
Coming Attractions/Scot Haller

Joni Mitchell courts New Haven

When I saw **Joni Mitchell** in Woolsey Hall two years ago, I sat in the last row of the second balcony. "Court and Spark" had just come out two weeks before and nobody was yet familiar with most of the songs. But despite the new material, something was happening between the woman on stage and the sell-out crowd. You could feel it even in the last row of the second balcony.

There was an understanding, a mutual unraveling, a respect between performer and audience that was foreign to any concert I'd been to before or any I've seen since. You could feel it when **Joni** introduced "For the Roses" by explaining her inability to concert life.

And although **Joni** complained of being unable to see the fans, she always knew they were there. They gave her standing ovation after standing ovation. They sang along. They offered her admiration and they gave back—at double the strength—the vibrancy that she gave them. It was a remarkable evening.

But, Monday night in the Coliseum, no matter how hard she tried, **Joni Mitchell** just couldn't spark the audience. She tried wriggling her hips, whistling back at the whistlers, and finally, gently mocking the applause by lighting her own match at the start of the encore, "Twisted."

She tried long introductions and short introductions. She tried "Raised on Robbery," "In France They Kiss on Main Street," "Shades of Scarlet Conquering," "Help Me," and "Free Man in Paris." She tried

four new songs—one of which, "Coyote," is excellent. But through it all, the audience sat in an admiration so overwhelming that it literally turned them into mere consumers.

Only when **Joni** clowned her way through "For Free" and demanded that the house lights be brought up for "Twisted" did the audience connect with her. With exceptions of the mutants who insisted on dancing in the aisles and the "Clockwork Orange" droogies who demanded "You Turn Me On, I'm a Radio," after every number, the crowd sat patiently, expectantly, waiting to be delivered by **Joni Mitchell**.

And **Joni Mitchell** was definitely delivering Monday night. That incredible voice has never sounded cleaner. It's easy



Joni Mitchell returned to New Haven Monday night with concert in the Coliseum. Accompanied by the LA Expre (Tom Scott), she offered a jazzed-up version of "Shades of Light" and a toned-down version of "Harry's House."

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to imagine Mitchell in the studio, mixing tracks until those haunting notes blend into a haunting album. But on stage she proves that mixing has damn little to do with that voice. Each time I hear Joni Mitchell in concert, I am amazed how readily those slides and scales come into the air.

The audience in the Coliseum wasn't interested in the melodies or the moment, though; the audience was interested in mystification.

"Oh, I love this one," said the girl next to me when Joni started "For the Roses." But then, realizing that she was publicly committing the heresy of preferring one Mitchell song above the others, she immediately added, "I love them all." The audience wanted communion. Although the top rows of the Coliseum are as near to heaven as man may come on earth, all Joni Mitchell wanted was a good time.

She was obviously enjoying herself: whistling, chirping, planting a Yellow Cab cap on

her head, avoiding the somber songs of her "Blue" album, turning to grin at Drummer John Guerin whenever the stoned shrieks for "Radio" travelled up to the stage. While the crowd never got on its feet once before the encore—even then the first twenty rows remained rooted to their chairs—Joni Mitchell never bothered to sit down once, except to get off three songs at the piano. She gave a first-class concert.

But, the tender familiarity wasn't there. The intimacy of the Joni Mitchell of "Conversation" and "A Case of You," the intimacy of the Woolsey concert, may have been lost forever when "Help Me" hit the Top ten.

Maybe now that Joni Mitchell arrives on the cover of Time magazine and sells out garages like the Coliseum, the close connections, the singer-fan communion that her admirers thrive on can never again be had in concert. Maybe it can only be had in a room alone at 4 a.m. as "All I Want" moves round the turntable again and again.