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Concert Review

# Joni Mitchell 'Unearthly'

By Ed Offley

The third time I saw Joni Mitchell was the best time of all.

The first time, in daylight, she was introduced sitting behind a portable upright piano in a Newport, R.I., pasture. She sang four songs from "Song to a Seagull" and was warmly applauded. That was 1969.

It was seven weeks before Woodstock, and Joni's demeanor reflected her singing — a little too upright, the soprano lilting nervously across an afternoon sky. Enjoyable, though.

The second time I saw Joni Mitchell I'll talk about in a while.

The third time, Tom Scott and the L.A. Express, her backup group at William and

Mary Hall last Friday, were more than adequate. Good, tight sort of jazz. I know essentially nothing about jazz, but I do know almost-jazz. They played okay almost-jazz.

No Longer Shy

She came on stage, picked up her guitar and began to sing. No more shy and piercing melodies to haunt the solitary listener. Joni, somewhere along the way from Newport to Williamsburg, had picked up a touch of Mick Jagger in the soul.

Love came to my door  
With a sleeping roll  
And a madman's soul  
He thought for sure  
I'd seen him  
Dancing up a river  
in the dark  
Looking for a woman  
To court and spark

There is, one friend told me

once, a different Joni Mitchell in each of her records. Perhaps it's just the rare ability she has shown as a performer, but each album casts somewhat of a different spell than the others.

Sometimes Boring

"Court and Spark," her newest album, contains one or two of her throwback here-I-am-sitting-here-alone songs, the only tendency this lady has for boring her audience. But on stage, she came out with the cream of her four previous records and some new selections that were simply mind-blowing.

Like: "Troubled Child," a lazily wandering ballad which takes the listener right up to Joni's "sterilized room," where the shock of knowing "you really have no one, only a river of changing faces" comes out.

She loosened up somewhat after the first few songs, rapped with the audience, smilingly accepted flowers from her fans. She put down a small group of noisy hecklers with the gentlest slash: "Wow, I feel like I've timewarped into the '50s."

Mastery Shows

On piano, on guitar, on dulcimer, Joni showed a mastery of instrument which strongly complemented her voice. Her voice was unearthly.

The second time I met Joni Mitchell I was in line buying cigarettes in the Viking Hotel, in Newport. A slender, rather pretty girl was in line behind me and we had a pleasant conversation for about five minutes about what far-out people we'd met during the Newport Folk Festival.

It was only after several minutes of talk that I realized this pretty lady was in fact — Joni. I tried not to show this, but my smile gave me away. She has a beautiful smile.

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