Mitchell “cracking out of her chrysalis and beginning to soar”

30 “I want my music to get more sophisticated” **CLASSIC INTERVIEW** Joni visits the UK, leaving her public and our correspondent awestruck

34 **BLUE** **ALBUM FEATURE** Romantic upheaval and restless travel fuel a timeless classic

38 **FOR THE ROSES** **ALBUM FEATURE** A retreat to Canada produces a more impressionistic fifth album

42 **COURT AND SPARK** **ALBUM FEATURE**

Backed by the LA Express, a bigger, bolder Mitchell sound is born, with hints of jazzier experiments to come

46 “They say I’ve changed... Yes, I have!” **CLASSIC INTERVIEW** Back in London, Joni isn’t talking, but she still reveals some secrets

52 **THE HISSING OF SUMMER LAWNS** **ALBUM FEATURE** Subtle sounds and suburban musings: an underrated (at the time) gem

56 **HEJIRA** **ALBUM FEATURE** Fearless women and open roads inspire an expansive, experimental journey

60 **DON JUAN’S RECKLESS DAUGHTER** **ALBUM FEATURE** Inching further into jazz with a bold double album

64 **MINGUS** **ALBUM FEATURE** A dying mentor inspires a meeting of minds like no other

68 **WILD THINGS RUN FAST** **ALBUM FEATURE** The Police, Lionel Richie and a new beau help usher Joni into a brash new decade



72 **DOG EAT DOG** **ALBUM FEATURE** Thomas Dolby’s synthscapes soundtrack Ms Mitchell’s raging broadsides against the Reagan era

76 “You’re going to get me into my apocalyptic vision...” **CLASSIC INTERVIEW** The newlywed holds forth on censorship, Live Aid and her synth-heavy new LP

98 **TAMING THE TIGER** **ALBUM FEATURE** A new guitar sound, a rediscovered daughter and... a last hurrah?

102 **BOTH SIDES NOW** **ALBUM FEATURE** The legend finds a new voice, via vintage covers and a couple of her own old favourites

106 **TRAVELOGUE** **ALBUM FEATURE** Mitchell delves further into her back catalogue, in playfully revisionist mood

110 **SHINE** **ALBUM FEATURE** A ballet soundtrack is a surprise final encore to a peerless singer-songwriting career

114 **Joni Mitchell’s 30 Greatest Songs** **CLASSIC INTERVIEW** Friends, fans and bandmates take their pick

126 “I’m a fighter, that’s what I do” **CLASSIC INTERVIEW** Joni gathers her strength since her aneurysm in 2015

138 **LIVES AND COMPILATIONS** **ALBUM FEATURE** Bootlegs, outtakes, concert recordings and more

142 **MISCELLANY** **ALBUM FEATURE** Singles, DVDs, paintings, guest appearances... and those guitar tunings in full

146 **STOP ME** **ALBUM FEATURE** LA Express guitarist Robben Ford tells of his journey with Joni



Joni at 75: a birthday celebration at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, LA, November 7, 2018



86 **CHALK MARK IN A RAIN STORM** **ALBUM FEATURE** Celebrity guests add stardust to a glossy late-'80s outing

90 **NIGHT RIDE HOME** **ALBUM FEATURE** A new decade heralds a return to intimate, introspective concerns

94 **TURBULENT INDIGO** **ALBUM FEATURE** As a Van Gogh homage adorns the cover, a tortured artist vents her spleen between the grooves within

SONG TO A SEAGULL

RELEASED MARCH 1968

A fêted songwriter takes the spotlight,
for a quietly revolutionary debut.

BY JIM WIRTH

DAVID Crosby knew what he had found within minutes of stumbling into a Joni Mitchell show at the Gaslight Café in autumn 1967. The disaffected Byrd had come to Florida in search of a new start, but found a different kind of break from the norm. “I went looking for a sailboat to live on – I wanted to do something else, find another way to be. I was pretty disillusioned,” he recalled years later. “I walked into a coffeehouse in Coconut Grove, and she was standing there singing those songs, and I just was gobsmacked. I fell for her. Immediately. It’s a little like falling into a cement mixer. She’s kind of a turbulent girl.”

Mitchell was, at that stage, a 23-year-old whose songs were living a life of their own. Country singer George Hamilton IV had made a hit of “Urge For Going”, Buffy Sainte-Marie had recorded “The Circle Game” and “Song To A Seagull”, with a trickle of versions of her other early works soon to become a torrent.

She was also a divorcée, an art-school drop-out, and the mother of a child she gave up for adoption, three turbulent years having given her enough source material to last a lifetime. Her debut record, recorded with on-off partner Crosby’s help at the back end of 1967, and released in March 1968, documented only a few fragments of a story still in flux: a few months in New York (Side One, subtitled “*I came to the city*”) and a few more on the West Coast (Side Two: “*Out of the city and down to the seaside*”).

Song To A Seagull (or ‘Son To A Seagu’ as it appeared on original copies, Mitchell’s felt-tip frenzy sleeve art being badly mangled at the printers) is a quietly audacious debut. The least user-friendly of all of her early records (her best-known songs of the time were largely omitted), its spartan production job was true to Mitchell and Crosby’s determination to get these songs down in their purest form, without psychedelic curlicues or mom-and-pop-friendly string sections.

“If I’d recorded a year ago, I would have used lots of orchestration,” she told *Rolling Stone* in May 1968, alluding to how the success of her songs had enabled her to call the shots. “No-one would have let me put out an acoustic album. They would have said it’s like having a whole paintbox and using only brown.”

“We did get the actual songs down without a bunch of other crud on it, and that made me happy,” Crosby remembered. “That’s the thing I’m proudest of.”

Crosby’s production job was not uncontroversial, though; his quest to capture Mitchell’s voice in all its wild seagull swoops picked up plenty of extraneous hiss, requiring slightly brutal surgery in the final mix. The finished product sounds like it was recorded behind glass, but given Mitchell’s tendency to view both her songs’ subjects and herself here as slightly baffling museum exhibits, that is oddly fitting.

“She’s brilliant and tough and opinionated and slightly crazy and incredibly talented,” Crosby said ➤



The spartan production was true to Mitchell and Crosby's determination to get these songs down in their purest form

as he looked back on their time together, his opinion of Mitchell's gifts having only intensified over time. "She's the best singer-songwriter that we've had in the past 100 years. She's as good a poet as Bob [Dylan], and a way better musician."

However, while Dylan talked in riddles, Mitchell's brilliance here hinged on close – often uncomfortably close – observation. *Song To A Seagull* begins, uncompromisingly enough, with the forbidding "I Had A King", a matter-of-fact account of her divorce from sometime singing partner Chuck Mitchell. When she left their Detroit apartment to head for New York in early 1967, he reportedly changed the locks, a detail that informs the song's chorus: "I can't go back there any more, you know my keys won't fit the door". However, while there is a note of distress in Mitchell's voice, and in the upside down guitar chords she picks out, there is a quiet determination, too. She does not give in to despair, merely boxes the emotions up, labels them and quietly moves on.

Marrying Mitchell in his native Michigan on June 19, 1965 was one of a series of early stumbles (he "carried me off to his country for marriage too soon", as she put it in "I Had A King"), the former Roberta Joan Anderson having dropped out of the Alberta College Of Art after just one year, 1963-'64, to pursue a career as a folk singer – a shocking decision for her relatively strait-laced parents.

She had spent her childhood tracking her Royal Canadian Air Force flight lieutenant father's moves from base to base before settling, aged 11, in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, where her father opened a grocery business. Her unconventional gift for language had first been recognised by her seventh-grade English teacher, Mr Kratzman; Mitchell credits him for having "taught me to love words" on the sleeve of *Song To A Seagull*.

Equally taken with music, she learned ukulele and then guitar, unconventional tunings helping to compensate for weakness in her fingers – a legacy from a childhood bout of polio – and went on to play in folk clubs in Calgary, and later Toronto, after dropping out of college.

However, her musical career took a significant detour when she fell pregnant by boyfriend Brad MacMath, giving birth to a daughter, Kelly Dale Anderson, in Toronto in spring 1965. While she wanted to keep the child – apparently marrying Chuck Mitchell with a view to creating a stable family unit – her daughter was fostered and then put up for adoption (a story that remained a secret, despite being explicitly addressed on *Blue*'s "Little Green" in 1971, until an old college roommate sold it to a scandal sheet in 1993).

Aiming to make the best of a bad

marriage, the newlyweds paired up on stage for a while, but it never worked out, with Mitchell well aware that she – and her songs – deserved better. In "I Had A King" she suggests that Chuck was a good deal less groovy than he seemed. "He lives in another time/Ladies in gingham still blush while he sings them of wars and wine/But I in my leather and lace/I can never become that kind."

The quest for a world that could handle her as she was underpins *Song To A Seagull*, "Michael From Mountains" the next potential partner to catch Mitchell's eye and ultimately come up short.

"He was a child-man; he was always showing you his treasures like a boy," she told the *Toronto Daily Star* about the song's real-life inspiration. Teasing and trepidatious, the song does its best to trap the elusive Michael, not to possess him, but to inspect him closer ("Know that I will know you," Mitchell maintains doggedly in the chorus), and while he gets away at the end ("You want to know all, but his mountains have called so you never do"), amid the excitement of New York, there are so many more exciting specimens to be had.

Underpinned by a spring-heeled bassline from Stephen Stills (who was recording next door with Buffalo Springfield), and Mitchell's jaunty bar-room piano, "Night In The City" captures some of that country-mouse sense of the metropolis's infinite possibilities. A delirious yodel celebrating a life that can never come fast enough ("Must you get ready so slow?" she asks herself), it is an unalloyed joy.

The main protagonist in "Marcie" is anything but, allowing her best years to go to waste as she awaits a letter of intent from an absentee suitor ("Dust her tables with his shirt and wave another day goodbye", Mitchell sings). "Is Marcie Joni?" asked *Melody Maker* in September 1968. "I suppose so, really," said Mitchell. "Marcie is a real girl, she lives in London. I used her name, because I wanted a two-syllable name. But I'm the girl in all these songs."

It ends with Marcie vanishing from the scene: "Someone heard she bought a one-way ticket and went out west again", Mitchell sings with a shrug, and within minutes she is heading the same way.

The "I came to the city" side ends with her trip to the airport in the company of the protagonist in "Nathan La Franeeer" – in her own words: "a New York cab driver who really exists, who drove me to the airport one day". Over an abstract acoustic doodle occasionally interrupted with an electrified whine, Mitchell depicts a man whose emotional circuits have been burned out by overexposure to humanity (as Mitchell sings, he "hated everyone who paid to ride and share his common space"). Mitchell feared the same might happen to her. "New York has left a big impression on me: good and bad," she told *Broadside* in February 1968. "It's made me very paranoid, which is a thing I never was. I've always been sort of naïve and completely trusting."

However, if the laid-back West Coast promised a radically different way to be, it was one Mitchell found equally problematic. Side two begins with her rubbing shoulders with California's new smug bohemian aristocracy in "Sisotowbell Lane" (Sisotowbell a Mitchell acronym for 'somehow, in spite of troubles, ours will be ever-lasting love'). The sun-blasted Renaissance Fayre atmosphere may be prelapsarian bliss on the surface ("Sweet well water and pickling jars"), but the repeated "we" highlights the worrying conformity beneath the surface. She spots the fakery too; the Marie Antoinette country folk, and the pop singers desperate to pass themselves off as artists; "A poet can sing", she sings, with absent-minded malice. The irascible Crosby, in such company, seems like a romantic hero. "The Dawntreader" – which Mitchell described at the time as her "one really true love song" – captures the renegade Byrd on the deck of his yacht. "He stakes all his silver on a promise to be free", Mitchell sings, idly pondering their future together "and a dream of a baby". Their romantic relationship was already dissolving by the time it was recorded, though.

A fever delirium Gilbert & Sullivan, one-woman operetta "The Pirate Of Penance" paves the way to *Song To A Seagull*'s frosty title track, an anguished minor-chord tiptoe along the cliff edge where Mitchell clocks the follies of life on both coasts, and ultimately throws her lot in with the birds.

Finally, "Cactus Tree" – the most musically simple and yet lyrically radical of all of these early songs. A gentle but purposeful stroll through a series of romantic adventures where Mitchell leaves a sequence of would-be suitors hanging on while "she" – observing herself from her usual seagull distance – focuses on the challenge of "being free". Crosby and 'Michael' get a verse each, others just a few words ("There's a drummer and a dreamer, and you know

A record that seeks neither to be liked, or pursued, but simply to document intensely lived experience



there may be more”, Mitchell sings, simultaneously pitying her cast-offs and marvelling at her own “*full and hollow*” coldness). “She’s not unattainable; I attained her pretty good,” Crosby joked, but the giant cultural leap here is the no-regrets separation of sex and commitment. Twice shy, conventional monogamy seems horrifying (“*She fears that one will ask her for eternity*”), and the “Cactus Tree” Mitchell is quietly amazed that any lover would want more of her than she is prepared to give. “*She will love them when she sees them*”, she adds in a luminous final verse. “*They will lose her if they follow*”.

“I have yet to meet a woman who doesn’t feel that Joni speaks for her.”

wrote *Crawdaddy*’s Paul Williams in mid-1968, but as much as *Song To A Seagull* shows seismic social changes, Mitchell is speaking only for herself. Not a big seller, it is a record that seeks neither to be liked, or pursued, or even understood, but simply to

document intensely lived experience. “I had to wait a long time for people to let me have my own opinions, and it was hard,” Mitchell told Toronto’s *Globe And Mail* in May 1968. “But now I can tell everybody.” Soon enough, the world would listen. ●

TRACKMARKS SONG TO A SEAGULL

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 I Had A King ★★★★★ | 7 The Dawntreader ★★★★★ |
| 2 Michael From Mountains ★★★★★ | 8 The Pirate Of Penance ★★★ |
| 3 Night In The City ★★★★★ | 9 Song To A Seagull ★★★★★ |
| 4 Marcie ★★★ | 10 Cactus Tree ★★★★★ |
| 5 Nathan La Franeeer ★★★★★ | Label: Reprise |
| 6 Sisotowbell Lane ★★★ | Recorded at: Sunset Sound, |

Hollywood, California
Produced by: David Crosby
Personnel: Joni Mitchell (vocals, piano, guitar, banshee), Stephen Stills (bass), Lee Keefer (banshee)
Highest chart position: UK -; US -