



Nureyev commands all eyes, page G3
 Book reviews, page G7
 Leisure, page G9

Joni Mitchell emerges from her retreat

By MARCI McDONALD
 Star staff writer
 HOLLYWOOD



★ The Star's Marci McDonald (left) writes about the folksinger who grew up.

THE myth is spun in sacred vinyl and remembered spotlights. In swirling soprano self-portraits and worshipful press-clippings, all corny flashes and free-spirit poetry. There is no myth in the top of pop quite like it.

Carole King and Helen Reddy sell more records, but what is magical about women's lib or baking banana bread and driving your kids to school in a pick-up truck? Roberta Flack sings with more soul, but what is there to catch a body's imagination about living with your mother in Washington, D.C.?

No, Joni Mitchell clearly has the edge on enchantment, an edge totally untarnished by six albums of stark self-revelation, caustic self-accusation and the contrary indications of a sometimes sordid reality.

She sings that she is fickle, that her heart is full and hollow like a cactus tree cause she's so busy being free, but they only seem to remember the romantic elusiveness. She sings guiltily about her greed for fame and fortune, but they only seem to hear the artful imagery.

Through it all though, through the 10-year career knocking around the Toronto coffeehouse circuit, booking herself right into recognition and sustained sometimes only by her own steely drive, through all the loves and the losses that read like a gossip roster of Who's Who in rock 'n' roll, she has emerged unscathed in portraits of enchanted dewdrop vulnerability.

And if absence only makes enchantment grow fonder, she will walk out onstage at the University of Waterloo tonight or Massey Hall tomorrow after a two-year retreat from the public glare as queen of the cults still, intact, immaculate, preserved forever as the elusive pastel prairie wildflower, the misty wispy moonbeam princess lushly chording in her castle of bittersweet sorrows and stained-glass dreams.

They will not see a tall, thin blonde with features just a shade too sharp and teeth too numerous to be really pretty; a deft self-propelled superstar who has survived the millions and the minions and a decade of musical history, to live now in half a Beverly Hills mansion that Julie Andrews used to

own, see her psychoanalyst twice a week and date Warren Beatty and assorted rock stars as countless as "railroad cars," which is about as Hollywood as you can get; who likes to eat out at classy restaurants and go bowling, which is about as unpoetic as you can get; and who just passed her 30th birthday.

They will not see the girl who friends say has changed, no longer acts so strange, is more sophisticated, worldly, womanly, has let her decolletage dip down for her newest publicity photos and her folkie bangs grow out.

They probably wouldn't want to see her either just a week or so ago on this sleazy fringe of Sunset Strip just down the street from Deep Throat, the Venus Massage Parlor and the Institute of Oral Sex, up a darkened alley and behind a fortress-like grated iron gate here in this all-night rehearsal hall where she comes storming down the corridor past the pay phone and the pinball machines and the pool table in the lobby, muttering the unmistakable pear-shaped sounds of a four-letter word.

Not enthusiastic about journalists

Joni Mitchell has just been told there's a journalist in the hallway and she is not exactly enthusiastic about journalists ever since Rolling Stone, the rock Bible, chronicled her romances with Graham Nash, David Crosby, Leonard Cohen and James Taylor, among others, complete with convoluted hearts-and-arrow graph charts, and somewhat unkindly christened her "old lady of the year."

Now Joni Mitchell extends a limp and wary wrist and makes quite clear she doesn't do interviews anymore. "I've had some bad experiences,"

she'll admit much later that night. "And besides I just don't find these things very interesting reading."

So she writes her own press releases, like the one for her newest album in her child-like loopy long-hand, a little short on details and a little long on preserving the mythology.

"I was born in Fort Macleod, Alberta in the foothills of the Canadian Rockies—an area of extreme temperatures and mirages," she lyricizes.

"When I was two feet off the ground I collected broken glass and bats. When I was three feet off the ground I made drawings of animals and forest fires. When I was four feet off the ground I began to dance to rock 'n' roll and sing the top 10 and bawdy service songs around campfires and someone turned me on to Lambert Hendrix and Ross and Miles Davis. And later Bob Dylan. Through these vertical spurts there was briefly the church choir, Grade 1 piano, bowling, art college, the twist, a marriage, runs in the nylons and always romance—extremes in temperature and mirages."

Others who have been a little less liberal with the mirages have recorded that she was born Roberta Joan Anderson, grew up in Saskatoon—the daughter of a grocery man, who used to blow trumpet and a onetime country school teacher who used to know the names of all the wildflowers, that she doodled her way all through school, learned her love of words from her Grade 7 teacher Mr. Kratzenan but always wanted to be a painter till she was waylaid at Calgary art college in a romance with a coffee-house called The Depression and a Pete Seeger do it yourself record that taught her to play guitar.

She dropped out to tote her dreams and schemes into the Toronto folk scene in 1964, where Riv-

erboat owner, Bernie Fiedler, now her friend and promoter, offered her a job as a dishwasher which he says was just a joke although she doesn't remember it quite that way. But by that time Joni Mitchell knew just where she was going and she went there, straight up, till suddenly it all got too much for her two years ago and she dropped right out of the glare.

Now, on this, the last night of rehearsal before she hits the road for her personal appearance comeback, she is warmed up, wound up and admittedly nervous because it's the first time ever that she's shared the stage with a band, Tom Scott and the L.A. Express; and things are, she says "a little shaky."

But she invites you in anyway, "not as the press but as a friend," although ironically a week before she had talked to old folksinger friend Malka (of Malka and Joso), not as a friend, but as the press.

She was glad to have the band, she told Malka on CBC radio's Entertainers, to absorb some of the "loneliness of the stage, even in the mass applause there comes a loneliness... I don't want to be vulnerable."

Wearing 1930s pink slings

She perches on an equipment trunk to watch them warm up now, wedged between a bottle of vodka and Liebfraumilch, wearing the pastel colors she paints in, pink pants and high-stepping '30s pink slings, prim white blouse and yellow chamois jacket, her fingers all brand new gold rings, her waist all flowers in an antique cloisonne belt. She sips white wine and a cigarette dangles through long languid fingers. "I'm excited," she says, "cause I really like these guys."

But at the break it becomes clear that she's excited too because she really likes one of them, drummer John Guerin, a lean, elfin good-looker, a little better than the rest. They kneel together, arms entwined, kissing by her piano stool and she brings him comic newspaper clippings, snaps polaroid photos of him and follows him out into the hall.

As one of her friends says, "There's no need for interviews. She says it all in her songs. Whatever's going on in her life, she says in her music. In her writing, Joni's the frankest person I know."

Indeed, she sits down now at the piano and chords out the reasons for her retirement in the song about the street busker who played real good for free...

*While me I play for fortune
 And those velvet curtain calls
 I've got a limousine and two gentlemen*

*To escort me to the halls.
 It was written when "the money and success seemed distasteful. The fame and fortune seemed out of all proportion to what I was doing, although there were times I felt I deserved every bit of it... I felt a little whorish about selling my soul, putting a price on it. I would get up and pour out fragments of it for money and applause, not only my life but sometimes the life of someone I was with in a close personal relationship."*

"She had poured out the end of her three-year marriage to Detroit folksinger Chuck Mitchell years ago in "I had a king in a salt-rusted carriage—Who carried me off to his country for marriage too soon."

Thirty-six hours after they'd met they formed a duo; he gave her his name and in many ways her start. It was his friends like Tom Rush staying at their house who first heard and recorded Joni Mitchell tunes. As she told Malka, "Then I began to long for my own growth. As soon as the duo dissolved, the marriage dissolved."

But years ago she confessed, "I guess the thing that bust it was when I started making more money. That hurt a lot."

She chronicled love for Taylor

But that wasn't what made Joni Mitchell want to quit the business. The relationship that left most marks on the singer and her songs was the one with James Taylor, who she met on Toronto Island after a Mariposa Folk Festival, all chronicled in bittersweetness and goodbyes on her last two albums, *The Roses* and *Blue*.

She belts out his battle with heroin in *Cold Blue Steel* and *Sweet Fire*, keens at her own lonely sense of feeling left out as she gave up working and traipsed after him as he made his one abortive movie *Two Lane Blacktop*:



AFTER A TWO-YEAR RETREAT, Joni Mitchell walks onstage at Massey Hall tomorrow, and writer Marci McDonald says the singer is a little more upbeat about things these days and songs are mellower.

*Your friends protect you
 Scrutinize me
 I get so damn timid
 Not at all the spirit
 That's inside of me
 Oh baby I can't seem to make it
 With you socially.*

She sings now "You can't hold the hand/Of a rock 'n' roll man."

"The rock 'n' roll industry is very incestuous," she confesses. "We have all inter-acted. James, he's written songs for me, I've written songs for him. A lot of beautiful music came from it, a lot of beautiful times. And a lot of pain came from it too, because inevitably relationships broke up."

No mirrors in her house

When Joni Mitchell and Taylor started slowly coming apart two years ago, she retreated to the house she'd built out of rock on a promontory of Half Moon Bay on Vancouver Island, a house that she hasn't been near in a long time now though it stands there still. "Almost like a monastery. All stone and hardwood floors and hardwood benches, everything that would be corrective. No mirrors. Fighting for all that good virtue in myself," she says. "When I left my house in Laurel Canyon I looked around and it seemed too soft, too comfortable, too dimly lit, too much red upholstery... It was really ridiculous I just made this place really uncomfortable like a corrective shoe."

She retired into travelling and painting, and that Christmas all her friends got a special exquisite limited-edition silver book of her songs handwritten out beside bright fine-line felt-pen drawings, one of them unmistakably a picture of James Taylor on a bright green bedspread, pale and unstrung.

She started psychoanalysis "to talk to someone about confusion," she says, "and I was willing to pay for his discretion..."

"An artist needs a certain amount of turmoil and confusion and I've created out of that, even severe depression. But I had a lot of questions about myself, the way I was conducting my lives—life, what were my values in this time. Most of it was moral confusion... I'm your average quiet-riden person," she says.

Still, it might not have been quite as easy as she makes it sound, for later there's a truer ring as she sings *Trouble Child*.

*So why does it come as such a shock
 To know you really have no one
 Only a river of changing faces
 Looking for an ocean
 They trickle through your leaky plans
 Another dream over the dam...*

But out of all the soggy dreams and isolation and time on her hands, one answer came back loud and clear.

"I heard it in the wind last night," she sings, "It sounded like applause..."

The lure of what she calls onstage "an almost euphoric feeling... sometimes I've felt out of control with it. I no longer was myself, I was transported..." in the end transported Joni Mitchell right back into the spotlight.

As she says, "I was too young to be retired at 27. I didn't know what to do with myself."

She played a James Bay Indian benefit in Montreal and another in Topanga Canyon last summer to get over the old loss of nerve that had once gotten so out of hand she'd stalk off a stage in mid-song "if anything fluttered in the room."

Now, up on this tiny rehearsal stage, going through the set a second faultless time, there's little doubt about how glad she is to get

back. The first set's gone well but something still finer is happening this time. The horns and heavier percussion take off with her high piercing soprano. The room goes electric. A long, liquid brown beauty, all flying hair and turquoises, takes to the floor and starts to boogie to the rhythms, all alone, oblivious. "Magic," she moans, "has arrived."

You watch the face up on the stage that changes almost as fast as the incredible guitar fingerwork, from the toothy giggling schoolgirl gossiping at the break about short haircuts and new silver-earrings, to the shy moon-eyed maid eyeing her new man, now to the wanton rocker, all grit and tumbleweed.

And you realize that it wasn't just a slip of the tongue when in mid-sentence she caught herself talking about not her life but "lives." There are paradoxes here beneath the myth, myths buried deep still beneath the bowl-orama cool-rocker reality. "It's all part of that guess," she says, "will the real me please stand up."

Still waiting for her prince

Joni Mitchell's still singing about waiting for her prince to ride up, only this time she sounds a little more upbeat about it, a little less wildflower vulnerable, a little less victimized. The songs are mellower, matured and maybe some of the best work she's ever done.

She tosses her long blonde mane back but now there isn't quite so much to toss.

"The thing is," says Joni Mitchell eyeing her myth separately across the studio's back-wall mirror, "you can express all these high and beautiful thoughts, but your life may not back it up."

The National Dream rated best CBC effort in decade

By JACK MILLER
 Star TV critic

CANADIAN television's next super-star will be William Hutt, sometimes soaring, sometimes staggering to the pinnacle as that brilliant conniver and voracious imbibor, Sir John A. Macdonald. Playing Canada's premier, the actor makes his leap first PC (Pickled Conservative) from stage to TV beginning three weeks from Sunday.

Hutt's vehicle is *The National Dream*, the CBC's \$2-million extravaganza starting March 3 on the network, based on Pierre Berton's best-selling chronicles on the birth pangs of the Canadian Pacific Railway. After previewing two of the series' eight chapters this week, we call it \$2 million well spent.

In a huge production, milling with fabulous people and propelled by a galloping history, Hutt has had to project an epic character to stand out from the crowd.

Other stars

Giving him the best run for critic's choice is John Colicos as caustic, hulking, gimlet-eyed Cornelius Van Horne, the unrelenting super-boss who ramrodded the "impossible" railway building job across Canada's old west, after Macdonald had hammered through a rebellious parliament.

But there are other stars—this is the most cohesive group effort the CBC has produced in a decade for TV and not all of them are actors. One star is an authentic 1883 CPR locomotive, borrowed from the Ontario Rail Association. Another star is the breathtaking vista of the Canadian west itself—the mountain passes in winter, the awesomely lonesome prairie. God, it's a beautiful country, and the cameras of producer Jim Murray and direc-

tor Eric Till have captured its essence in a way that can take your breath away.

And maybe the least expected star is Pierre Berton himself, the man who wrote the books that started it all. Berton was hired not only as consultant, but as narrator, so he's the man you see or hear summarizing some growing crisis before the scene fades into a dramatic recreation of another milestone in the country's spastic drive to pull itself together before the U.S. could swallow it.

This technique chosen by producer Murray, of spelling the dramatic scenes from history with narrative bridges, has worked uncommonly well. Aside from maintaining pace and heightening the viewer's appreciation of each scene by explaining its import in advance, the

narration idea has made it possible to condense the massive original texts into scripts of manageable length. And yet the narration, at least in the two episodes we've seen, never overpowers the visual depiction of the story.

In an era which has seen *The Tenth Decade* and *The Pearson Memoirs* light up CBC-TV's information programming schedule, *The National Dream* looks to be the most potent series yet, possibly because it's as entertaining as it is fascinating and important.

Authentic debate

Typical of how the show works is a climactic scene in the second chapter when a sozzled Macdonald seeing his party ridiculed by scandal and in peril of defeat, launches a mastery five-hour speech in the House, attacking his Liberal opponents so stinging that one loses his cool and challenges him to a duel. All the while, Macdonald wets his parched throat from constantly-refilled tumblers of straight gin. He usually drank brandy, but he decided the Liberals might think he was drinking water if he switched to gin, and it would confuse them to see him drinking water, and confusion is a great ally in battle.

In this scene, like so many others, with the dialogue being not Berton's but the authentic transcript from the original parliamentary debate, with actors like Gillie Fenwick and George Parkes and John Horton and Chris Wiggins giving potency to the opposition to counter Macdonald's command—it all feels real.

Making it feel real was the heart of Murray's assignment, and in this biggest of CBC efforts, he appears to have delivered.



WILLIAM HUTT
 Heralded as superstar