



JONI MITCHELL with NEIL YOUNG (of Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young) arriving at London Airport earlier this year.

MILLIONS MAKE JONI FEEL GUILTY

says Allan
McDougall

SIQUOMB is the name of a Red Indian tribe. It is also the name of the company which publishes all songs written by Joni Mitchell, and Joni owns Siquomb publishing — which mean's she a very rich young Canadian, to the tune of several million dollars.

"But really," she says frankly, "I feel guilty about having all of these. I'd like to give a proportion of my money to some good causes, but how do I know that the money will actually be used for everybody's benefit?"

Ecology — the preservation of birds, bees, trees and just nature in general is Joni's big hang-up. Not because it is particularly trendy, but because she is delicately concerned about life going on undisturbed.

"Living in Low Anglese, smog-choked Los Angeles, is bad enough," she once told me. "But the last straw came when I visited Hawaii for the first time.

"It was night-time when we got there, so I didn't get my first view of the scenery until I got up next morning. The hotel room was quite high up, so in the distance I could see the blue Pacific Ocean.

"I walked over to the balcony, and there was the picture-book scenery, palm trees swaying in the breeze and all. Then I looked down, and there was this ugly, concrete car park in the hotel grounds.

"I thought, 'They paved Paradise and put up a parking lot.' That's how the song 'Big Yellow Taxi' was born — I just had to draw attention to what's going down all around us. When I recorded it, I made it into a rock and roll parody thing, just to show how absurd it is to destroy nature like that."

This song has this week landed Joni in the NME singles charts for the first time.

Joni — who was born Roberta

Joan Anderson in Alberta 26 years ago — is extremely sensitive. Not just to her own feelings, but to those who are close to her. She didn't actually go to Woodstock, which inspired her to write the song of that name, but her closest boy-friends, C S N & Y did, and they told her how it felt when they got back.

The sensitivity shows through in the way she's captured the atmosphere in her song about the "half-million golden children of God gathered in The Garden."

The Mitchell version of "Woodstock" on her "Ladies Of The Canyon" LP — currently at No. 18 in this week's album chart — is very different to the way David, Stephen, Graham and Neil have rocked it up. But both versions of the song have their own validity. The group sing it like they saw it, Joni sings it like she felt it — by proxy.

Another "Ladies Of The Canyon" song is "For Free," which is Joni's get-out for the guilt feelings she has about her wealth.

"This one came to me when I was in New York. I was out shopping one day, and there was a street musician — what you'd call a busker — playing on the corner. He was playing real good, and for free. But nobody wanted to know.

"And I thought, here's me, who plays for fortunes, and who drives to shows in big limousines, who plays either for friends or for those who can afford to go to my shows; and there's this clarinet player — who

probably knows more about music than I'll ever learn — and he's playing for free.

"I went back to that street corner another time, but he was gone. All my friends in New York are looking out for him, because I'd like to get together with him some day."

When Joni was at school in Canada, she never thought about being a singer or a composer. She wanted to be an artist. But somehow, she picked up a guitar, and Pete Seeger's "Teach Yourself Guitar" record.

But she never quite got around to learning the proper tuning of guitar, although her own uniquely tuned suits her voice perfectly. And via her singing, her guitar and her piano, she found the perfect method of getting her thoughts and dreams and schemes across.

She still paints — more so now than ever, now that she's in a state of semi-retirement. The last public performance Joni gave was at London's Festival Hall.

"That was a great way to bring the curtain down on that particular section of my life," she told me after the capacity crowd gave her perhaps the most rapturous reception she'd ever had. Britain love Joni, and the admiration is mutual.

"I feel so relaxed in London. I guess that's partly due to my ancestors coming from over here. But mainly because there just seem to be no hassles, no tension. I just hope that all the British people realise how very lucky they are!"