

THE TELEGRAM

TORONTO

Vol. 19, No. 2 — Jan. 11, 1969

Weekend Magazine



**WILD AND
SOFT IS
JONI MITCHELL**

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**JUDY LAMARSH:
The Discontent
And
Disillusionment
Of The
Pearson Years**

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**Joni Mitchell is a
25-year-old winsome
bittersweet blonde from
Fort Macleod, Alberta.**

**She writes her own
songs about alienated
youth, loneliness
in the big city,
unromantic love,
and sings them for
young people in small
towns and colleges.**

**She gives out
good vibrations and
they dig her...**



LISTEN to the words. Make a cuddle baby out of your arms and rock with the music if you want to. But listen to the words.

**I saw an aging cripple selling Superman balloons*

The guitar rolls with the lines. It becomes the punctuation and paragraphs to the poetry. The bitersweet blonde with a voice for the ages wears second-hand clothes on stage while she publicly undresses her soul.

I had a king dressed in drip-dry and paisley

And the crowds sit hushed in coughless, whisperless, squirmless adoration. They feel the message of the traveller who touches them for one night with the beauty of an art that is entirely in her mind.

Night in the city looks pretty to me

Night in the city looks fine

Music comes spilling out into the street

Colors go waltzing in time

Joni Mitchell is—by her own description—a singing poet. She writes her own words and tunes them to her learned-by-ear guitar. Then she sings. My God how she sings. With a voice as wild as the alien city that rebuffs her, or with a voice as soft as the woman who loses her man to the mountains, she sings of her today world.

So she'll wash her flower curtains

Hang them in the wind to dry

Dust her tables with his shirt and

Wave another day goodbye

Joni is 25 and divorced and gets as much as \$3,000 per night for her concerts at universities and colleges: This is quite a long way from being born in Fort Macleod, Alberta and educated in Saskatoon. And she acknowledges "there isn't much Saskatchewan in my songs" as she sings of the dissatisfaction North American young people feel for urban life and unromantic love. They groove on her because this is the kind of life most of them will face as graduates. Few of them will be poets.

And the sky goes on forever

Without meter maids and peace parades

Joni is a poet because she remembers. She re-

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members the smell of Portulacca in her mother's garden. She remembers playing in the attic with the trunks of old clothes, the dress-up world of make-believe. But most of all, she remembers her schools and her friends and her teachers and the tremendous impact her childhood had on what she is doing now.

"I remember one time in grade five I had a teacher who wore her hair up high—all grey with combs at the side to hold it—and steel-rimmed glasses. I drew a picture of her. I really thought I caught her likeness. So I proudly showed her. She got really up tight about it. She thought I was being insulting and made me stay after school. I guess I was sort of a strange student. I liked art and music. But other kids were better than me. I had a friend who I thought could draw better and sing better. She could do everything better."

And on her first record—one that sold better than Petula Clark, according to her Warner Brothers-Seven Arts producers—there is an inscription on the cover she designed herself: "This album is dedicated to Mr. Kratzman, who taught me to love words." He was her seventh-grade English teacher.

Peridots and periwinkle blue medallions

Gilded galleons spilled across the ocean floor

Treasure somewhere in the sea and he will find where

Never mind their questions there's no answer for

Joni didn't fit the pattern of the Saskatoon school system. She took to hanging out at a coffee house called the Louis Riel. But jazz was the name of the game in those days. She odd-jobbed around until suddenly she was involved in the folk revival.

"Originally folk was like No John, No John, No. And jazz was cool for us. But then I got caught in the early Kingston Trio college rowdiness kind of singing. I began to play the ukulele and got really ridiculous. I took it with me everywhere and would go plunk-a-plunk every time I learned a new change. In Prince Albert some friends set it up so I could replace a late night television show. So I played my

six-song repertoire with a baritone ukulele on my own half-hour TV special. People recognized me on the street next day. So I was bitten by the bug."

She went to art school in Calgary, but she couldn't stay out of the coffee houses. John Uren was just opening his place, The Depression, when Joni walked in.

"She looked just tremendous," Uren remembers. "With all that blonde hair. I brought Peter Elbling in from Toronto to open the place. And he listened to Joni and said she should sing. She played The Depression for three and a half months. And she met a lot of people. Elbling now plays Mycroft Partner in the Times Square Two. And Will Millar was around. He's one of the Irish Rovers. It was a good scene in those days. And Joni was part of it. She did more for the uke than Tiny Tim."

After Calgary came Toronto where she played non-union gigs in church basements and YMCA halls. She was 21 when she met Chuck Mitchell, a real musician and singer. Thirty-six hours after they met, they were married in Detroit.

I had a king in a salt-rusted carriage

Who carried me off to his country for marriage too soon

Beware of the power of moons

"We played the Michigan circuit as a duo. Chuck was a fine musician. He influenced my music an awful lot. I was playing the guitar now. But I was still kind of an all-around golden rainbow girl in those days. The show was like a collage. He played . . . like . . . Brechtian stuff. Sort of heavy World War II things. We did some Lightfoot songs. But basically, I did my thing and Chuck did his. Marriage was good for us at the time. But it had to come to an end, I guess. We broke up the duo. And I guess the thing that bust it was when I started making more money. That hurt a lot. Especially for two Scorpios. We're very proud people."

I can't go back there anymore

You know my keys won't fit the door

You know my thoughts don't fit the man

They never can they never can

Continued on next page



...Ssshhhhh... **Listen, Listen To Joni**

Listen, Listen To Joni

Continued from preceding page

Joni moved to New York City where she was mugged twice, robbed once and met her current managers, Elliott Roberts and Joel Dean. The managers, who also handle Buffy Sainte-Marie and Noel Harrison, put the final polish on her act and sent her out onto the road.

Performers like Joni are about the only acts that play the road any more. But her one night stands are in the country — in the university and college towns, in the coffee houses and at the folk festivals. To be with her on the road is to see a world the city slicker doesn't know exists.

In one weekend stretch recently, she started by missing a plane and having to drive more than 100 miles from Hartford, Conn., to Northfield, Mass., to make a concert two hours late. She had just quit smoking the day before and had the beginnings of a cold. But she was full of vitality as the car rolled through a storm that blocked out everything but the turnpike.

"This is my year for vitality," she says. "I had my Tarot cards read last spring. They said I was going to be sick. And it sure was right. But now I'm sure I'm going to be better. But I've got to get some rest. It's the way you live on the road. You keep musician's hours, eat bad food. All my problems come from the life I lead. But I'm going to get some rest now. I'm going to do a record. Then I'm going to sit in my house and paint and write."

And summer goes

Falls to the sidewalk like string and brown paper

Winter blows

*Up from the river there's no one to take her
To the sea*

The hall in Northfield is like the opera house in a movie set. It's all wood in tongue-and-groove and varnish. The balcony sits on stilts over the main deck. It is so crowded the first row hang their legs

over into thin air.

One man brought his dog. And in the excitement before the concert the dog got loose and ran barking through the hall. Then the sound goes bad and with a great hump of a roof above there is no such thing as acoustics.

"Can you hear me?" Joni asks. Then she wrestles over another microphone. It looks bigger than she is. But it carries the watts needed. And the creaky old hall fills with the lonely wailing magic of a little girl grown up in a world that doesn't make much room for little girls.

He asked me for a dollar more

He cursed me to my face

He hated everyone who paid to ride

And share his common space

A crowd gathered outside the shabby dressing room after the show. All of them young. Most of them non-college — dressed in duffel and denim. Joni was stopped by an intense man.

"I want you to know," he said, "I've been on meditation. And I get good vibrations. I have a message to give you. I've been told to tell you you're doing the right thing. You're going to be all right. That's all. Peace."

"Thank you," she says. "That's very important to me. Because I get the same feelings myself."

And the road winds back to a much wanted bed. But there's no sleep yet.

"Whatever did we use for a word before vibrations?" she asks. "What did we think about? I get the softest feeling out of something like that. I can't explain it, but it's weird."

"What can I say except she's a beautiful sweet chick," says Gary Eisenkraft, a former Montreal coffee house operator who remembers Joni well. "Her whole special thing was that she was so perfect. She put out good vibrations."

The vibrations seem to work best on a good sleep and a decent meal or two because the next performance was a dandy.

Joni was booked into Alumni Hall at the University Of Western Ontario. The flight from Hartford to Toronto was fairly exciting and the weather can-

celled the connecting flight, but the drive was fast and peaceful. Joni curled up in the back seat and went to sleep. The warm car was her capsule and she moved with it through the short section of time and space that brought her to London almost as gently as she used to sleep in the back of her father's car as he drove home to Saskatoon late at night from the summer vacations of another life.

Come back to the stars

Sweet well water and pickling jars

We'll lend you the car

The Western Ontario Gang are as rich as the Northfield Gang was poor. Alumni Hall is a gymnasium by prevarication to qualify for some absurdly strung grant system. But never has the smell of a sweaty sock sullied the atmosphere of the main room. It is a concert hall — with lines painted on the floor — and it is full of pretty girls and handsome boys. The mikes work and the acoustics are splendid. There are friends in London who knew her in Toronto or who met her in Chicago. There's a rep there from Seven Arts and the whole thing has a nice feeling. A couple of kids try the guitar and tell each other about open E tuning. Maybe they listen to the words.

"When I made the record it changed a lot of things," Joni says. "It changed a lot of things and not all for the better. It's like being pressed by five suitors. And they're all pressing you hard. I began to feel really crowded, even in my dressing room. I had to start asking people: 'Please give me as much air as I had before.' But people don't understand. They say you've gone show business. And they start to put you down. So you have to change. You really do change. And all I really ask is that people treat me like a person. I change as much as other people change. I feel more like a woman now. I used to think I was a teeny-bopper."

She has brought them to her senses

They have laughed inside her laughter

Now she rallies her defences

For she fears that one will ask her

For eternity

And she's so busy being free



Joni and manager Joel Dean arrive in Toronto's Malton Airport to find weather has cancelled connecting flight to the next one-night stand.



So it's on the road again and the motion of the automobile lulls Joni into sleep as it moves through the storm to bring her safely to London.



Refreshed and vibrant, Joni woos a full house at

After the show, a girl wearing a paisley jump suit comes up carrying a dove in a cage.

"Joni, this is Mr. Peepers. He likes you. Won't you come away with Mr. Peepers and me. We love you Joni. Please come."

Mr. Peepers strikes out as do all stage-door Johnnies on this kind of road. After a short church-basement-style coffee party in the real gymnasium of Alumni Hall, Joni was ready to go home. But she was still pretty well strung out. She had given a good concert to a very receptive audience. And she had that tremendous performer's high that comes out of an evening like this.

"It's time I played something for myself," she says as she folds into her motel room. "All I do lately is grumble. I feel sort of spiteful when I talk like that when I think of all the wonderful things that have happened to me. But it's the way things are right now. I've got to make this record and I don't even have a producer yet. And there's always somebody who wants me to play a date. I just can't turn down work. I wish someone would do it for me. I worked 44 weeks last year. I haven't had time to write anything. I've got lots of music. But right now I haven't got any words."

And she takes the guitar out of its cradle and nurses it. She has a tune in her head and she sings it wordlessly as she changes keys and tempos with voice and instrument playing together. This is what she calls her Laurel Canyon music. The music she plays at home. The furniture of the motel modern fades from sight. The clutter of the one suitcase open and ruffled looks like a painting. The open bathroom door provides a theatrical backlight. And sitting on the bed is the girl alone, making music, thinking words. Listen.

*The seasons they go round and round
And the painted ponies go up and down
We're captive on the carousel of life
We can't return
We can only look behind from where we came
And go round and round and round in the circle game*



the University Of Western Ontario's Alumni Hall.