

NOEL GALLAGHER KNOCKS DOWN WONDERWALL!



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180
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50TH
ANNIVERSARY
SPECIAL!

**"I'LL NEVER
BE THAT PURE
AGAIN..."**

JONI MITCHELL

**THE REAL STORY
OF BLUE**

**THE BALLAD OF
BIG STAR**

**THE
BLACK KEYS**
DIG THEIR ROOTS

**THE
TROGGS**
WILD THINGS!

**SONS OF
KEMET**
BLACK TO
THE FUTURE

REDSKINS
KICK OVER
THE STATUES

**ROKY
ERICKSON**
"HE LEFT THE PLANET,
BUT HE CAME BACK!"

PLUS!
**RECORD
STORE DAY**
THE ESSENTIAL PREVIEW



LOVE STORIES

FROM SASKATOON TO LAUREL CANYON, FROM CRETE TO CHAPEL HILL AND THE ISLE OF WIGHT, THE PLEASURES AND PAINS OF ROMANCE PURSUED **JONI MITCHELL**. AND 50 YEARS AGO, SHE ETCHED THEM INTO *BLUE*—A MASTERPIECE OF POETRY AND MELODY, POWER AND VULNERABILITY, THAT ASTONISHED HER PEERS, THEN AND NOW. “IT WAS ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL THINGS I’D EVER HEARD,” HEARS **GRAYSON HAVER CURRIN**.

PORTRAIT BY **TIM CONSIDINE**.

IT WAS THE FOURTH DAY OF THE THIRD ISLE OF WIGHT FESTIVAL, SATURDAY, August 29, 1970. The afternoon’s line-up suggested some staggering variety show: Tiny Tim and John Sebastian, The Doors and The Who, Miles Davis with some of the crew that had just made *Bitches Brew*, and Joni Mitchell, set for the 9pm slot.

Local residents had protested the expected influx of loud ne’er-do-wells, especially after the success of the first two festivals and the chaos of Woodstock and Altamont the year before. Organisers scrambled, moving the five-day affair for the first time to a farm at the base of Afton Downs, a hilly expanse of grass-speckled chalk that offered a prime perch for thousands of attendees who believed all music should be free. As the crowd swelled beyond half a million, those who still wanted in began to crash the formidable metal fence. Promoters debated asking the world’s biggest bands to play for free, to appease the growing mob.

“The kids got upset about the commercialisation that was going on. When you get a crowd of that many people, and one guy starts, ‘Let’s get in for nothing,’ there’s a ripple effect,” the film-maker Murray Lerner told Louder nearly half a century later. “That whole movement began to break apart.”

The idealism of the just-expired ’60s was fracturing, in part, because of the conspicuous wealth of its stars: Mitchell, for instance, arrived in a rented red Rolls-Royce, with Neil Young and their manager Elliot Roberts. Donovan came with a lavish antique stagecoach, complete with ostentatious bevelled windows; it became Mitchell’s dressing room.

“It was the hate-the-performer festival,” Mitchell remembered in the 2018 documentary *Both Sides Now*. Four months earlier, she had released *Ladies Of The Canyon*, her third album, and was steadily becoming a star of the singer-songwriter scene. “There was an expression of wealth taking place.”

But at mid-afternoon, the sun still high in the sky, organisers implored Mitchell to take one for the flagging team. After a slew of cancellations, they needed her to perform in broad daylight, as gates crashed and police clashed with the kids on Desolation Row, an illicit campsite built of straw. Mitchell resisted, then conceded. “I have a feminine cooperative streak,” she lamented. ➤

Tim Considerine Productions (author@yankstlemans.com)

Artist at work: Joni Mitchell making a Valentine for ‘Willy’ AKA Graham Nash, Los Angeles, January 1969.

"You're acting like tourists, man. Give us some respect": Joni Mitchell winning over the crowd, Isle Of Wight Festival, August 29, 1970; (centre right shots) interloper Yogi Joe is removed; the shirtless hordes remake Ben-Hur.



◀ Wearing a long mustard-flower dress and an assortment of turquoise and silver, she strode on-stage with only a Martin guitar for a crowd composed mostly, it seemed, of shirtless men. Standing in front of The Who's Stonehenge of colossal amps, she adjusted the microphone and her capo and, in an attempt to break the ice, joked, "Looks like they're making Ben-Hur or something." She laughed nervously and alone, like a comedian flopping at the start of their stand-up debut.

The set didn't get better: she sang her first few songs to a tide of apathetic chatter and above distracting ripples of feedback. She politely reproached the crowd's noise: "It really puts me uptight, and then I get nervous and forget the words. Just give me a little help, will you?" Then, just as she summoned Woodstock, a man in the throes of a bad trip had to be lifted from the first few rows. A parental panic washed over Mitchell's face. But she returned to the piano for Woodstock, encouraging the crowd to join her in the chorus, in getting "back to the garden".

The moment she finished, Yogi Joe – months earlier, the man who gave Mitchell her first yoga lesson, and had now inexplicably found his way onto the stage with some hand drums – grabbed the microphone and began lecturing the crowd about rock music's crass commercialism. Roberts and a dragoon of security guards tried to ply him off stage, Mitchell eventually pleading with him. The crowd went berserk, drowning out her piano as she began My Old Man, an unreleased song about being in love with Graham Nash. Finally, she had enough.

"Listen a minute, will ya? Will ya listen a minute? Now listen," she yelled, spinning toward the crowd while fending off tears. "I get my feelings off through my music. But, listen: you got your life wrapped up in it, and it's very difficult to come out here and lay something down when... you're acting like tourists, man. Give us some respect."

It worked. Mitchell's final six songs were a *tour de force* of bare feelings, unrecorded songs A Case Of You and California holding as much power and sway as the established favourites Both Sides Now and Big Yellow Taxi. For California, written about her return to The Golden State after gallivanting through Europe with hippies and rich-kid rubberneckerers, she even sat down on a folding chair with a four-string Appalachian dulcimer, a relatively exotic instrument she'd been playing for a year. "Can you give me a little more volume on the dulcimer – somehow?" she said, beaming and at ease.

"I've run for much less than that," Mitchell would remember. "But I thought, I have to stand up... And the beast lay down. The beast lay down."

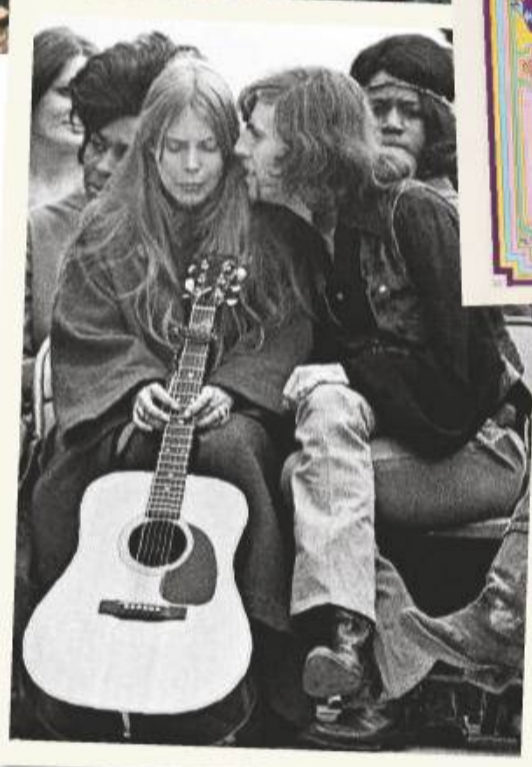
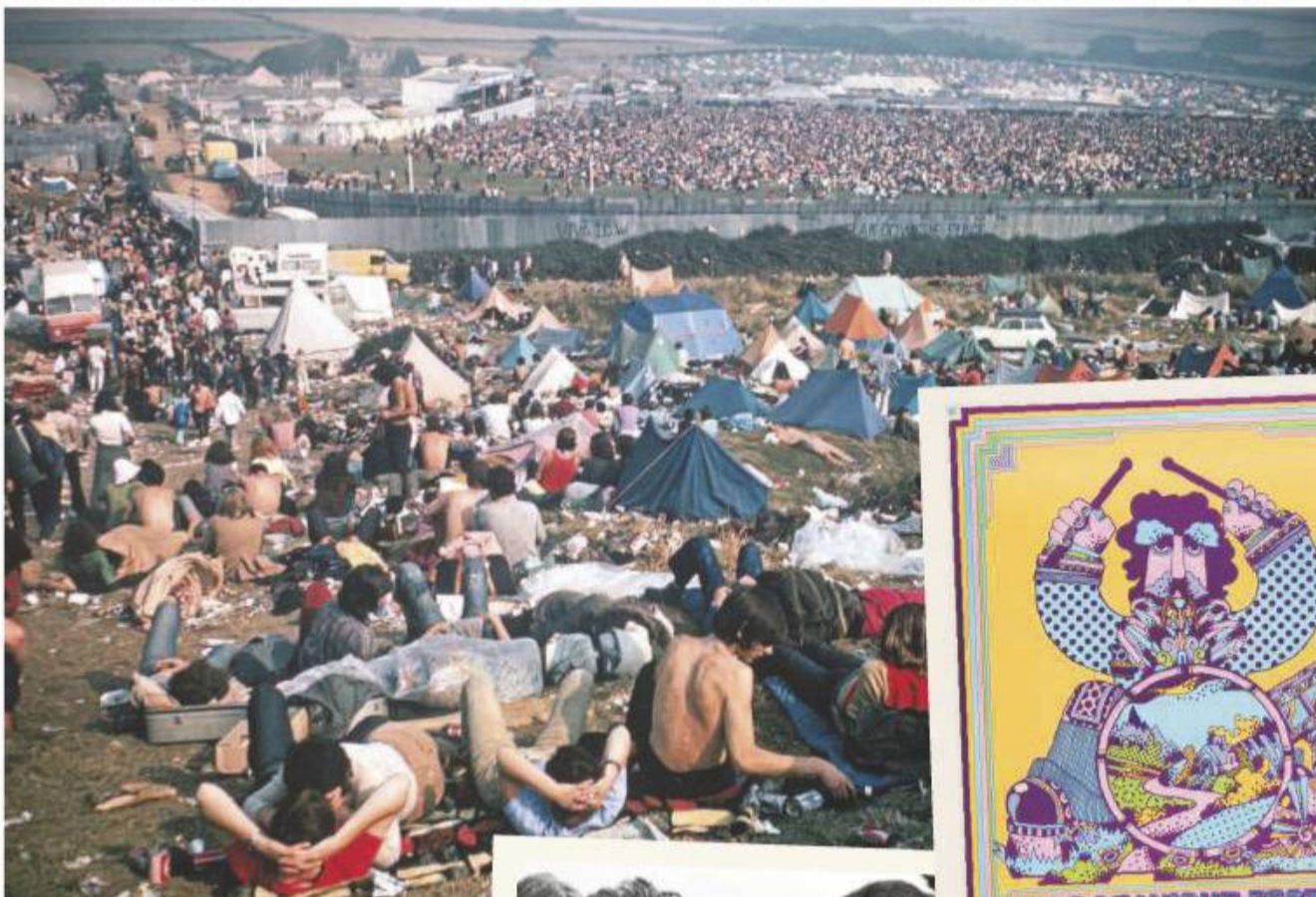
It was a galvanising moment for Mitchell, an instant in which she realised the power that her seemingly small sound – her voice and a few strings, a grand piano at most – could have. That vulnerability had been a touchstone of her first three albums but, in the months to come, she pushed it to the centre of the 10 songs she cut at the beginning of 1971. In the record she would title *Blue*, she sang candidly of love's joys and follies, of the ways it had crushed and uplifted her. She sang of regret for leaving, of discomfort with staying. She sang, for the first time, of the child she'd put up for adoption six years earlier. Half a century later, *Blue* remains one of the most complete encapsulations of how it feels to be young and falling in or out of love.

"I was a plastic bag with all my organs exposed, sobbing on an auditorium chair," Mitchell once said. "That's how I felt. Like my guts were on the outside. I wrote *Blue* in that condition."

■ IN THE SPRING OF 1968, TIM CONSIDINE WAS A former child star approaching 30. The scion of a prominent showbusiness family, Considine appeared in a smattering of films before making a star turn in *My Three Sons*, a sitcom about



**"I WAS A PLASTIC BAG WITH ALL MY ORGANS EXPOSED, SOBBING ON AN AUDITORIUM CHAIR. I WROTE BLUE IN THAT CONDITION."
JONI MITCHELL**



a single dad's misadventures in raising kids. But his run had ended three years earlier, so he had turned to screenwriting and tinkering with photography. He was a music fan, too, during a boom in California's folk rock scene.

"I went to a Judy Collins concert, and she sang Both Sides Now. I thought, 'Wow, that's a great song,'" says Considine. Collins had already recorded the song, but it was months away from becoming her hit. "And she said, 'If you like that song, wait until you hear the person who wrote it, Joni Mitchell.' That seemed like an extraordinary thing for an artist to say."

Considine took Collins' advice. Weeks later, early in June 1968, Mitchell was making her debut at The Troubadour, the now-iconic club just off the Sunset Strip. Considine lived a mile away and recognised an opportunity in the club's famously dim lighting. He'd been experimenting with a new film that could capture elegant portraits in low light. "It was like a tunnel, so dark," Considine says. "So I thought, 'Let's give this a try.'"

Tunnel vision: (right) photographer Tim Considine in TV acting days with My Three Sons co-star Meredith McRae, 1965; (insets from bottom) the first big Joni cover version; Nash whispers sweet nothings; Isle Of Wight festival poster; the Blue album cover.



he could get a worthwhile photo. Back home, he was stunned with the results, particularly how the sharp grain of the film made Mitchell look like a Greek statue, a wash of marble beauty emerging from shadow. He made a few 11-inch by 14-inch prints and returned to The Troubadour the following night, climbing to the tiny dressing room to seek out Mitchell.

"She seemed really pleased, and I felt about nine feet tall," says Considine. "But then David Crosby came in, looked at them, dismissed them, and said to me, 'Needs more contrast.' I thought, 'Bitch!'"

But after Considine developed the photos for a second time, he realised that Crosby, who was the son of an acclaimed cinematographer, was right. And when Mitchell returned to the club for a six-show stand there in January 1969, so did Considine, with his camera in hand. He found Mitchell in the Troubadour's ➤





**"AFTER GRAHAM AND I SEPARATED, I WAS REALLY DEPRESSED. I BELIEVED IN THAT RELATIONSHIP, AND SUDDENLY IT WAS OVER."
JONI MITCHELL**

◀ upstairs green room, lit by streetlights and signs outside. She was painting a Valentine's Day present for Graham Nash, The Hollies star who had arrived in Los Angeles since her first show at The Troubadour and had almost immediately moved in with her. Considine shot a double-exposure of Mitchell, juxtaposing her portrait and a wider frame that shows her painting. "And the light was just magnificent," he remembers. She was practically glowing.



On Nash's first night in town, in 1968, Mitchell rescued him from a wild party at Crosby's, tugging on his arm and saying, "Come to my house, and I'll take care of you," he later wrote. By April 1969, they represented a picture of domestic Laurel Canyon bliss, their house brimming with instruments, an elk's head, two cats and a lamp designed as a frog holding a lily pad. They went into creative overdrive. Mitchell painted incessantly while self-producing her second album, *Clouds*. Nash worked at stained-glass and photography while Crosby, Stills & Nash cut their debut.

And he doted on Mitchell. During an April 1969 New York Times profile of the pair in their Laurel Canyon nest, Nash promised Joni a kiss because he liked her new version of Both Sides, Now so much. "You would've kissed her, man, if she would have spit," Elliot Roberts quipped. "There sure is a lot of love in this house."

Nash wrote that scene, of course, into the blissful Our House, where her love made everything that used to be so hard so easy. It is an anthem of unqualified happiness. "We were married, you might say," Mitchell, who had split with her first husband a year before inviting Nash over, told Cameron Crowe in 1979.

Mitchell's songs for Nash, though, radiated equivocation. In Willy, recorded for 1970's *Ladies Of The Canyon*, she worries that it's too good to be true, that he "gave [his] heart too soon." Its corollary, My Old Man, is an ode to her happiness when he's near and a confession of her blues when he's gone. "We don't need no piece of paper from the city hall," she sings, her voice diving and rising with the same doubts. "Keeping us tied and true, no."

Indeed, it didn't last. Late in 1969, the relationship disintegrated: a mixture of Nash's self-proclaimed insecurity, her romantic restlessness, and his clandestinely narcotised life with the suddenly famous Crosby, Stills & Nash.

"After Graham and I separated, I was really depressed," Mitchell admitted to Marc Myers in *Anatomy Of A Song*. "I believed in that relationship, and suddenly it was over. I also lost most of my Los Angeles friends, who had been my constant community. When I left him, they took his side."

SO MITCHELL FLED, FIRST TO CROSBY'S BOAT, A Belize-built schooner named The Mayan he'd purchased in 1969. But when she climbed aboard in Jamaica in early February, Nash was there, too. She felt she'd been hoodwinked by Crosby, a mentor who had encouraged her to move to Los Angeles and produced her first album, *Song To A Seagull*. After passing through the Panama Canal, she flew to California and joined ➤

"Blue without the severe daguerreotype album cover processing," says photographer Tim Considine; (above left, from left) John Sebastian, Nash, Mitchell, David Crosby and Stephen Stills on-stage at Big Sur Folk Festival, Esalen Institute, California, September 13-14, 1969; (inset) Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young's single Our House.

Main image: Tim Considine Productions (author@vankatslemans.com), Getty

◀ a poetry-writing pal, Penelope Ann Schafer, *en route* to Greece.

At home with Nash in 1969, Mitchell had claimed that nascent fame and her escalating schedule had cost her the space and time to write. She intended to take four months off at summer's end to live a little and focus on new material. "There is a certain amount of life in all my songs," she would later tell Melody Maker. "If I have any personal philosophy it is that I like truth." This was her chance to live a little, to find new truths for tunes.

After tooling around Athens, the pair heard that, since the early '60s, hippies had flocked to the island of Crete, where they lived in seaside caves carved into soft sedimentary rock in the fishing village of Matala. They hopped on a ferry, rented a VW Beetle, and found a cinderblock hut beside a poppy field. An explosion at Delfini's, one of Matala's two taverns, sent a cook sailing through the doors. Mitchell had to meet this character.

Cary Raditz was a North Carolina copywriter who decamped to Greece to get away from the stateside grind. Mitchell was smitten.

"He had steely-cold blue eyes and a menacing grin," she told Myers, "and he was a bit of a scoundrel."

For nearly two months, they were inseparable, hiking through the hills in clunky boots, swimming in the sea in the buff, learning yoga from Yogi Joe, and sleeping in Raditz's cave on a stone-slab bed covered with pebbles, grass, and a rough Afghan rug. Mitchell would sometimes disappear into the countryside carrying her dulcimer, a rare instrument built in California by exclusive luthier Joellen Lapidus. Escaping the gaze of the hippies who knew who she was, she wrote *Carey*, an intoxicating epic about her Matalan adventures and sub-standard living conditions. She adored Raditz but longed for "my clean white linen and my fancy French cologne".

She sang it for him on her birthday, both as a gift and a farewell letter. She flew to Paris, then "caught a plane to Spain," partying and playing dulcimer alongside Nico at the Ibiza home of Rolling Stone co-founder Jann Wenner. But she began to feel the pull of an idealised California, before *The Fall*, and captured that longing in the song she titled for the state. "I'm going to see the folks I dig/I'll even kiss a Sunset pig," she sang, nostalgic even, it seemed, for the cops on the Strip.

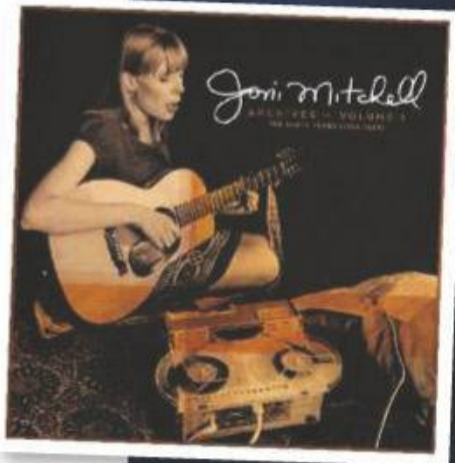
Still, the freedom of Matala clung to Mitchell like salt from the sea. "It was a

WAY TO BLUE

THE ROAD TO JONI MITCHELL'S FIRST MASTERPIECE, BY VICTORIA SEGAL.

JONI MITCHELL ARCHIVES - VOLUME 1: THE EARLY YEARS (1963-1967)

★★★★★
(Rhino, 2020)



This document of Mitchell's earliest career shows her outgrowing coffee-house folk repertoire, stretching out into her own songwriting. *Urge For Going* (recorded for *Blue*, then dropped) and *Born To Take The Highway* prefigure *Carey* and California's restless wandering, freewheeling through the old, the cold, the settled in its ways. Also included is a 1967 performance of *Little*

Green, *Blue's* blessing over the daughter she placed for adoption in 1965. Travelling, travelling, travelling.

SONG TO A SEAGULL

★★★★★

(Reprise 1968)

"I'm the girl in all these songs," said Mitchell, but on her David Crosby-produced debut, she hadn't quite found the transparency that would define *Blue*. *I Had A King* was about former husband Chuck Mitchell, Crosby's hand was on *The Dawntreader's* tiller – but specifics often come veiled in fable, all galleons, castles and mountains. *Cactus Tree*, however, cuts to the core of an ongoing process: "She's so busy being free."



CLOUDS

★★★★★

(Reprise, 1969)

The sun-flooded Chelsea Morning underlines Mitchell's *A Case Of You* claim that she lives in a "box of paints", but *Clouds* is bluer than the rainbows, butterscotch and oranges suggest. *Songs To Aging Children* Come and *Roses Blue* have a chill at their hearts, while *Both Sides, Now* – like *Chelsea*

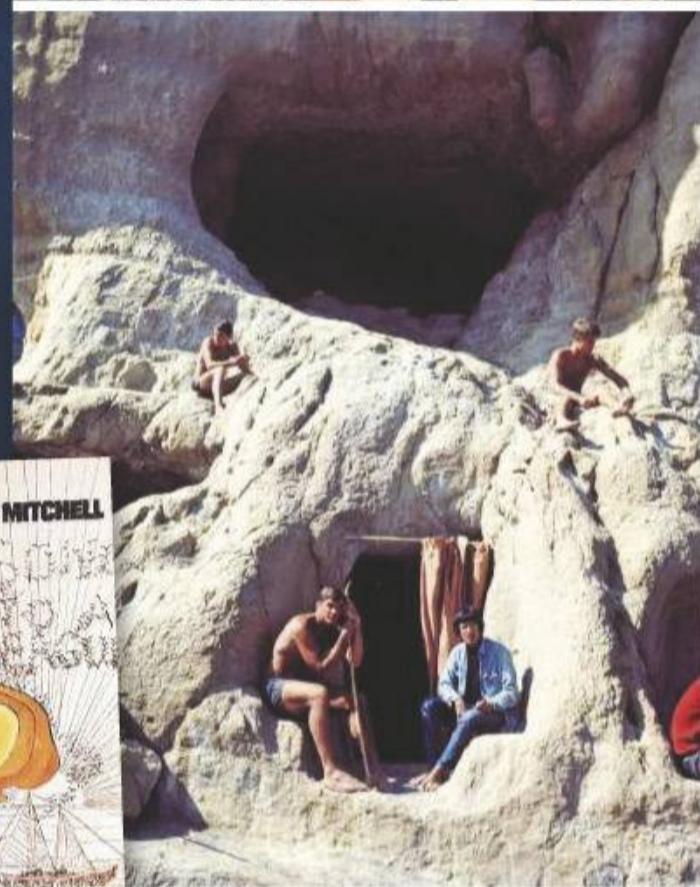
Morning, popularised by other voices – says goodbye to the fairytale, that self-portrait on the cover a move towards finding exactly where she stands.

LADIES OF THE CANYON

★★★★★

(Reprise, 1970)

With piano shouldering guitar out the way on *Rainy Night House* and *Willy*, *For Free's* clarinet coda and *Conversation's* wild-side fade, *Ladies Of The Canyon* expands Mitchell's singer-songwriter palette. Closing with counterculture hits *Big Yellow Taxi*, *Woodstock* and *The Circle Game*, it decisively boxed up '60s folk utopia: by *Blue's* California, peace "was just a dream some of us had" and the Me Generation was in full introspective flight.



lovely life, far better than being middle-class in America," she told *Rolling Stone*. "Even the poorest people seemed to eat well: cucumbers and tomatoes, oranges and potatoes and bread."

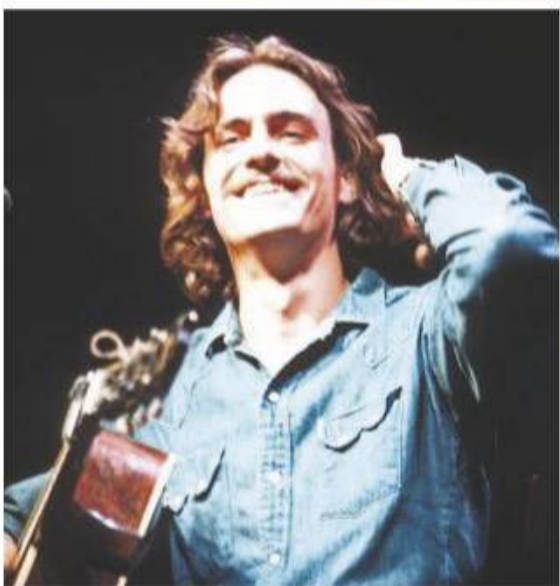
By late July, though, Mitchell's expedition led her back home to Canada, where she joined Elizabeth Cotton, Mississippi Fred McDowell, and Odetta at Toronto's Mariposa Folk Festival. There was a familiar face among the ranks – James Taylor, who had opened for Mitchell in 1969 and worked with her at the Newport Folk Festival.

"She sang something while we sat in the grass, and she was tauntingly beautiful," Peter Asher remembers of the two at Newport. "I don't remember sparks flying across the room, but Joni was this very magnetic, very charming person. You could see her effect on all the men sitting around her. James was no exception."

This time, they became a couple. Mitchell joined Taylor when he filmed *Two-Lane Black-*



“JONI WAS THIS VERY MAGNETIC PERSON. YOU COULD SEE HER EFFECT ON ALL THE MEN SITTING AROUND HER. JAMES TAYLOR WAS NO EXCEPTION.”
PETER ASHER



Home thoughts from abroad: (clockwise from above left) Joni on her travels reaches Ibiza, 1971, where she was inspired to write California after being taken to a party “down a red dirt road” with people “reading Rolling Stone and Vogue”. She is drawn by Salvador Maron (child not model’s own); Two-Lane Blacktop movie poster; on-stage at the Mariposa Folk Festival, Orillia, Ontario; James Taylor at the same event; young Americans living in caves, Matala, Crete; Mitchell with an Appalachian dulcimer, 1971.

‘Please play it again.’ It registers as beautiful poetry, but you haven’t figured it out. Hearing it was an experience I wanted to repeat.”

top, a movie about itinerant outlaw drag racers, in the New Mexico desert late that summer, knitting him a sweater vest by the pool. She wrote the experience into All I Want, a song about the extreme emotional vicissitude of falling in love: “I want to knit you a sweater/Want to write you a love letter.” Alongside Dennis Wilson in an RV, they drove to a Hopi ceremony with snakes and dancing, an occasion Mitchell would directly reference at Isle Of Wight when she called the attendees tourists.

“Why would you *not* want to hang out with James Taylor, for God’s sake?” Nash told Michelle Mercer for her inquisitive analysis of Mitchell’s *Blue* period, Will You Take Me As I Am. “Just look at him.”

You could hear their chemistry, too. In late October, the new couple recorded a set for the BBC at London’s Paris Theatre. They introduced each other’s songs, finished each other’s choruses, and giggled at each other’s jokes. When she explained the curious immigrant history of the dulcimer, she said, “It’s a truly American folk instrument, right?” The Canadian paused, as if awaiting the North Carolina-raised Taylor’s seal of approval. They played her Carey, then his Carolina In My Mind.

During that trip, Mitchell and Taylor shared a flat with Asher and his wife, Betsy Doster, complete with a harpsichord and piano. Asher remembers her sitting down to rehearse *Blue*, an incisive and patient ballad she’d just finished about the pain and perseverance of romance and, really, living. It stunned Asher in the same way that hearing I Want To Hold Your Hand for the first time did, back when he and Paul McCartney shared the top floor of his family’s London home at 57 Wimpole St.

“It was one of the most beautiful things I’d ever heard,” he says today. “It’s hard to be analytical in those moments. You just say,

The new first couple of singer-songwriters fell for one another so deeply that Mitchell accompanied Taylor to Chapel Hill for Christmas, where his father, Ike, was about to finish his tenure as the dean of the medical school at the University Of North Carolina. Mitchell, it seemed, was joining what Rolling Stone would soon call “The First Family of the New Rock.” Taylor helped his father cut down a Christmas tree. The couple carolled through the neighbourhood, joined by Taylor’s childhood friend, the journalist David Perlmutter. They even showed up on the doorstep of UNC’s already-legendary basketball coach Dean Smith.

“As the carollers circled around Morgan Creek, David lip-synched his way through Silent Night, in part so that he could listen to James and Joni sing,” Will Blythe wrote in *The Oxford American*, recounting Perlmutter’s memory of the night. “Why listen to himself when such beautiful voices were ringing out behind his ears?”

With her dulcimer and his guitar, Mitchell and Taylor even played an impromptu fireside concert in the living room, performing Taylor’s *Fire And Rain* and three songs that Mitchell had yet to record – the Crete songs, Carey and California, and the lovesick *A Case Of You*. Months later, when Mitchell released *Blue*, some in attendance wondered if the native of cold Canadian prairies had written *River*, perhaps the definitive ode to Christmas’s bittersweet sting, about her time in Chapel Hill. It “stays pretty green” there, after all, even in winter.

Continues on page 74



"FOREVER POIGNANT. FOREVER PRECISE"

**BLUE, TRACK BY TRACK,
BY JONI MITCHELL'S
PEERS AND PARTISANS.**

SIDE 1

ALL I WANT



Robin Pecknold (Fleet Foxes): I was 15, 16 and had started writing songs, and at some point my dad said I should listen to *Blue* and *Blood On The Tracks* – because those are, like, the bibles of songwriting. So I had a fall and a winter driving around rainy Seattle in my 1980s Toyota Camry listening *only* to those records.

I started learning all the songs on *Blue* and playing them at coffee shops, and for All I Want, because I wanted to do it right, I had to buy a dulcimer. The song is all about how little

you need to be infinite, and the dulcimer is definitely a part of that. Dylan is like, I only need 6 strings. Joni's like, I only need 4 – total flex!

All I Want is like the overture to *Blue*, setting up the mission statement that this is going to be about relationships, and we even get the first appearance of the word "blue", with that amazing melody, moving from the G to the F for "...so I hurt you too". It's a master level move.

There's stuff on *Blue* that I think about almost every day. Even [from River] "I'm gonna make a lot of money and quit this crazy scene" – I aspire to that sometimes! Some people have the Bible and I have *Blue*.

MY OLD MAN

Natalie Mering (AKA Weyes Blood): My Old Man is a beautiful song, and not the kind of love song Joni Mitchell wrote very often. Maybe

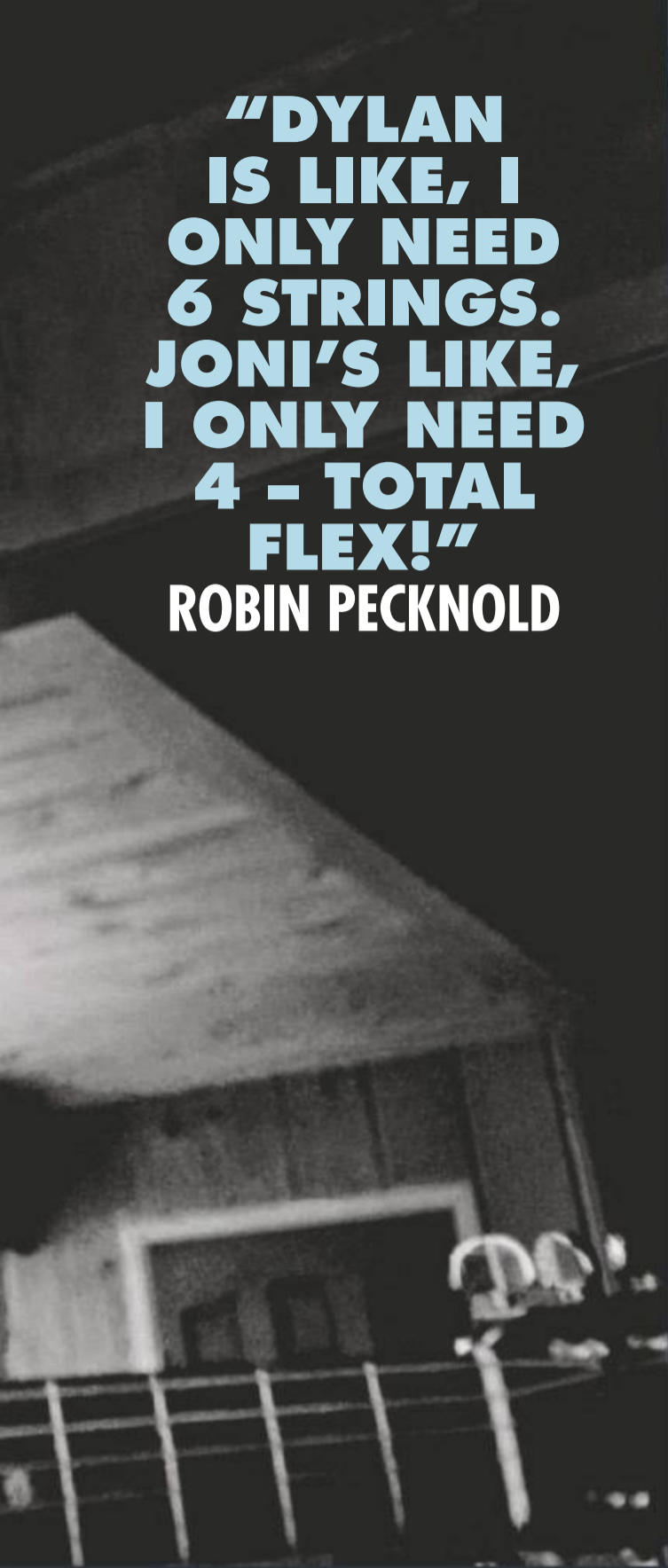
Night Ride Home [from 1991], when she was married to Larry Klein, is similar. The lyrics feel quite old school but I think she's playing it that way because she had to. I'm sure she did cook this guy's meals and darn his socks – feminism hadn't caught up with music people yet. That said, I think the line – "We don't need a piece of paper from the city hall..." was a radical statement at the time: Yeah, we're living together but we're not getting married. We don't need to do that.

Musically, I think it's one of the first big tip-offs of what's to come from Joni – the start of that piano style you hear more of on *For The Roses*. She uses these chromatic half-steps – which gives it an angular modern sound, like blues and gospel meets jazz and even a Charles Ives atonal thing.

Joni is hard to cover well, because if you try to do the songs simply, and kind of flatten out the idiosyncrasies, it doesn't sound



"DYLAN IS LIKE, I ONLY NEED 6 STRINGS. JONI'S LIKE, I ONLY NEED 4 - TOTAL FLEX!"
ROBIN PECKNOLD



so good. Because it's her individual timing and strangeness that gives it the transcending feel. The songs on *Blue* are like one-time things. Like if she'd recorded them the next day they'd have sounded completely different.

LITTLE GREEN



Nadia Reid: I think on first listen it's possible to mistake Little Green for being about a lost love. It's so poetic and mysterious. If the story about the daughter she gave up hadn't surfaced in the '90s we may never have figured it out.

But knowing what we know, I can't think of a more tender, or braver song. It's heartbreaking, yet I never feel too saddened by Joni's songs. She takes grief and pain and turns it into something useful, something that lasts for ever. So if anything, I get this intense comfort. I hear this deep wisdom. Joni knows something that I want to know.

CAREY



Laura Marling: Though I believe the idea that songs need narrative context is a trend, not a necessity, I was delighted to find out many years after first hearing *Blue* that Carey was a real person: this eccentric American Mitchell met in Crete, and found sufficiently beguiling to memorialise in song.

The language places it firmly in its era. The "finest silver" she promises to put on, the "clean white linen" and "fancy French cologne" she says she misses, they're signifiers of a certain type of glamour that feels of another time. And of course "you're a mean old daddy, but I like you" is a beautiful piece of time-stamped language. I'm unsure of the provenance of the use of "daddy" in this context, and if I were the author's analyst I might suggest we delve deeper into that word, but as another stroke on the canvas, it serves a purpose perfectly, rapidly giving dimension to their relationship. Mitchell is full of detail, which is precisely what allows the listener, standing back and taking in the scene as a whole, to feel the mood so intensely. She is a true artist.

BLUE



Rufus Wainwright: When I was asked to sing at the concert that celebrated Joni's 75th birthday [in Los Angeles, November 7, 2018] *Blue* hadn't been taken yet, and the general consensus seemed to be that people were a little bit afraid of it. Even for Joni, it's unusual and challenging and unique, so indicative of her style and essence and so *vertical*, vocally. I kind of thought of it as an aria. So for a month or so I was pretty terrified of it too.

Thankfully, the day it really clicked was at rehearsal, and it happened that Chaka Khan was waiting to do her song after mine. She was my only audience member and I thought, "Well, I'm really going to have to take this up a notch - I mean, Chaka Khan is staring at me!" And magically, it really worked.

As someone who has struggled with addiction, the song touches a raw place. It's sung from the perspective of someone *witnessing* this downfall, so I would put myself in the place of my father or mother watching me go through that. Joni communicates what's tragic - chastising the user somewhat. But you know that she gets it. She's in there with you.

Like the tattoo in the song, for me it's the album's anchor.

SIDE 2

CALIFORNIA



St. Vincent: I don't mean to make this about me, but I have often felt I could understand Joni on a purely logistical level. I too, have sat on a bench in Paris, France, while on tour reading the news from back

home. Wondering if the love you left there will love you when you get finally get home. Feeling at once at home on the road and at home nowhere. Nobody but Joni could pack so much heavy into a song that feels like spring birds fitting around Laurel Canyon.

THIS FLIGHT TONIGHT



Tamara Lindeman (The Weather Station): The first time I heard *Blue*, I didn't get it. I think in part, it was my youth. Joni on this record is so

vulnerable that it's kind of frightening. I didn't want to be like that myself. But obviously, I came around to it!

I've been on a lot of planes and I really relate to the existential moment she's having on this one. It's a tangled statement. She seems to

be constantly disagreeing with herself: I love you; I miss you; you hurt me. "Star bright, star bright, you've got the loving that I like, alright," then immediately turning to regret and then to anxiety. I love the rock band part [from 1:56 to 2:05] when she puts the headphones on. It's like she's running away from herself, to get away from her head.

After *Blue*, Joni really grew and changed. I happen to think she got better at everything. But there's a purity to *Blue*, an unfiltered quality that was kind of her gift to music. It's not polished. It's not a fantasy. It's vulnerability and uncertainty and confusion, and it's perfectly expressed in this song.

RIVER



Judy Collins: I've been enchanted by Joni's songs ever since I first heard that clear, bell-like Canadian voice of hers. There was a charm and a luminescence, and her turn of phrase was spellbinding.

But on *Blue* - and *River* especially - she reached above and beyond my wildest expectations. During that time, she and I were involved with CSN in personal ways - she had been in a relationship with Graham Nash and I'd been having an affair with Stephen Stills. In 2019, what seemed like one million years later, I was recording my 54th album, *Winter Stories*, with Norwegian singer Jonas Field and Chatham County Line, a bluegrass group from North Carolina. In our rehearsals in Raleigh, in November 2018, *River* made it to the top choices for the album. When I started to sing the song, I was in tears.

Joni is indelibly timeless in her lyrics, fresh and remarkably poetic even in the fiercest of her plots. Think of *Free Man In Paris* or *The Magdalene Laundries* off *Turbulent Indigo*. Forever poignant, forever precise. That's our Joni. Our only.

A CASE OF YOU



David Crosby: I love everything about *A Case Of You*. When she first sang it to me, it blew me away. But this happened to me every time I heard a song of hers, man. She was my old lady for a year, and I would write

something I thought was really good and she would come back with *three* things she wrote the night before, and they'd all be better.

A Case Of You is so open and so her. She's telling you the truth. And she utterly hooks you from that conversation at the start of the song: "If you want me I'll be in the bar." It's a tough woman who's got her dukes up about life, and she's got an opinion, and that's Joan.

That line: "I could drink a case of you and still be on my feet." There's a duality there that's deliberate. On the one hand she's saying she can't get enough of him. But she's also telling him, You can't bowl me over. Because you know she'd been through some serious trials and tribulations. Polio. Chuck Mitchell - not a good experience. She'd paid her dues.

She knew what pain was.

Blue is the best record by the best singer-songwriter of our times. *A Case Of You* is a face photographed under a bright light.

THE LAST TIME I SAW RICHARD

Elvis Costello: A full stop at the end of a beautiful page.



A bad case of Joni: "Like blues and gospel meets jazz and Charles Ives," says Weyes Blood of *My Old Man* (opposite page), while Elvis Costello comes to a full stop.

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For now, though, it was back to sunny California. Mitchell and Taylor had records to make.

LATE IN 1970, RUSS KUNKEL HAD WHAT HE calls 50 years later “my own little Joni Mitchell concert.” Only 22 at the time, Kunkel had quickly become one of Los Angeles’ drumming hotshots, able to dig into the beat but also play lightly, as if accenting a track without touching it. He had worked for The Band, recorded with Dylan, and befriended Hendrix. And after he married Cass Elliot’s younger sister, Leah, the entire rock world appeared to open up before him. The young couple remodelled an A-frame apartment above Elliot’s sprawling Laurel Canyon spread, and moved around the time their son, Nathaniel, was born. Kunkel had met Mitchell years before while she cut her debut album with Crosby, and he’d since seen her around Elliot’s in the afternoons. She asked him to play on *Blue* and if she might stop by.

“My first thought was, ‘Holy shit, I am sitting here, and Joni Mitchell – the most gorgeous angel in the world – is playing her songs for me,’” says Kunkel, admitting to callow first impressions. He mostly listened, occasionally slapping his hands on his knees or reaching for bongos. Mitchell approved of this minimalism, his tacit concession to her own intricate metres. A few weeks later, he began arriving at A&M’s tiny Studio C with a modest percussion kit, listening to Mitchell and falling in place.

“She dictated what the grooves were, just with her guitar parts,” Kunkel says. “It was easy to get inside them. When I got into the studio, I fit into what she’d already recorded.”

It was a busy time at A&M: just down the hall, The Carpenters were recording in Studio A, while Carole King was cutting *Tapestry* in Studio B. King described the *Tapestry* sessions as a family affair, with her husband, Charlie Larkey, playing bass and her longtime pal, Lou Adler, producing. Her kids would stop by, as did Mitchell and Taylor to sing Will You Love Me Tomorrow? Taylor himself was recording *Mudslide Slim And The Blue Horizon* nearby, with King and Mitchell both contributing.

Mitchell would have little of that. Her sessions were sealed to the extent that, when King’s engineer requested access to the piano Mitchell was using, they had to sneak into Studio A while she was gone. After the last year, Mitchell needed a sanctuary.

“If you looked at me, I would weep,” she told *Musician* in 1983. “We had to lock the doors to make that album. Nobody was allowed in. Socially, I was an absolute wreck. Imagine yourself stripped of all defences.”

Four other people played on *Blue* – Kunkel, Taylor, Stephen Stills and pedal steel whiz Sneaky Pete Kleinow. But it’s possible to listen from start to finish and barely notice them. Kunkel’s Sonor drums and Kleinow’s steel whinnies during California blend into Mitchell’s sharp but shimmering dulcimer chords. Stills’ bass line on Carey clings so closely to her see-sawing voice that it feels like a special effect. The players weren’t assuming she’d keep their stuff, anyway. “She’s so secure that, when she said hello and thanks for coming, I’d do what occurred to me,” Stills tells *MOJO* today. “I was very clear that she was free to erase it.”

In this secluded setting, Mitchell could let everything out, the first 27 years of her life’s emotional detritus extracted in 10 multivalent songs. She had been playing Little Green, a number she revealed decades later was about giving up her daughter for adoption, since at least 1967. Floating through delicate acoustic guitar, its examination of lost innocence slipped seam- ➤

“I had a really beautiful experience”: Willow Verkerk (in blue), daughter of Penelope Ann Schafer, with Joni and Sophie Verkerk; (bottom) Morning Glory Of The Vine, Mitchell and Schafer pictured below the poem Penelope.



“COME ON DOWN TO THE MERMAID CAFE...”

UNCOVERED: THE AMAZING STORY OF JONI’S SIDEKICK ON CRETE, PENELOPE ANN SCHAFER. BY GRAYSON HAVER CURRIN.

IN THE LORE around *Blue*, “Penelope” seems like some fictionalised goddess – the Ottawa poetess, as Joni Mitchell called her, who whisked the heartsick songwriter away to a transformational period on Crete, her mononym bestowed by Greek mythology. To wit, in previous essays about *Blue*, Penelope has never been given a last name.

But she is actually Penelope Ann Schafer, a best-selling Canadian poet, award-winning actress, Buddhist explorer, beloved impresario and mother of two, who had a decades-long and sometimes-contentious relationship with Mitchell. Her fascinating life can seem at times like a tall tale.

Born in 1939 in Victoria, British Columbia, she was raised by a Second World War hero, then starred in *The Tragic Diary Of Zero The Fool*, an acid trip of a film that inspired Werner Herzog. She worked for a drug cartel exchanging money in South America until she developed dysentery and returned to Canada, where she became a crux of the creative counterculture. And in the late ‘60s, she had a

short-lived tryst with Leonard Cohen (possibly while he dated Mitchell) before convincing Mitchell, in 1970, to follow her to Crete, where Cohen had purchased a home a decade earlier.

“Penelope loved travelling, but she was also interested in philosophy, history, and architecture, so it was a spiritual pilgrimage,” says Willow Verkerk, Penelope’s eldest daughter and a philosophy professor and author in Canada. “My mom also admired Leonard as a Canadian songwriter and poet, so she would have been curious to see where he had gone.”

Indeed, Penelope penned a poem about her time with Mitchell on Matala, called *Letter To Crete For Joni*. She wrote of “growing wild with the mystics” and “a simple day/ spent learning to pray/in the sun.” Mitchell, in turn, wrote a playful and lascivious poem about Penelope’s lust for life in Crete: “Penelope wants to fuck the sea... She wrinkles up her nose and screams.” In November 1970, after Mitchell had returned to the United States, she recited the poem on-stage with Frank Zappa. Verkerk still owns the 58th handmade copy of Mitchell’s *Morning Glory On The Vine* book, a photo of her mother and Mitchell affixed beneath the poem titled *Penelope*.

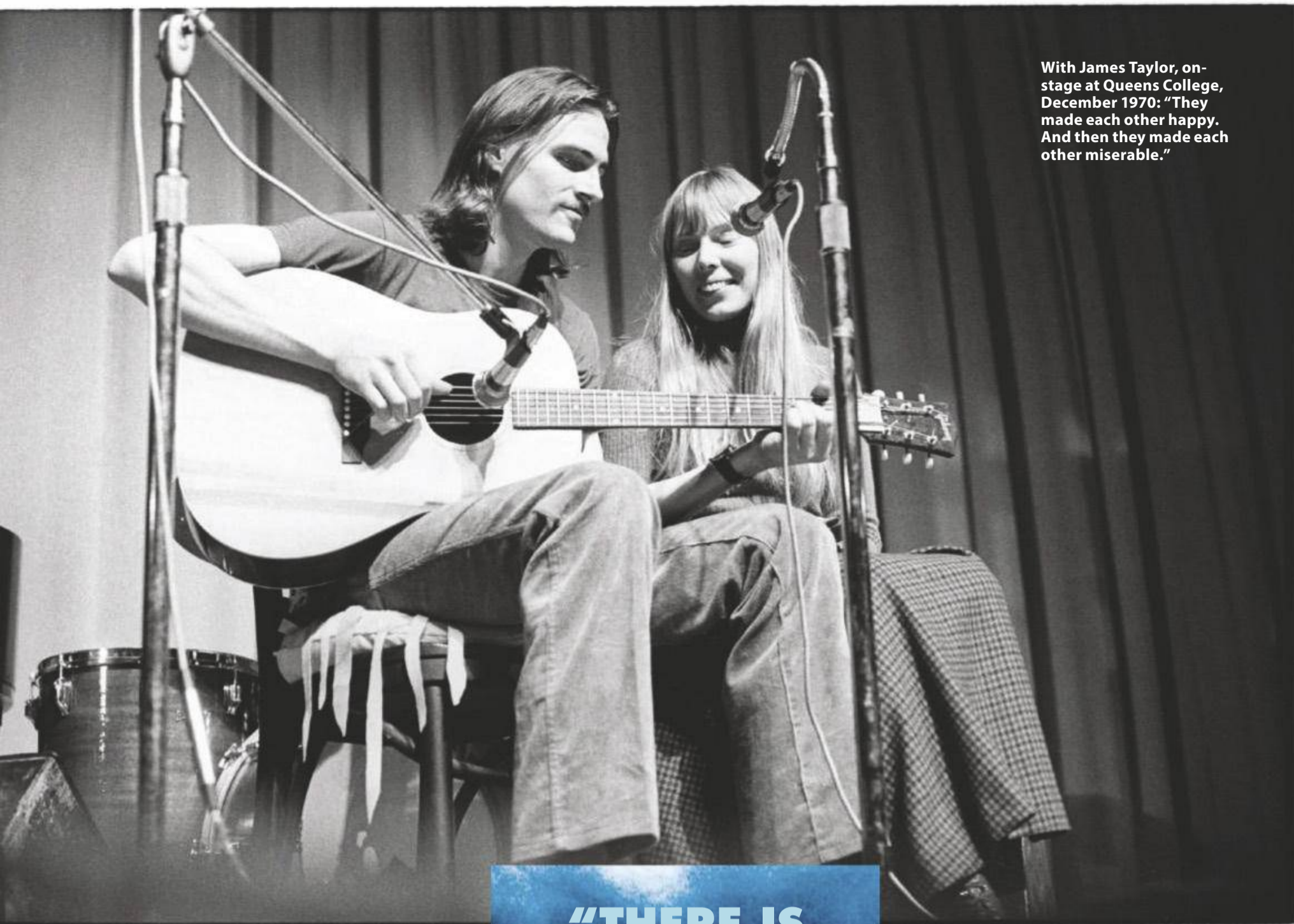
After Penelope’s second husband died in an accident in 1982, Mitchell was around more, even teaching Verkerk a little piano. But they were both opinionated, obdurate people, unafraid of telling their version of the truth. As Mitchell’s star rose, Penelope worried that money was warping her. After Penelope died in 2011, a mutual friend said she would tell Mitchell, but Verkerk never asked how Joni responded.

“I remember asking my mom if Joni was coming to visit us, because I had a really beautiful experience with her, a nice feeling,” she says. “But mom said Joni was too materialistic, that her fame was getting to her.”

“MOM SAID JONI WAS TOO MATERIALISTIC, THAT HER FAME WAS GETTING TO HER.”



Shutterstock, Courtesy of Willow Verkerk



With James Taylor, on-stage at Queens College, December 1970: "They made each other happy. And then they made each other miserable."

◀ lessly into *Blue*, as though its happy "icicles and birthday clothes" were metaphorical contrasts for its unnamed sorrows.

In some ways, its inevitable acceptance of hardship offers the anticipatory inverse of *The Last Time I Saw Richard*, the fraught piano finale about refusing to accept the doomed news of love. Richard warns her about the sad, cynical fate of romantics. "All good dreamers pass this way some day," she rebuts, her suddenly frail voice almost buckling beneath the burden. "Only a dark cocoon before I get my gorgeous wings and fly away."

Mitchell finished *Blue* early in the spring – a little more than a year since she arrived in Crete, about half a year since she made the beast lay down on the Isle Of Wight. Her relationship with Taylor didn't really survive the sessions, becoming a casualty of their individual struggles for meaning. Taylor was there to play guitar on *Blue*, but, for Mitchell, that was the extent of his support.

"James was a walking psychological disaster, anyway," Mitchell told Mercer decades later. "He was in no position to point a finger."

Or, as Asher puts it: "Joni and James made each other happy. And then they made each other miserable."

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NEARLY THREE YEARS AFTER TIM CONSIDINE snapped his low-light photos of Mitchell during her *Troubadour* debut, Gary Burden called. Despite Crosby's criticism, Mitchell had held onto Considine's photo and hoped to use it for the cover of her new album. By that point, Burden was an icon of record art, having worked with Neil Young, Steppenwolf,

**"THERE IS A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF LIFE IN ALL MY SONGS. IF I HAVE ANY PERSONAL PHILOSOPHY IT IS THAT I LIKE TRUTH."
JONI MITCHELL**

and The Doors. Considine loved his work and handed over the negative, never thinking about a fee.

"I have never given anyone a negative after that," says Considine, laughing and then sighing. "I like everything Gary ever did – except for *Blue*."

Burden bathed the picture in a blue light and sharpened the image until it looked almost like an antique daguerreotype – extreme contrast and edges, so that every crease of Mitchell's face looks deep, like a steep canyon on a topographical map. In 1968, Considine felt he had captured a certain softness; Burden, however, tapped Mitchell's experiences since, the windfall of highs and lows. Considine is still not sure who made the call, Mitchell or Burden, and it remains the only album cover he's shot.

Burden's version, at least, aligns with Mitchell's own take on that time, a moment when she felt so vulnerable she soon retreated to a cabin in rural Canada, where she planned to garden, maybe live without electricity, and write. After *Blue* was released in June 1971, she rarely appeared in public for the better part of a year. Never again would she make an album as exposed, unfiltered, and unflinching.

"I love that record more than any of them, really," Mitchell said in 1983, before her decades-long battle with its confessional legacy. "I'll never be that pure again." **M**

The Reprise Albums (1968-1971) containing newly remastered versions of Joni Mitchell's Song To A Seagull, Clouds, Ladies Of The Canyon and Blue, is available in 4-CD, 4-LP and digital formats from June 25 through Rhino.