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Sound problems mar Joni Mitchell's return

By Philip Elwood
Examiner music critic

JONI MITCHELL'S Concord Pavilion show last night was a not-so-funny comedy of errors.

She started late because not enough people had taken their seats by the time the performance was to begin, a Pavilion spokesman told me. Since the place was sold out — it was jammed — there were apparently hundreds of fans waiting for Mitchell to go on stage, and Mitchell was waiting for hundreds of fans to take their seats.

Mitchell sang two sets, which ran about 50 minutes each. Accompanying herself on guitar, piano and dulcimer, she captivated the crowd, who seemed predisposed to idolize her.

Selection after selection gained uproarious applause. Strange, since I doubt that

more than 20 percent of the Concord Pavilion audience could hear well enough to even honestly applaud a tasty riff.

It wasn't just the "imbalance in the sound system" that many a club or auditorium comes up with. There was not, truthfully, a single number Mitchell performed in 95 minutes on stage in which the lyrics were intelligible.

Not her fault, but a pop-music show for 9,000 paying customers is, inherently, an important event. That means public criticism is in order.

She did do "Big Yellow Taxi" and "You Turn Me On I'm a Radio" and lots of her mostly newish numbers, especially those from her LP, "Wild Things Run Fast," a steady seller over the last few months.

Her voice was in superb shape. Since her forte, originally, was writing songs, Mitchell from the beginning has always hit her lyrics hard, hired superb backup musi-

cians and has been able to swing, bump, sway and grind appropriately enough to keep her panting fans enthused.

And Mitchell draws just about equally from the male and female audience. She's got feminism and hard-nosed lyrics of social reality in her veins, and god knows she will never have trouble proving her jazzier and bluesier vocal points.

Outstanding in her backup quartet were her husband, Larry Klein, on bass and Bay Area keyboardist Russell Ferrante, who seems especially competent to handle the multiple chores Mitchell's music requires.

In the expensive front seats last night, the sound was frightfully mangled. It was impossible to identify tunes, let alone comprehend or appreciate lyrics. Security enforcement was lax; herds of customers blocked others from seeing the show by wandering and sitting down in the front rows.



Joni Mitchell was in fine voice, but...

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