

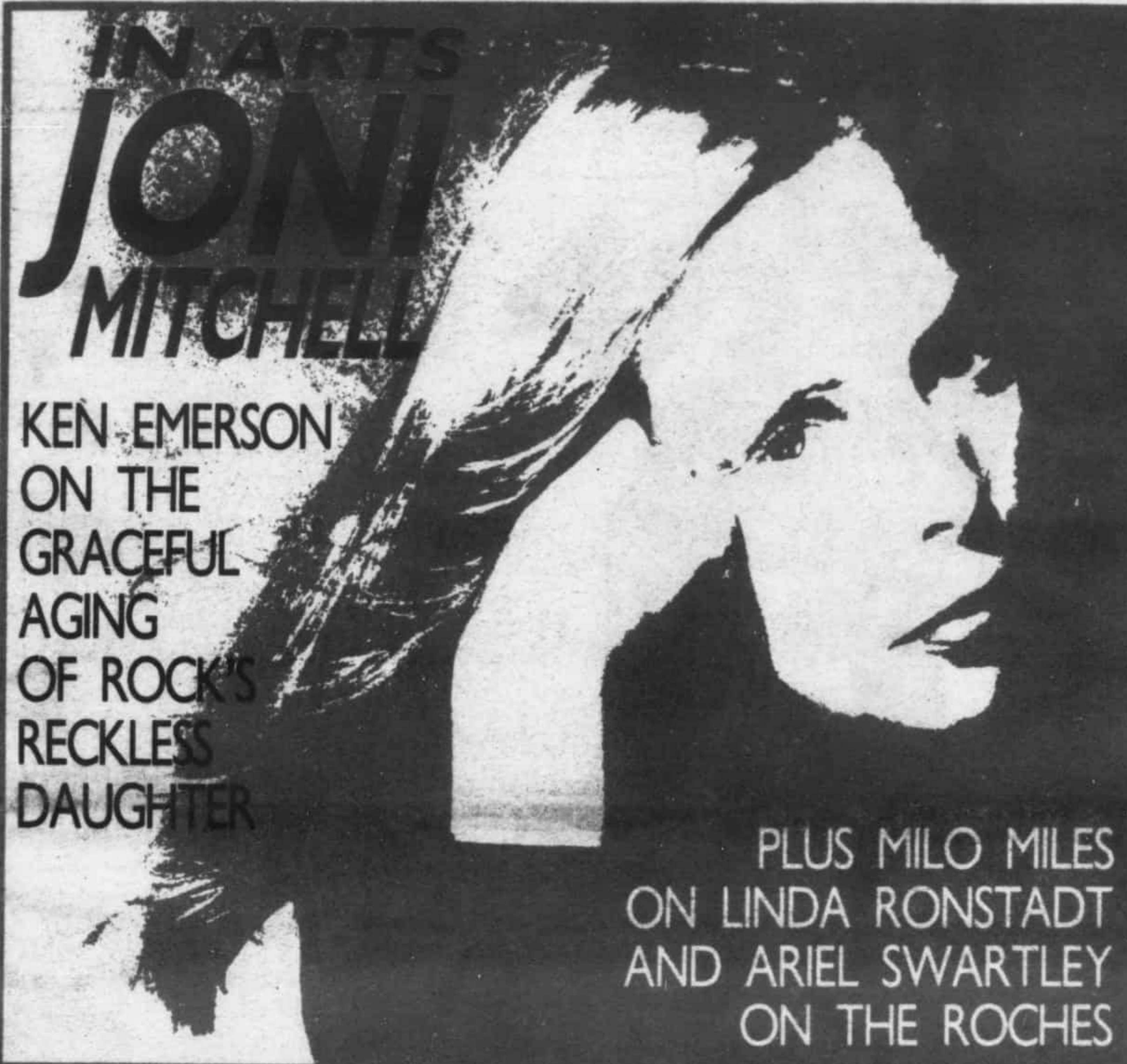
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THE BOSTON
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IN ARTS
JONI MITCHELL

KEN EMERSON
ON THE
GRACEFUL
AGING
OF ROCK'S
RECKLESS
DAUGHTER



PLUS MILO MILES
ON LINDA RONSTADT
AND ARIEL SWARTLEY
ON THE ROCHES

The great White hunt

The feds dig into
the mayor's turf

by Michael Rezendes

Even after serving six months of a three-year sentence at the federal penitentiary in Danbury, Connecticut, George N. Collatos, the former Boston Re-development Authority (BRA) official, was finding it difficult to adjust to prison life. Sixty-two years old, in poor health, and accustomed to the political high life, Collatos last year pleaded guilty to extortion charges rather than stand trial and face doing really serious time. He could only console himself with the knowledge that if he could hang on for just six more months, he'd become eligible for parole.

As bad as things were for Collatos, they were about to get worse. On September 29, he was indicted again — this time on 12 counts of perjury. The new indictment came as a result of new testimony Collatos gave before a grand jury looking into his fund-raising activities on behalf of Boston Mayor Kevin H. White. Now the admitted shakedown artist must confront the possibility that the prison in Danbury will be his last home. For if convicted of all 12 counts of perjury, Collatos could be ordered to spend an additional 60 years in jail.

The willingness of newly appointed US Attorney William F. Weld to add perjury to the arsenal of ready weapons in the fight against corruption was seen as a clear signal to the mayor and his minions at City Hall that the implicit rules by which federal prosecutors had played during previous White administrations have changed. The indictment, moreover, marked a public declaration of war, a war the US attorney

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The Leninist left and the Klan Worthy adversaries

by Michael Matza

The images float into focus like freeze frames from a newsreel that began in the '60s and simply never stopped running.

— Frame one: it's August of 1975 in Boston. In a barricaded Huntington Avenue basement apartment that looks like "a bunker" to *Phoenix* reporter Howard Husock, a fervent group of anti-racists is talking about the political "line" it will take to support and promote the court-ordered desegregation of the city's schools as busing moves into its second year. The windows of the apartment are covered with wire mesh. Amid the litter of old newspapers, petitions, and pamphlets, its occupants sit on crumbling furniture. Some are tugging at bandages on eyes and arms. The injuries are fresh, sustained in a clash with angry anti-busers.

— Frame two: it's September 13, 1980, in Scotland, Connecticut. Some 300 Ku Klux Klan members and supporters have assembled on the property of a sympathetic farmer to stage a cross-burning. The forces of the anti-Klan are there, too; in numbers approaching 700. The action is

predictably hot. After two hours of skirmishing on a country road, the anti-Klan takes credit for inflicting injuries that send 40 Klan sympathizers to the hospital. In all, nine people are arrested. In a sequence captured on film by photographer Michael Grecco, a lanky man with a mustache helps to topple a Klan sympathizer into a roadside ditch, then spears him viciously in the ribs with a thick wooden flagpole from which a political banner flies.

— Frame three: there's Bill Wilkinson, Imperial Wizard of the Invisible Empire, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, recruiting for the Klan Youth Corps on the October 14 edition of Channel 4's *People Are Talking*. Suddenly, the decorum of the midday audience-participation show is shattered by a chant in the studio audience. "Asian, Latin, black, and white/Against racism we must unite," they roar, launching a demonstration not soon to be forgotten in the annals of local live TV. It begins when Wilkinson is hit on the chest with an egg. Under the

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BOSTON AFTER DARK ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

THE BOSTON PHOENIX, SECTION THREE, NOVEMBER 9, 1982

MITCHELL AT THE GATES OF DAWN

by Ken Emerson

"Heart and humor and
humility."
He said, "will lighten up your
heavy load."
I left him then for the refuge
of the roads.
— "Refuge of the Roads," 1976

It takes cheerful resignation
Heart and humility
That's all it takes
A cheerful person told me.
— "Moon at the Window," 1982

It's taken Joni Mitchell six years to recognize the wisdom of the advice she rejected at the end of *Hejira*. During the interim, I pretty much stopped listening to her records; to judge from her declining sales, a lot of other people did, too. Let's not kid ourselves that this was a case of an experimental performer whose work was going over the heads of hoi polloi. *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter* (1977) and *Mingus* (1979) failed to find an audience not because they were too avant-garde but because they were bad records, full of the "sophomore jive" and "Negro affectations" Mitchell had derided on *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* (1975).

The higher Mitchell's anima rose, the more gaseous her music became. *Don Juan* ranks among the most ponderously epic, filibustering albums ever recorded. *Mingus* proved a well-intentioned but wrongheaded homage — effete, unswinging, and naive, it was everything that Charles Mingus's music was emphatically not. The ambition that had made Mitchell one of the most admirable songwriters of the early and mid '70s puffed into self-importance; the confessionalism that had made her so moving cheapened into self-display. Mitchell had never been at a loss for ego. Here was a woman, after all, who had managed in one song, "Judgement of the Moon and Stars (Ludwig's Tune)" on 1972's *For the Roses*, to identify not only with Beethoven but with Sylvia Plath and Jesus Christ. But by 1980, she seemed to possess little but delusions of grandeur.

Mitchell's belated rediscovery of "heart and humor and humility" makes *Wild Things Run Fast* (Geffen) her finest album since *Hejira* and her most commercial since *Court and Spark* (1974). The opening measures of the first cut, "Chinese Cafe/Unchained Melody," herald a return to
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RONSTADT'S EVENING OF THE DAY

by Milo Miles

For a record that, intentionally or not, marks the end of Linda Ronstadt's pop dominance, *Get Closer* (Asylum) is an unusually casual, dry-eyed curtain call — it includes nods to her songwriting kith and kin as well as leftovers from her heyday and a few glassy late-period laments. *Get Closer* does not sum up or revise Ronstadt's career so much as it lifelessly recycles a once-potent formula now helplessly (hopelessly?) out of synch with even rock's mainstream. True, there's always been something unheeded about Ronstadt; the very purity of her voice, the way she primped all those plum-perfect notes, is an emblem of rock and roll reduced to mere fashion. If there is something "timeless" about even Ronstadt's best work ("You're No Good"), it is because those songs have no history, no past or future — in short, no point of view. Linda Ronstadt is a pop cipher, a blank; she's never allowed herself to indulge in even Elton John's goofy gaucherie (speaking of '70s ciphers). From her coronation on the charts with *Heart like a Wheel* (1974) until her defensive new-wave counterattack on *Mad Love* (1980), Ronstadt was the voice of rock's consolidation, the climax of LA's loveless care. Her records stood as the surest litmus test for '70s rock fans, and the all-encompassing range of her work with producer Peter Asher and guitarist/songwriter/arranger Andrew Gold forced both her detractors and her defenders to consider her only on her own fashion-designer terms.

Ronstadt's studio "class," the sly selection of oldies, and the smug flexibility of the accompaniment once distilled what was considered rock's center (when it had one). Through Ronstadt Peter Asher became one of the hit producers of the decade, because he figured out just how much pop paradise (and in what proportions) a post-counterculture audience would buy. Ronstadt's records after *Heart* were calibrated smorgasbords of love-song entrées: two or three oldies (usually hits half-remembered by white rock fans); two genre tunes (usually C&W, folk, or Tin Pan Alley); a batch of songs from established songwriting peers (J.D. Souther, Jackson Browne, and Randy Newman, for example); and a sprinkling of numbers by newcomers (Karla Bonoff, Warren Zevon, and Kate and Anna McGarrigle, for instance). And
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MORNING, NOON, AND NIGHT



THE ROCHES IN SUNSHINE AND IN SHADOW

by Ariel Swartley

Imagine Ian Hunter without his shades, Johnny Lydon without his attitude, AC/ without DC, Ted Nugent eating quiche. . . . Hard, isn't it? Then imagine Suzzy Roche at the local laundromat. Easy. She even wrote a song about it, "The Death of Suzzy Roche" (on 1980's *Nurds*), in which she is criticized — well actually, offed — by an attendant annoyed by the airs Suzzy puts on with the Era and the Clorox II. Even those high priestesses of the quotidian, the Delta 5, never got quite so mundane as a breach of manners at the washeteria. (If Suzzy had been strangled instead of stabbed, would that have been wring around the collar?) The point is rock and roll is a costume drama, a Halloween mask, Lucy in Disguise. Underneath Mick Jagger's body paint and chicken chest beats the heart of an articulate antiques collector — but you'd never know it when the whip comes down on stage. Rock-and-rollers reinvent

themselves. Folkies — anachronistic nurds that they fear they are — don't think they have to. The Roches have a song about all of the above on their new album, *Keep On Doing* (Warner Bros.). "I Fell in Love" is about falling in love with a motorcycle punk but only after seeing him dressed in a suit and tie at his mother's house. This doesn't sound nearly so tongue-in-cheek once they've flung their harmonies over it like high-flying Frisbees. I mean, they're not trying to be uncool — they really don't see the appeal of a tough-guy walk. It's just another one of those things, like combat boots or Kinks T-shirts, that identifies "the kind of animal that goes in herds."

Wait a minute — who's calling whom a folkie? Didn't *The Roches*, the sisters' 1979 debut produced by the eternally en-avant Robert Fripp, anticipate the Go-Gos' cool-headed girlishness by a good two years,
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Phil in Phlialash

Berlin Airlift: a jumping-off point

Cellars by starlight

Rocking around the clock

by Joyce Millman

Didi Stewart's hard-edged commercial pop and Berlin Airlift's soft-focus mainstream rock would've seemed dark horses in the race to become Boston's next big-time exports, but CBS has just released Stewart's *Begin Here* (Kirshner) and *Berlin Airlift* (Handshake). It's ironic that Berlin Airlift and Stewart are not new-wave performers (neither are the Stompers or the Jon Butcher Axis, both also recently signed to major labels); just two years ago, the majors were scampering to sign local post-Cars progressives like Robin Lane and the Chartbusters, the Rings, and the Nervous Eaters. All these performers were dropped from their labels when their

records failed to go gold, and now, the music-business slump is dictating a return to lower-risk acts. As local new-wave bands like Mission of Burma (Ace of Hearts), November Group (Modern Method), and Rubber Rodeo (Eat Records) have discovered, independent labels are not only more hospitable nowadays, they're safer.

But *Berlin Airlift* and *Begin Here* owe their existence to new wave. Rick Berlin found a sympathetic format for his theatrical trappings in new wave (his wacky early-'70s band, Orchestra Luna, even anticipated it); Stewart was sprung from her guitar-strumming folkiedom by new wave's onslaught of ag-

gressive female rockers. Neither of these albums is trailblazing or inventive, but how many trailblazing, inventive big-label debuts by American performers have there been this year? Only X's *Under the Big Black Sun* (their third album, but their first for Elektra) and Greg Copeland's *Revenge Will Come* (Geffen) qualify for my Top 10.

Berlin Airlift and *Begin Here* are testimony to professional persistence, reminders of the drudgery of life in the bars. They show us what it's like to live just beyond the grasp of success. Two previous recording contracts slipped through Berlin's fingers (in 1975, with Orchestra Luna, and in 1978, with Luna); the release of

Stewart's album was delayed for nearly a year when Kirshner ran out of money. Berlin, at 37, and Stewart, at 29, are veterans now marketed as new faces; they're struggling to win a reasonable share of an increasingly atomized, elusive, and empty-pocketed public. Finally given the chance to reach an audience of millions, they gamble on approaching their listeners adult-to-adult.

Produced by Stephan Galfas, Stewart's *Begin Here* is direct, sleek pop: the synthesizers nod to the Top 40; the heavyweight guitars (including Steve Perry, courtesy of Berlin Airlift) wink at the Top 10. A charming, homespun performer, Stewart has a big, hearty, well-controlled voice, with a touch of Streisand's bravado (though she should curb her tendency toward schmaltzy, Streisandesque ballads like "Angelina") and a dash of white-girl soul. Like Jennifer Warnes and Ellen Shipley, she's an active intelligence rather than a glam-

orous mouthpiece; she laughs off the idea of being a predatory lover in the bubbly single "Reckless Heart." And with Linda Ronstadt, pop's fading queen, acting more ludicrously youthful with each album (at 37, she's coyly posing in Mary Janes and ankle socks on the cover of *Get Closer* — will she sport Dr. Dentons and a teddy bear when she hits 40?), Stewart's reluctance to look like an average Valley Girl is all the more welcome.

As a songwriter, Stewart astutely hints at influences (Jerry Lee Lewis in "Goin' on Safari," Holland-Dozier-Holland in "Can't Get Through to You") without ripping them off. Her subjects are uncommonly understated — female friendship ("Girl's Night Out"), gun control ("Saturday Night Special"), corporate climbing ("Upward Mobility"). Under their arena-rock disguises, these last two numbers are subversive and wry. On "Saturday Night Special,"

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Mitchell

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the rich, rolling sonorities of *Hejira*. The lyrics, comparing Mitchell's solitary lot to that of a long-married friend from childhood, also hearken back to that album, particularly "Song for Sharon." But there's none of the hipper-than-thou contempt for the bourgeoisie that made much of *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* seem so smug. The Christmas lights sparkling on the lawn in "Chinese Cafe" beckon wistfully. No longer pretending to be Don Juan's hell-raising daughter, a sadder but wiser Mitchell is more humane toward others and more honest with herself: "Carol, we're middle-class/We're middle-aged." Weaving in and out of the song's swirls are not only snatches of "Unchained Melody" — an exquisitely ironic touch, since Mitchell's lament is that no one can break the bonds of time — but also lines from "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow" and, during the fade, "Who Knows Where the Time Goes."

Yet Mitchell is not beating a nostalgic retreat back to Judy Collins's territory. Kicking off with a witty allusion to Julius Caesar ("He came/She smiled")

and concluding with a hilarious one to the Troggs ("Wild thing/I thought you loved me"), the ensuing title track bolts out of the stable with new-wave zest. Every time "Wild Things Run Fast" slows down to catch its breath, Steve Lukather's guitar goads it on or Larry Williams's synthesizer whumps it on the backside. Mitchell squeezes a lot of musical dynamics into this song's mere two minutes, and she's equally economical, here and throughout the album, with her words. She's reined in her prosy prolixity, curbed her elliptical poetastery and learned once again how to express herself directly and precisely. One verse of "Chinese Cafe," for example, says more about Indians and ecology, and says it more compellingly, than 16 minutes of *Don Juan's* "Paprika Plains."

Mitchell's friskiness also refreshes *Wild Things Run Fast*. She doesn't seem to have had so much fun in the studio since *Court and Spark* — and then the good time was David Geffen's (on "Free Man in Paris"). The glee with which she whoops "Hot dog, darlin'" amid the stuttering rhythms and acoustic folkiness of "Solid Love," or "Yes I do — I love ya!" on "Underneath the Streetlight," is as infectious as a fit of giggles.

Such girlishness may prevent

Wild Things from plumbing the *profondeurs* of an album like *Hejira*. There's no carefully cultivated existential Angst here, just everyday anxiety. Nor are there any of the head games that Mitchell used to play as she sought to escape the mental constraints of gender. But why do you have to be a man in order to be taken (or, more important still, to take yourself) seriously? *Wild Things* isn't superficial — indeed, it's inspiring — because an artist who had willed herself into icy androgyny has decided that it's okay to be a girl — and a woman. "Why do you keep on trying to make a man of me?", Mitchell complains on the slinky "Ladies' Man," and then launches into a sultry chorus of overdubbed moans that are bluesier, than anything she has recorded. On "Man to Man," with James Taylor providing the background vocals, she protests that the revolving door of her love life has left her numb and uncaring. Shuttling from "man to man to man" has turned her into a man, when what she really longs to be is "woman to man."

It's unlikely that Mitchell will ever become an earth mother, but her new awareness (or acceptance) of her femininity has certainly thawed her vocals. The adolescent innocence with which she sings "Unchained Melody"

and her breathy vulnerability on "Ladies' Man" melt the mannered sang-froid of her performances on *Mingus*. Indeed, *Wild Things* could be construed as an indictment of the suave, self-absorbed masculinity of jazz. "Be Cool" is an ironic bill of particulars that presents Wayne Shorter's soprano saxophone as Exhibit A. The way Shorter flutters noncommittally over the tune, never dipping beneath its surface, is dramatically and diametrically opposed to the emotional engagement *Wild Things* cries out for.

Not that Mitchell has spurned jazz entirely. There's the darting melody of "Moon at the Window," for instance, on which Shorter again tootles obbligato. And Mitchell's new bass player, Larry Klein (from Freddy Hubbard's band), unostentatiously echoes Jaco Pastorius, her collaborator from *Hejira* through *Mingus*. But along with her womanliness, Mitchell has rediscovered the ebullience of rock and roll. You can almost see her grin and shake her hips as the chorus of "Underneath the Streetlight" revs into the refrain of Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Proud Mary." "You Dream Flat Tires" rocks harder still, and the only bug in its engine is the clichéd whine of Mike Landau's guitar. Landau

appears on four tracks on *Wild Things* and screws up two of them, the second being an update of "(You're So Square) Baby, I Don't Care." Although the Buddy Holly cover makes sense thematically, since *Wild Things* is about not being cool, Landau's lead guitar is distorted sludge.

Where do rock and roll and womanhood and "heart and humor and humility" finally lead Mitchell on *Wild Things*? To the Bible. The album's last track, "Love," is a free translation of I Corinthians 13 — the chapter with the famous line "For now we see through a glass, darkly." It's at once hippy-dippy and pretentious to end a record with Scripture and a song entitled "Love." As if it made her uncomfortable, too, Mitchell's vocal, for the first time on the album, seems self-conscious, and the amorphous arrangement, once again featuring Shorter's soprano sax, sounds artful rather than heartfelt. And yet it is fitting that *Wild Things* ends with Mitchell regretting the day she "put away childish things." The album is by no means a regression, but it is a rejection of the false sophistication that made *Don Juan* and *Mingus* so off-putting. Now, once again, like a child but also like a true artist, Joni Mitchell is confronting life and herself "face to face."