

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 LAWN** **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

TURBULENT INDIGO

RELEASED 25 OCTOBER 1994

Can Joni Mitchell really be the Siren Of Sorrow?
And why is she so disillusioned with the world and the
music business this time? **BY DAVID CAVANAGH**

ON the last day of February 1996, Joni Mitchell was presented with two Grammy awards – her first since 1974 – for her 15th studio album, *Turbulent Indigo*. Taking the stage arm in arm with Larry Klein, Mitchell looked stunned and thrilled. To win the Grammy for Best Pop Album was no little achievement for a 52-year-old in a youth-driven industry (though not everyone thought so; the glare on the face of Mariah Carey, a runner-up, was priceless). Mitchell, who hadn't slept for two days prior to the ceremony, delivered her acceptance speech in a fit of giggles. "We had cats for help," she jabbered. "We went out to a pet shop and got a couple of cute little cats to frolic around, to take the tension off the engineer. Ha!"

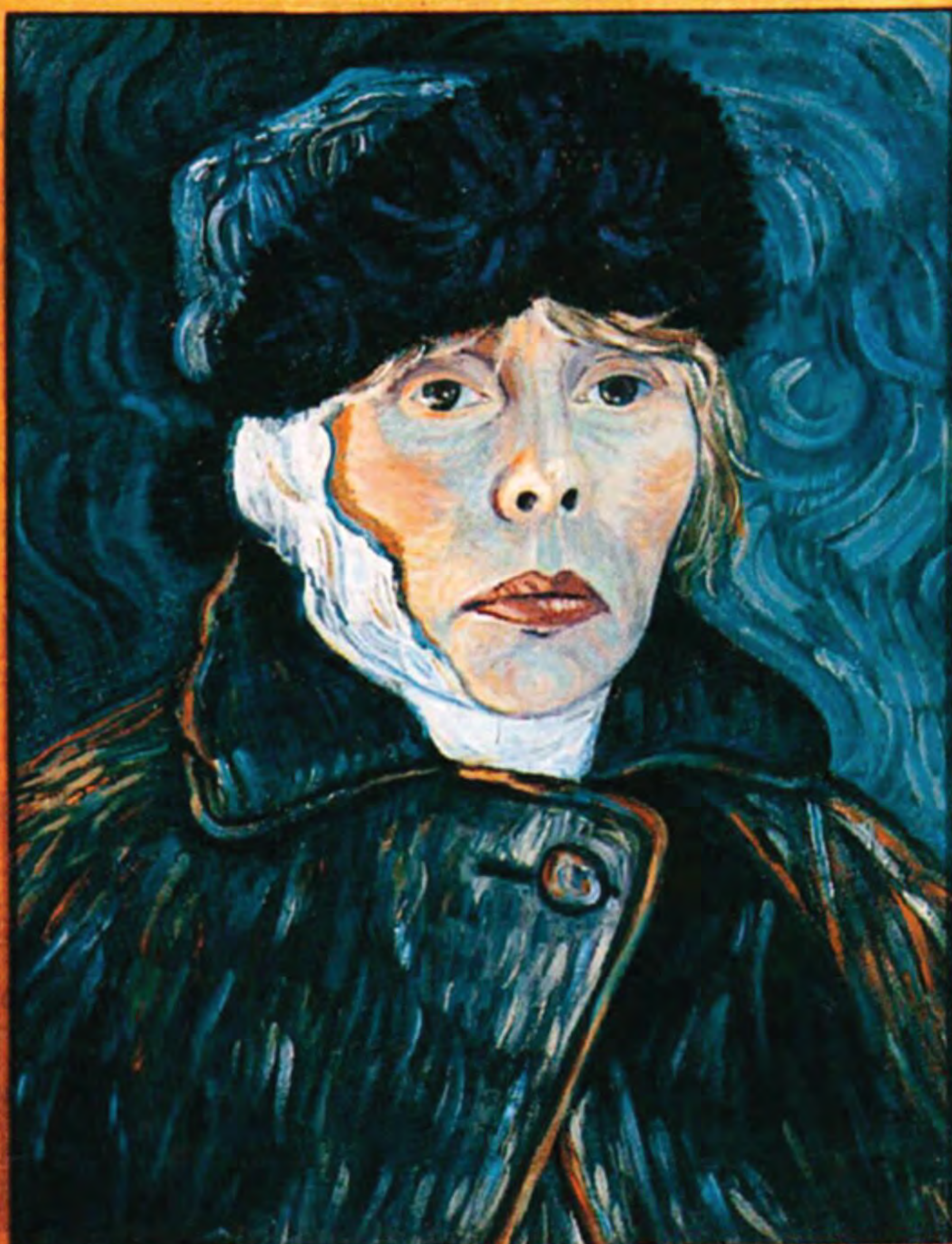
She returned to her seat to be embraced by her boyfriend, a Canadian songwriter named Don Freed. Klein retook his seat next to his girlfriend. If it was awkward for them to be socialising as a foursome, imagine how *Turbulent Indigo*'s engineer must have felt when he arrived at Mitchell's Bel Air studio one day in 1993 to be told that Joni and Klein were divorcing after 11 years of marriage – and intended to co-produce the album regardless. "That was a trip," Mitchell later recalled. "We were so uncooperative, it was awful." The divorce was her first major relationship break-up since the days when she used to write famous songs about the break-ups of her major relationships.

While praise for *Turbulent Indigo* wasn't universal, it was widely acclaimed as her most significant release since the '70s. The compliments were appreciated by

the ever-sensitive Mitchell, especially in the light of the voter apathy that had greeted *Chalk Mark In A Rain Storm* and *Night Ride Home*. By 1993-4, clear lines of inspiration could be traced back to Mitchell's golden age from singer-songwriters such as Tori Amos, Aimee Mann, Jane Siberry, Sarah McLachlan and Kristin Hersh – and even, if you wanted to stretch a point about emotional candour, PJ Harvey. All those artists had fans who were in their teens. There seemed no reason why those fans couldn't also be fans of Joni Mitchell. Cindy Lee Berryhill, another singer-songwriter, summed up Mitchell's allure in a 1996 magazine piece: "Cool words, great guitar player, excellent blonde hair." And more seriously: "As far as I'm concerned, she's way more real in her pissed-offedness than some green-M&M-eating, posing-for-the-press, copycat nu-punker." It was that "pissed-offedness" – a sense of injustice bordering on outrage – that informed the subject matter of *Turbulent Indigo*.

"A troubled look at the world around her," a presenter on CBS called it, and he wasn't kidding. With its songs about AIDS, spousal abuse, the "ulcerated ozone" and the degrading exploitation of young women by sadistic nuns in an Irish convent, it didn't take long for the LP to get a reputation for hard-hitting social commentary. *Turbulent indigo*, as a colour and as a premise, could be seen as an ominous advance on *Night Ride Home*'s "Exxon blue", and could be applied to everything from a bruise on a face to a gathering storm in a Van Gogh sky. "Let me speak," Mitchell sang towards the album's end, "let me spit out my bitterness". ➤

JONI
MITCHELL
TURBULENT
INDIGO



There was a sense of
injustice bordering on
outrage that informed
the subject matter of
Turbulent Indigo

The track that drew most attention was “Sex Kills”, a headline-grabbing title for a song about the direful plagues that threaten an anxious citizen of LA from every angle. Mitchell cruises the streets to a sinister soundtrack like De Niro in *Taxi Driver*, sickened by all she sees, her antenna tuned to a kind of pan-societal road rage. “Indian chiefs with their old beliefs know the balance is undone/Crazy ions/You can feel it out in traffic/Everyone hates everyone”. The song was awash in modern synthetic textures and had a reasonably catchy chorus under the circumstances, and it might have been a strong pre-album single if someone had been braver. In the end, with Madonna’s *Bedtime Stories* and Lisa Germano’s *Geek The Girl* scheduled to come out the same day as *Turbulent Indigo* – dear God, how the landscape had changed since *Ladies Of The Canyon* – Mitchell’s label, Reprise, tasked with obtaining the support of American radio and MTV for a middle-aged, non-touring artist with the dreaded imprint of jazz on her latter-day work, plumped for a more conservative choice, “How Do You Stop”.

A soul ballad written by the duo of Dan Hartman and Charlie Midnight, “How Do You Stop” had first appeared on a 1986 album by James Brown. There’s generally little overlap between the canons of Mitchell and the Godfather Of Soul, but a key verse halfway through the song may explain its appeal to her: “You’ve had success/Lots of fancy friends/You’ve tasted the good life/You thought it would never end/One day you’re too young, then you’re in your prime/Then you’re looking back at the hands of time”. For Mitchell, a writer who had worried about the ticking of the clock since her early thirties, if not her mid-twenties, the idea of chronicling a lifetime in those lines would have been irresistible. Her version, featuring the British R’n’B sensation Seal on backing vocals, took on added poignancy when its co-writer Hartman, a former disco star who belted out high-energy hits (“Instant Replay”, “Relight My Fire”) around the time that Mitchell was collaborating with Charles Mingus, died of an AIDS-related brain tumour while *Turbulent Indigo* was in production. In the song’s video, Mitchell and Seal danced discreetly around each other like a couple in an advert waiting for an Old English Sheepdog to enter the room. But while Seal stormed America with “Kiss From A Rose” in the months ahead, “How Do You Stop” sold so poorly it didn’t even register a chart position.

On an album full of people trudging their way through their daily ordeals, the indignities to which women are subjected are particularly grim. Cloaked in apparitional *Twin Peaks* synths, “The Magdalene Laundries” is written in the voice of a long-dead Irish woman forced to work in Dickensian conditions in a convent-run institution, for no other reason than because the Catholic Church deems her to

CRITICS’ VERDICT

“This is not a bad album. There’s just no point in listening to Joni Mitchell being anything less than brilliant... Here she’s just drunk and boring someone in some dark café.”
EMMA FORREST, NME, NOVEMBER 5, 1994

be a fallen woman. The inmates of the real-life Magdalene Laundries in the 19th and 20th centuries were unmarried mothers, prostitutes, girls suspected of being sexually curious and – in Mitchell’s lyric – teenagers made pregnant by their own fathers. She learned of their horror stories just as the rest of the world did, when newspaper articles in 1993 revealed the discovery of 130 women’s bodies in a mass grave in Dublin. The testimonies of survivors would later inspire two documentaries and a feature film, *The Magdalene Sisters* (2002).

From eerie visions of sepia laundries, Mitchell, now seated at a piano, jerks us into a present-day nightmare. Her piano chords, in and around which floats the melancholy soprano saxophone of Wayne Shorter, seem too elegant for the scenario they paint – a man assaulting his partner, then telling his friends that she deserved it. The three words in the title (“Not To Blame”) end each verse, giving the man his habitual get-out clause. Mitchell was irritated when the media concluded that the man was Jackson Browne, her onetime boyfriend, who, in 1992, had been accused of beating up his partner, Daryl Hannah. “It’s not about anyone specific,” Joni scolded them. “It’s about the phenomenon of the battered woman at this time.” She could hardly blame the journalists for their assumption: the lyrics of “Not To Blame” gave several clues to his identity. Again, she changed the subject – or refused to let it be changed. “Ugliness is on the increase,” she told an interviewer, “especially towards women.” In the years following *Turbulent Indigo*’s release, Browne denounced Mitchell as “very embittered” and condemned the song as “beneath her”. A decade after their feud appeared to die down, Sheila Weller’s 2008 book *Girls Like Us: Carole King, Joni Mitchell And Carly Simon – And The Journey Of A Generation* controversially claimed that Mitchell had attempted suicide in 1972 during her relationship with Browne.

Although Mitchell insisted in her mid-’90s meetings with the press that she was “not an uncheerful person”, the mere fact that she felt obliged to say it underlines just how stark and hopeless *Turbulent Indigo*’s prognosis for humanity is. Her voice may have a smoky intimacy that beckons us towards her (and when the vocal melody is an agile one, for example in “Last Chance

In her cover concept, she identifies with the most tormented and neglected figure in art

Turbulent times: Mitchell performs at the Autry Museum of Western Heritage, Los Angeles, January 1995



Lost”, she sounds like an uncanny cross between Rickie Lee Jones and Harriet Wheeler of The Sundays); but the characters in the songs are mostly pessimistic, photophobic and prone to desolate monologues. “The Sire Of Sorrow (Job’s Sad Song)” is a seven-minute journey into the agonised mind of Job, the Bible’s ultimate sufferer, complete with taunts from a chorus of antagonists. Mitchell, who has denied that it is autobiographical, sequences it as the album’s closing track, not as an anthem or a psalm but as an irrevocable, endlessly tragic totem for all the people in *Turbulent Indigo* who have been forsaken by a man or a God.

Who, then, has forsaken Joni? In her cover concept, she identifies with the most tormented and neglected figure in western art. While he was alive, Vincent Van Gogh, whose *Self-Portrait With Bandaged Ear* she impudently recreates on the front of *Turbulent Indigo*, would have been shunned as a dangerous lunatic by the hypocrites who now revere him as a genius, she scathingly contends in the album’s title track. (“The madman hangs in fancy homes they wouldn’t let him near/He’d piss in their fireplace!”) Artistic injustice is the subtlest of the injustices that Mitchell confronts on



Turbulent Indigo, but it's an injustice that cuts her to the quick all the same. In a 2005 interview, *Reader's Digest* would ask her if criticism of her post-1980 LPs had upset her. "It upset me all the way," she confirmed. "I watched as the industry standards got lower and lower. The sediment rose to the top, and crap was being elevated. More formulated, less sincere. It's all very typical of a culture in decline."

To put *Turbulent Indigo* in its correct context, it was a unilateral attempt by Mitchell to arrest a cultural decline while reminding the philistines in the music business that Mitchell, far from being an icon of the Woodstock generation who had faded from popularity, was an enduring genius whose records continued to be works of art. (When she was first introduced to Don Freed in 1993, he asked her how she was. "Undervalued," she replied. She began her *Self-Portrait With Bandaged Ear* not long afterwards.) Moreover, even when she received an award for "distinguished creative achievement" from *Billboard* magazine at the end of 1995, she was noticeably prickly about it, referring in her speech to "a sea of misunderstandings and rejections and dismissals" that had submerged her albums between 1985 and

1991, and describing herself as feeling as though she was "emerging from the McCarthy era". Well! What an apocalyptic way she had of looking at her record sales. Not only undervalued but blacklisted, too. No wonder she empathised with Job.

Only a couple of months later, in February 1996, she was all smiles when she collected the third and fourth Grammys of her career (Best Pop Album and Best Album Package). The euphoria, however, lasted less than 24 hours. When she bought a newspaper the next day, it had an interesting article about singer-songwriters. There was a Then list, and a Now list. She was in the Then list. Could that have been the final straw? Was

that the moment when the sea of misunderstandings, rejections and dismissals broke Joni's banks? The nocturnal artist knew she had better ways to spend her time. She painted four canvases for every song she wrote. "I paint all night," she said in the *Reader's Digest* interview. "The night is quiet and everything shuts down, so night is a creative time for me."

She could produce 40 paintings in the next three years and no music critic or radio programmer would shrug their shoulders and talk about Alanis Morissette. The songs she wrote for her next album, she decided, would be her last. ●

TRACKMARKS TURBULENT INDIGO

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| 1 Sunny Sunday
★★★ | 7 Not To Blame
★★★ |
| 2 Sex Kills ★★★★★ | 8 Borderline ★★★★★ |
| 3 How Do You Stop
★★★ | 9 Yvette In English
★★★ |
| 4 Turbulent Indigo
★★★★ | 10 The Sire Of Sorrow
(Job's Sad Song)
★★★★ |
| 5 Last Chance Lost
★★★★ | |
| 6 The Magdalene
Laundries
★★★★ | |
- Label: Reprise
Produced by: Joni Mitchell and Larry Klein

Recorded at: The Kiva, Los Angeles
Personnel: Joni Mitchell (guitar, keyboards, percussion, vocals), Larry Klein (bass, keyboards), Wayne Shorter (soprano saxophone), Michael Landau (electric guitar), Stuart Smith (electric guitar),

Greg Leisz (pedal steel guitar), Bill Dillon (guitar organ), Carlos Vega (drums), Jim Keltner (drums), Seal (vocals on "How Do You Stop"), Charles Valentino and Kris Kello (backing vocals on "Yvette In English")
Highest chart position: UK 53; US 47