



Joni Mitchell and David Crosby at Mama Cass Elliot's house, Laurel Canyon, 1968 (Eric Clapton out of shot)

“Maybe we lucked out”

DAVID CROSBY recalls a Canyon life of pools, porches and politics. Not to mention the talents of Joni Mitchell: “absolutely the best singer-songwriter of our time...”

It was always sunny in the Canyon. The first of us moved up there to get above the Los Angeles smog line. There was cleaner air and it was prettier because of the trees. I'm pretty sure I was one of the first to head up there.

It was always very pretty. But the truth is that if you can find a little space of your own up in the trees, that's where you want to be if you are a musician. And it just got to be more and more attractive the more of us there were up there. But the community we established wasn't visible from the outside. It was at people's houses that everything happened. We would go from house to house, to whichever of our friends had the nicest house at the time. There was a lot of that going on, visiting back and forth. We might go down to the clubs on Sunset Strip at night and see each other there, but it was really a lot of sitting around on people's lawns, sitting around by people's pools and sitting round people's porches and living rooms, goofing off.

That's how Stephen [Stills], Graham [Nash] and I realised our voices gelled when we were singing at Joni's place – and it was definitely at Joni's, right there in the kitchen – we started singing, “In the morning when you rise,” from “You Don't Have To Cry”, which went on our first album.

We knew what we had was different. This was 1968, 1969 – it was the years of the guitar players like Jimi Hendrix, Jimmy Page and Eric Clapton.

They were building these giant thunderstorms with their electric guitars and here we were poking our heads out from the corner with our acoustic guitars. It was very unusual that anybody would be interested with this harmony stuff we had going on. It got a lot of attention and maybe we lucked out. We were singing about the things and people we loved – that was generally our thing, it was always about love and politics. Graham and I both wrote a song about Joni Mitchell and we laughed a lot about that.

“We were singing about the things and people we loved – it was always love and politics”

The politics were important. We were trying to stop that war and we were dealing with rampant racism. There was a great deal of split in the country, just like there is today. I think now it might even be worse now, the president is worse. I'd be horrified if I ever found out he was a fan of *Déjà Vu*. I would call it a perversion of justice and I would have to quit.

The Canyon scene wasn't just the songwriters. We had all kinds of musicians up there. There

were people like James Taylor and Paul Simon, but the single person who was most important to the scene was Cass Elliot of The Mamas & The Papas. Cass had a really nice house and she was a really lovely human being. Her place was *the* place, it was where we all hung out. We were there all the time. Joni's place was sweet and Graham Nash lived there, so we went there a lot, but Cass's house was the real hangout. She was very smart, very sensitive, very social and very sweet. She was really wonderful.

Peter Tork of The Monkees was another guy who was around. He was a sweet guy and he had a wonderful house with the best pool. There was always a lot of naked people around his pool.

We listened to the other artists. We listened to Paul Simon, we listened to James Taylor; they were great songwriters and great musicians. Then there was Joni. Formidable talent doesn't describe it, she was the best of us. She's absolutely the best singer-songwriter of our time. She's as good a writer as Bob [Dylan] and she's a way better musician, so that contest is over. She is the pre-eminent figure in my field without question.

I understand it's not a foot race. Paul Simon is Paul Simon, Randy Newman is Randy Newman and Bob Dylan is Bob Dylan. They are all incredible and there's no real best, but Joni is head and shoulders ahead of all of us, so in that one case I would say she is the best. I thought it the whole time, from the first moment I saw her. ●