

THE PROVINCE, Thursday, March 16, 1972 ****45



ENTERTAINMENT
ARTS



Queen Elizabeth Theatre

Flawless act by Joni Mitchell

By JEANI READ

She wore a bravado of purple and magenta and gold tie-dye and it almost eclipsed her at first. Perhaps she wanted it to, because she shrank inside it like an uncomfortable shell until she was sure of us, until she thought she might want to be friends.

Joni Mitchell, at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre on Wednesday night, gave us a very beautiful concert, a virtually flawless concert, and one that was longer than probably anyone had hoped.

Perhaps she felt as if she were coming home. Because it seemed somehow to be also an unveiling — we might almost have gotten to know her — if she hadn't had to go quite so soon.

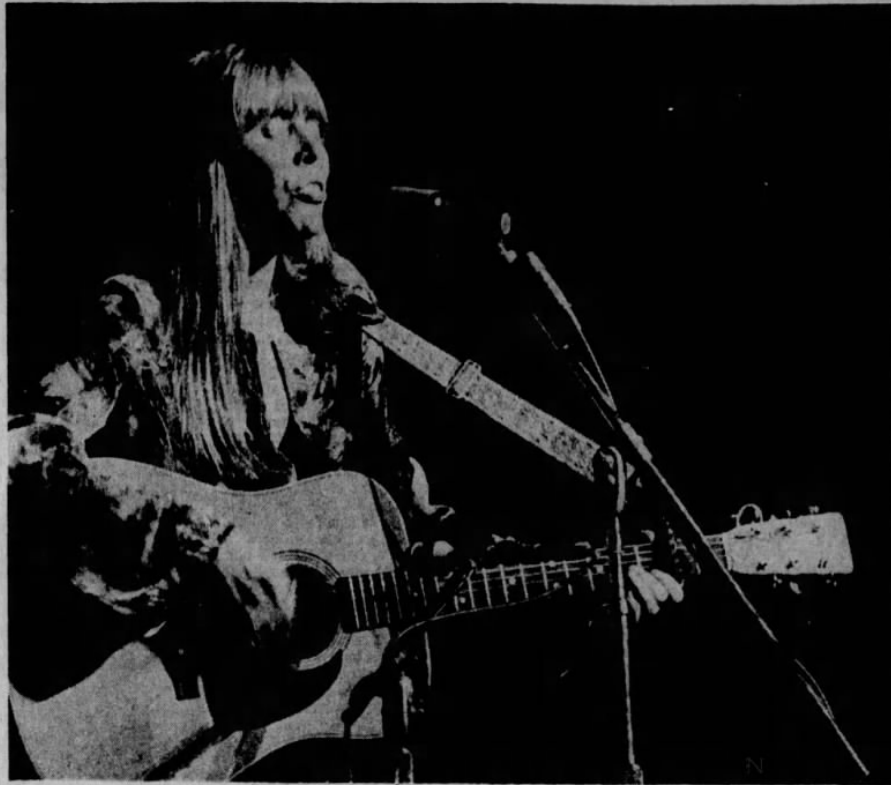
One more glance might have done it, out from under the deep eyelids that kept her look from meeting ours for long. Or one more shy giggle after one more song. Perhaps one more of her tiny stories, or one more image resting lightly on one more melody.

But she is a lady of mirrors, and we could never have been certain, anyway.

So deceptive, the confused fragments of glass — cynicism and naivete, despair and triumph, haughtiness and compassion and isolation. Each a new self-portrait, sketch of emotion, miniature of a love or sorrow, impression of a laugh.

As her music grows she becomes familiar with pain instead of merely recognizing it; the color of her early music was yellow, of her recent songs blue and dark. The images became stark and powerful. The maiden of idyll and fancy is turning to economy and clarity. Her vision is clean and knife-edged; even her laughter now has a perspective.

But, tossed together as the songs were on Wednesday, the gift she gave us was a kind of mural — the pieces, overlapping, a collage of changes and moments.



With a phrase, she can capture the passing of a tear or the touch of a footstep in a dance. Fragile and finally unknowable, she speaks from her fortress of words about motion too private to be accessible.

Bob Dylan, evidently, wrote something about everyone whether he knew them or not. In a song called Visions of Joan he spoke of someone called Louise.

She's delicate, it seems like veneer, he said. Louise holds a handful of rain, tempting you to defy it.

On Wednesday, Joni Mitchell held out her handful of rain.

We each took a drop home with us.

Jackson Browne, Joni's backup performer, delivered an interesting set to open the program — songs that were full of little flashes of insight, little

sincerities. Cliches and non-sequiturs studded his writing, which nonetheless turned out lively and clever and warm. In the fashion of James Taylor, his music was easy and appealing.

Like the first listen to a new album, Browne's set left impressions of songs particularly good and ones less striking. But it also made one want to listen again.