

# Joni Mitchell At River Festival

By Dick Richmond  
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

January 1976 was the last time Joni Mitchell appeared in St. Louis. It was a debut concert of a world tour, and she brought with her some of the best studio musicians money could buy. Her fans loved her, but in truth the concert was only 2 cents above dull.

Last night at the Mississippi River Festival, Joni returned with some of the best musicians money can buy. This time she shed that stoic '76 presentation and gave an exciting performance.

She has so much to choose from: folk, rock, pop and now jazz. And hits such as "Big Yellow Taxi," the song in which Paradise is paved for a parking lot; "In France They Kiss on Main Street"; "Both Sides Now"; "Raised On Robbery"; "Free Man In Paris"; "Help Me"; and "You Turn Me On, I'm A Radio" among others. She didn't sing all of those, but enough to keep most everyone happy. There were certainly plenty of shouts from guys expressing their love for her.

Joni has never stayed in one spot musically. In 1977 she released an exciting album called "Don Juan's Reckless Daughter," in which she explored elements of jazz and Afro-Latin rhythms, the calypso beat and other sounds of the Caribbean. With her latest album, "Mingus," a tribute to the

## review/rock

late great jazz bassist Charles Mingus, she has entered mainstream jazz. The songs I heard were wonderful.

And she looked and sounded wonderful singing them, with a red rose in blond hair and breeze blowing her dress teasingly around her legs. One song especially of that group, "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat," with words by Joni and music by Mingus, was touching in its story of the plight of a black musician and his white wife.

Her story-songs often have pathos; more often they are cerebral. A person cannot just listen; he must listen again and again as in the beautiful "Amelia," which she handled so well.

The concert opened with the rocky "Big Yellow Taxi," and then the equally rocky "Coyote" from the "Hejira" album. But it didn't take her long to move into some of the softer songs; nor did it take her much time to display the talents of her back-up musicians, including Missourian Pat Metheny on guitar, Jaco Pastorius on bass, Lyle Myas on keyboards, Don Alias on drums and Michael Brecker on reeds.

Pastorius, especially, got a special shot. He had the stage to himself for several

minutes, during which time he displayed not only his versatility with the bass, but also some applause-awarding tricks with electronics. He would establish a theme, "capture it" electronically, and then play along with the music he had just made. It was more fun than precise. Still, the audience loved it. So he tumbled for them. Right on top of his bass.

He was much more precise later in a jazz run with Brecker on tenor sax and Alias on drums. The music was exciting.

The musicians, including Joni, moved in and out of the wings leisurely. When they weren't needed, they were gone. They just seemed to fade away. So that it did not interrupt anything. This time I shared the sometimes wild enthusiasm of the crowd, which numbered 8,000.

An a cappella quintet from Brooklyn called the Persuasions opened the show with an enjoyable 30-minute set. It was the first time I had ever heard the "Lord's Prayer" sung at a rock concert. Perhaps they knew where to come, because they sang that shortly before they ended their set, and were brought back for an encore.

When they returned, they quickly got the crowd singing with them, then moved in file off the stage and into the aisles. And while the crowd was singing, they moved around the side of the bandshell and disappeared. Talk about a tasty exit. That's it.