

Joni's Come A Long Way

■ NEW YORK — Joni Mitchell, (Asylum) has come a long way from her first record, "Song to a Seagull" to her most recent, "The Hissing of Summer Lawns." Her early music was ethereal and acoustic. Relying heavily on the simple versatility of her voice and guitar she was a one woman band. Her contemporary sound oozes with the technological slickness of electronic music played in the jazz-oriented arrangements of her back-up band, the L.A. Express featuring Tom Scott.

Clearly, Joni Mitchell's stage presence and music have become more sophisticated and more ambitious. It is the vast commercial success of "Court and Spark" that allows her the freedom to introduce new and often previously unrecorded material. Even her dress has evolved into a new portrayal of her persona. On her 1973 tour the blue jeans and braids of the late sixties were replaced by shimmering floor length gowns and a tint of bleach in her hair. In 1976 she's sporting a tailored two piece black pant suit and a wide brim hat under which she tucks her gold locks until she performs "Big Yellow Taxi," when she replaces the original hat with one she says comes from a Tennessee Yellow Cab Company.

Her show opened with the familiar hit, "Help Me," which she followed with a tune from "Miles of Aisles," "For Love or Money," and then it was back into "Court And Spark" territory with "Free Man In Paris." Throughout the show the music was over amplified but eventually her voice found its way above the band. With "For The Roses" and "Cold Blue Steel and Sweet Fire" Joni took the stage by herself, back-

ing her smooth, thick voice with her able accompaniment on amplified acoustic guitar. A painfully, bittersweet clarinet solo by Tom Scott provided a memorable conclusion to "Cold Blue Steel."

From her new album Joni performed songs like "Shades of Scarlet Conquering," "Shadows and Light" and "Harry's House/Centerpiece." She also introduced four new numbers, "Don Juan's Reckless Daughter" and "Coyote" (both written while she toured with Dylan's Rolling Thunder Review), "Furry Sings The Blues" and a nameless tune with the recurring refrain, "Come talk to me, Mr. Mystery."

From "Ladies of the Canyon" she performed "For Free," changing the original lyrics in places: "I'll play if you have the money/ And I have a new song/ And I get pushy," and perhaps the most moving song of the evening, "Rainy Night House." Here she featured her upper octave vocals following the lyrics, "I sing soprano in the upstairs choir."

A spirited rendition of "Raised or Robbery" was introduced by a strip tease beat and Joni donning a feathery shawl. The heavy, exotic, rhythmic "Jungle Line" closed the show. Shedding her guitar, as she did several times during the evening, she allowed herself the opportunity to be strictly singer/entertainer. Moving freely she seemed more relaxed and more confident than on her last tour, especially when her gut desire to rock and roll surfaced in a refined but obvious way.

With the house lights up and her cigarette in hand Joni returned for a single encore with "Twisted." Pausing in the middle of the song she asked the audience, "Are you all enjoying your craziness?" A unanimous yes was the reply.

Like her songs that speak of people as, "duplicitous cowards of some multiplicity torn between high ideals and the temptation of the serpent," Joni is still singing to us, about us. She's not the same Joni Mitchell millions have come to know and love. Wiser and more confident, she's an artist who's learned to communicate with her audience. Taking chances is a part of this communication. She listened to the audience requests and they listened to her new ideas. Everyone got most if not all of what they came for.

Kris Nicholson

Rider to Casablanca

■ LOS ANGELES — Neil Bogart, president of Casablanca Records, has announced the appointment of Allan Rider as vice president of Cafe Americana and Rick's Music publishing companies. Rider's responsibilities will include administrating the publishing companies, as well as handling the acquisition of new writers.

Rider, a music veteran of ten years, started his career with Irving/Almo Music, as professional manager of the west coast branch. Most recently, he was professional manager of Island/Ackee Music.

WEA Branch Meetings



All of WEA's branch managers, controllers and operations managers headquartered throughout the U.S. gathered in Burbank recently as the Warner-Elektra-Atlantic Corp. helmed its round of annual branch management meetings February 4, 5 and 6, at the company's national headquarters. Joel Friedman, president of WEA, disclosed that the branch management teams met in a series of sales and operational seminars detailing the steps taken by the firm to increase its capacity to best fulfill the needs of their customers. Shown following the meetings are Warner-Elektra-Atlantic's home office executive staff and branch managers, from left: Henry Droz, executive VP sales; Stan Harris, general manager; Irv Rothblatt, Chicago; Tom Sims, Dallas; Russ Bach, L.A.; George Rossi, N.Y.; Pete Stocke, Philadelphia; Joel Friedman, president; Mike Spence, Cleveland; Vic Faraci, VP marketing; Don Dumont, Boston; Bill Biggs, Atlanta.

Atlantic LP Release

■ NEW YORK — Atlantic/Atco Records senior vice president of marketing Dave Glew has announced a 12 album release for February. The release is headed by the seventh Led Zeppelin album called "Presence" on Swan Song, Bill Wyman's "Stone Alone" on Rolling Stone and "A Trick of the Tail" by Genesis.

The jazz/rock/r&b fusion in music is represented by Billy Cobham's sixth album "Life & Times," "That Is Why You're Overweight" by Eddie Harris and "Aurora" by jazz-violinist Jean-Luc Ponty. Debut albums on Atlantic this month will include "Mike Douglas Sings It All" by the popular television host and "Lady Bump" by Penny McLean of Silver Convention. The Atlantic/Atco debut of Wishbone Ash is a set called "Locked In." Debuting on Big Tree will be "Nanette Workman" and Muscle Shoals singer-songwriter "Lenny LeBlanc." The final album in the February release is "Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center on Finnadar Records. It presents classically composed electronic music in Discrete CD-4 Quad.

Emphasis in promoting this release will be placed on local print and radio time-buy advertising tied in with dealers to achieve maximum exposure for the product.

European Tour Planned for Tomita

■ NEW YORK—Isao Tomita, the Japanese musical innovator who is known for his electronically created albums of classical music, will make his first stage appearances anywhere when he launches a European concert tour March 9 in Munich, Germany.

The artist brings his synthesizer and his music to stages in Germany, Holland and Great Britain. Sharing the tour, with equal billing on the Continent, will be British rock group Renaissance. A support act for the two British dates is yet to be announced.

Tomita will create music from his albums using an eight-track tape console and mixing unit, Moog piano and the Pink Floyd Quadraphonic public address system. Keyboard artist John Tout of the Renaissance will join him with solo piano parts in "Daphnis and Chloe," "Pictures at an Exhibition" and "The Firebird."

During the concerts, Tomita, through its interpreters, will explain his techniques of building sounds with a Moog synthesizer including the sounds of a steam locomotive, woodblocks, whistle chimes and orchestration.

RCA Records is offering heavy advertising and promotional support for the tour.

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