

# **Jazz and Joni: Echoes of Jazz in Joni Mitchell's Early Music**

A Mandatory Bachelor's Seminar

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## Introduction

Joni Mitchell (b. 1943), known as among the preeminent folk singer-songwriters of the twentieth century, surprised listeners with her shift towards jazz experimentation in 1974 with her album *Court and Spark* and caused negative backlash among critics in 1979 with her collaborative work, *Mingus*, together with jazz musician, Charles Mingus.<sup>1</sup> Although these conscious shifts did occur, I would like to argue that Joni Mitchell was influenced by jazz even in her early work.<sup>23</sup> This influence can be found rooted in an early love of jazz<sup>4</sup> and a desire to emulate the harmonic and melodic stylings of the crooners, while maintaining the narrative depth similar to that of Bob Dylan.<sup>5</sup> Echoes of jazz can be found in multiple analytical dimensions. Mitchell utilizes “jazzlike” chords in many (if not most) of her early songs. She frequently incorporates shifting through modes and scales in her music. Her melodic lines often include notes that deviate from the accompanying chord, syncopated lines, and in some cases, what conveys the feeling of improvisation around a melody line through variation. In various songs, she incorporates jazz idioms, like “trumpet” and clarinet solos. Viewed in this light- of early influence and experimentation- it is no wonder that Joni Mitchell delved into the realm of jazz more freely as her career progressed.

To accomplish my goal of a deeper understanding of Mitchell’s early music and its relation to jazz music, I have chosen five songs, one from each of her early albums and analyzed harmonic, melodic, rhythmic, structural, and idiomatic components. Then, I organized a brief overview of the components of jazz and compared these elements to characteristics I have found in my analysis. Next, I reviewed biographical sources to explore a possible contextualization for my analytical findings and delved into alternative explanations as well. Afterwards, I include the fifth and final song analysis, as an expression of the text and context viewed together.

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<sup>1</sup> Lloyd Whitesell, “Harmonic Palette in Early Joni Mitchell,” *Popular Music*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 2002, p. 173, *JSTOR*, accessed 21 March 2021, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/853681?seq=1>.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Ford, “Searching for Ghosts: Fluidity and Temporal Expansion in Joni Mitchell’s First Five Albums (1968-1972),” *Popular Music* 38/3 (2019), p. 399, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261143019000230>.

<sup>4</sup> Leonard Feather, “Joni Mitchell Has Her Mojo Working,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 10, 1979, accessed 21 May 2021, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120831215540/http://jonimitchell.com/library/print.cfm?id=595>.

<sup>5</sup> Susan Lacy, director, “Joni Mitchell: A Woman of Heart and Mind,” *Youtube*. uploaded by Guido Coriandro, April 6, 2020, accessed 21 May 2021, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T9513\\_eai88](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T9513_eai88).

## Song Analyses

“I Had a King” *Song to a Seagull* (1968)<sup>67</sup>

“I Had a King” is Joni Mitchell’s first song on her first album. It’s in verse-chorus structure and is accompanied by a guitar. The key starts off in A major but jumps to A minor almost immediately. It also incorporates Dorian mode.<sup>8</sup> The piece rarely deviates from a pedal point of a and even when the bassline changes at the second half of the verse, a is still present in accompaniment, and returns to the a pedal point for the chorus. (The use of pedal point is very much folk-derived,<sup>9</sup> though jazz musicians use pedal point to create tonal ambiguity which arguably happens here as well.<sup>10</sup>) The chord progression for the first half of the verse is A-Am9-A2(omit3)-Fmaj7/A. The second half of the verse: Amadd9- Em7/A- Am7- E2(omit3)/A- Amadd9- Em7/A- Am7- E2(omit 3). The chorus basically remains on Asus4 the entire time aside from three half measure in which the phrase ends on an A major. The chorus ends on Am9-A and the song ends on the ambiguous A2(omit 3). While the song rarely moves from varieties of A, its texture is rich with dissonances which lend to the feeling of unclarity presented by the lyrics of the song.

The melody consists of many quirks. Nearly the entirety of the verses is sung in syncopated melody rhythm with a hemiola in measures 5, 7, and 8. The chorus contains more rhythmic regularity in the melody, but the accompaniment adds layers of polyrhythm. The melody quickly moves from being sung on chord tones to emphasizing tones dissonant to the base chord by measure 7, in addition to distinctively modulating from c sharp to c natural with only a b in between. A major motif of the melody in the first half of the verses (mm 5-12) is the jump a third down and a fourth back up twice in a row. An interesting element in the second half of the

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<sup>6</sup>Joni Mitchell, “I Had a King,” *Spotify*,

<https://open.spotify.com/track/6rj2z2taVIxPRnzx5LJkGm?si=nmB039d6R7Sx1wv5u0sIfw>

<sup>7</sup> See appendix, “I Had a King.”

<sup>8</sup> Lloyd Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 133.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>10</sup>Stuart Smith, *Jazz Theory*, (Sax Online: Word Press, 2008), <http://www.saxonline.it/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/JazzTheory.pdf> p. 70.

verse melody (mm 12-20) is the double grace notes (see figure 1). In contrast to the verses, the melody in the chorus contains just four notes that ascend, which is repeated four times. The leading tone of the A major scale is emphasized in the melody here, though harmonized with Asus4. Throughout the melody, the quick paced notes seem to be balanced out by the sustained notes at the tail end of many of the phrases.

**Figure 1**



*“I Don’t Know Where I Stand” Clouds (1969)*<sup>1112</sup>

“I Don’t Know Where I Stand” is Joni Mitchell’s third song off her second album. It begins each verse in D Mixolydian and transitions to F major for the second half of each verse.<sup>13</sup> The intro<sup>1415</sup> begins with guitar playing an arpeggiated B♭m(add9)- Gm(add4)- Gm(add4)/F- Fadd9-Dadd9. The chord progression for the verses is as follows<sup>16</sup>:

	Guitar tuning: C F C G A C
Phrase 1:	D   D   C   C
Phrase 2:	D   D   F <sup>7</sup>   F <sup>7</sup>
Phrase 3:	B♭   B♭   Am   Am   B♭m <sup>6</sup>   Gm   F   F

Then, Joni includes a vocally simulated trumpet solo<sup>17</sup> that continues in what seems to be the key of F-with modal mixture- as follows: III-II-iv-ii-I. The second “trumpet” solo that she uses as an ending varies on the melody that appears in the first solo.

<sup>11</sup>Joni Mitchell, “I Don’t Know Where I Stand,” *Spotify*, [https://open.spotify.com/track/4rciOOyIBH3Z4UqtV5DQ7K?si=U\\_01Up\\_ZQFaT-VOfrcxRgQ](https://open.spotify.com/track/4rciOOyIBH3Z4UqtV5DQ7K?si=U_01Up_ZQFaT-VOfrcxRgQ)

<sup>12</sup> See appendix, “I Don’t Know Where I Stand.”

<sup>13</sup> Whitesell, “Harmonic Palette in Early Joni Mitchell,” p. 184.

<sup>14</sup> “How to Play Joni Mitchell I Don’t Know Where I Stand (intro only),” *Youtube*, Uploaded by: Jerry’s Guitar Bar, 20 March 2017, accessed 19 September 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Xr0IRDUESU>.

<sup>15</sup> See appendix, “Transcription for Guitar, I Don’t Know Where I Stand,” for intro.

<sup>16</sup> Whitesell, “Harmonic Palette in Early Joni Mitchell,” p. 184.

<sup>17</sup> Joni Mitchell, “Intro To I Don’t Know Where I Stand (Live at Canterbury House, Ann Arbor, MI, 10/27/1967)- 2<sup>nd</sup> Set,” *Spotify*, <https://open.spotify.com/track/3DYXp2gUOGmozaAjk18Vnq?si=YEZm9uKESXq6eemySDdJWA>. Here,

The guitar accompaniment remains in eighth notes for the entirety of the piece, and frequently the rhythm of the melody syncopates with this uniformity. The melody and melodic rhythm—as seen in the other examples as well—changes to suit the words. It also includes a lot of trills and glissandos (that are not presented in my version of the sheet music.) Dissonant notes are included in various manners: appoggiaturas (such as in the first measure of the verse and onward), emphasizing non-chord tones in the melody (such as in measure three of the melody when she sings *d* over a C major triad), and through suspending notes (like with the phrase “in California and talking to you” when she holds *g* and changes the chord to F7).

“My Old Man” *Blue* (1971)<sup>1819</sup>

“My Old Man” is Mitchell’s second song off her fourth album, *Blue*. It is a piano driven piece that’s polymodal in A major and tonic Dorian.<sup>20</sup> It is in verse-bridge form,<sup>21</sup> with what appears to be a chorus more accurately described as an extended refrain.<sup>22</sup> Although it’s set in A major to begin with, it sounds tonally ambiguous— the intro begins with Dadd9, moves to D/E, forays briefly into and E triad but regresses back to D/E- D/A before peeking into A and returning back to D/A. The verses seem to hover around the D triad (which varyingly appears with *d*, *a*, and even *e* in the bass.) The first couple appearances of the dominant seventh chord are in a suspended format, leaving out the tension to resolve to the A triad. (This suspension of the leading tone and modal ambiguity occurs in earlier songs as well, such as “Sisotowbell Lane”<sup>23</sup> from Mitchell’s first album, *Song to a Seagull*.)<sup>24</sup> And when A does appear, it is as a suspended seventh chord and then as Am7 and A7. Despite this complexity, the general progression tends to follow the simple skeleton: IV-V-IV-I etc. The bridge veers into even more ambiguous

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Joni explains that she originally wished to have her father play a trumpet solo, but she sang it herself instead.

<sup>18</sup>Joni Mitchell, “My Old Man,” *Spotify*, <https://open.spotify.com/track/1yWIsH3TC51gmzvQxZNCQC?si=NE2ky9kqSf-9aWVTrEiSlw>.

<sup>19</sup> See appendix, “My Old Man.”

<sup>20</sup> Whitesell, “Harmonic Palette in Early Joni Mitchell,” p. 180.

<sup>21</sup> Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*,” p. 148.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>23</sup> Joni Mitchell, “Sisotowbell Lane,” *Spotify*, <https://open.spotify.com/track/7hIlyd77ArhdaHcKA5SNGw?si=SwrNomsEQpacWguNcX1Ddw>.

<sup>24</sup> Whitesell, “Harmonic Palette in Early Joni Mitchell,” p. 177.

harmonic territory, with Abm7 to Bbm to Gbmaj7- Db-Dbm7-B and then through a modulatory piano interlude back to D.

Although harmonically the song appears to avoid its supposed tonic triad, the melody lines of the verses begin and end on a, though the refrain once again emphasizes d. The melody is characterized by many large jumps. Already in measure 5 (the second measure on the first verse), the melody jumps a minor seventh interval; this repeats through most of the iterations of the verses. The rhythm of the notes is generally regular, until Mitchell adds variation to the melody; in fact, variation typifies the performance of the verses. The refrain melody is particularly unique. It begins in measure 13 with an octave jump and proceeds to oscillate between d and c# only to rise to e and jump down a major sixth, ascend chromatically to a and then jump down once again a major 7th from c# to d. The second half of the phrase chromatically ascends d-d#-e and then chromatically descends g#-g-f#. All this occurs over the course of five measures. Rhythmically, Mitchell dusts in more syncopation. The melody of the bridge is equally surprising. It moves a half step down from f# then jumps down a tritone to b, moves a half step down to bb, chromatically ascends to cb and then jumps up an augmented fourth to f natural. It rises gb-ab-bb then jumps down a ninth to ab. From there it jumps up a major sixth to f natural and back down to ab, jumps back up a minor sixth to fb, rising to gb and finally finishes on cb.

At various points throughout the song, Mitchell plays with the metric flow<sup>25</sup> by switching to 2/4 for lone bars, specifically in the refrain with the words “hall” and “blues”.

The piano accompaniment is generally arpeggios in the left hand and harmonic in the right hand, but at the start of the refrain, Mitchell plays a counter melody. This sort of counter melody is played again with the bridge and breaks off into an interlude between the bridge and the following verse. The song ends with a surprisingly simplistic IV-I-IV-I...ii-I-ii-I movement

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<sup>25</sup> Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, pp. 161-62.

underscoring the word “blues.” This emphasis on a plagal cadence is reminiscent of the common twelve bar blues progression,<sup>26</sup> especially considering the word it accompanies.

*“Lesson in Survival” For the Roses (1972)*<sup>2728</sup>

“Lesson in Survival” is Mitchell’s fourth song on her fifth album *For the Roses*. It is polymodal<sup>29</sup>; the intro and successive piano interludes are played in A Mixolydian, and the verses begin in G major and then move to A major. It is in strophic form with the internal structure of the verses including A, B and partial A’ sections, though each verse does vary. The song is largely in 4/4 time, though lone measures deviate. In the first verse, there are measures in 5/4, 6/4, 9/8 and 2/4. The second verse is more regular with deviations only to 6/4 and then 5/4, while the third verse goes to 3/4, 3/8, 3/4 again, and 7/8.

A major harmonic characteristic of this song is “slash” chords.<sup>30</sup> For instance, the first four measures of the song are played over the bass of g-d though the right hand moves between G and D major triads. This continues at different points over a (in the intro and interludes), over e, and over f#. Additionally, there are times when the chord in the right hand is played over not only the “slash note” of the left hand, but also the note that is a fifth above the bass note, (this similarly occurs in “My Old Man,”) (see figure 2).

The progression of the intro and interludes is: A7sus-A-G/A-A...

The A part of the verse is: G- D/G...E/A- D- A/D

The B part is: E- D/E- A/E- E- D/G- F#m7- D/E- E/A- F#m7- E/F#

The A’ part is sung over G2/E for four measures.

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<sup>26</sup> Robert Hutchinson, “12.4: The Twelve Bar Blues,” *Music Theory for the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Classroom*, (Free Software Foundation, 2021), <https://musictheory.pugetsound.edu>.

<sup>27</sup> Joni Mitchell, “Lesson in Survival,” *Spotify*.

<https://open.spotify.com/track/0Xrrxype3ih2nyfyTdUM6O?si=uOX2yXndTauuXHTK8ZsuBQ>

<sup>28</sup> See appendix, “Lesson in Survival.”

<sup>29</sup> Whitesell, “Harmonic Palette in Early Joni Mitchell,” p. 191.

<sup>30</sup> Ford, “Searching for Ghosts,” p. 404.

**Figure 2**

The image shows a musical score for a song. The top staff is the vocal melody in 4/4 time, with lyrics: "know my needs my sweet tumbleweed". The melody consists of eighth notes, sixteenth notes, and eighth-note triplets. Below the melody are two piano accompaniment staves. The first staff has a dynamic marking of *f* and shows chords D/E and E/A. The second staff shows a bass line with eighth notes.

The melody is mostly composed of eighth notes, sixteenth notes, and eighth-note triplets, with the occasional dotted eighth- sixteenth and tied notes. The phrasing frequently begins on a weak beat or even after an eighth-note rest or a dotted quarter-note rest, lending to the variety, syncopation, and a fluid speech-like quality. The melody phrasing tends to syncopate or contrast with the regularity of the right-hand accompaniment that usually falls on the first and third beat of the measure. The A part of the verses hovers around notes b and d, then dramatically jumps up to c# from e, and meanders back down to the lower register. The B part of the verses bases itself at g# and jumps from c# (at middle c) up an octave. The A' section returns to b but holds e for two measures right before the end of the verse for the first two verses; in the last verse, this e is shortened while the final b is extended.

Variation is frequently used to accommodate the words, but in some instances, it is not vital to this accommodation. For example, a blue note appears in the B section of the first verse over the words “know my needs” but has no corresponding appearances in the other two verses. A rhythmic variation that isn’t repeated is the swing Joni adds in the first verse to the words “survival” and “bible”.

Another characteristic of the melody is the frequent emphasis of non-chord tones (as shown in figure 4 with the words “know” and again “my sweet”). This, accompanied with the fifths in the left-hand results in harmonic richness, as if two chords are co-occurring. In figure 2, the first

measure has a simultaneous E minor and D major (alternatively Emin13,) and the second measure has E major and A major (an A11 chord).

### *Summary of Song Analysis*

Many distinctive elements appear throughout these five songs, taken as samples from Joni Mitchell's first five albums. Each song displays a lot of variation. This variation frequently seems to service the emotional narrative of the song and emphasizes special words that may contrast with parallel phrases in other verses.<sup>31</sup> This variation that fits the lyrics is surprising as Joni is quoted as saying, "I get the melody first and then I write out three sets of lyrics before I'm satisfied. Usually I think the melody is too pretty for the lyrics."<sup>32</sup> This statement indicates a level of intentionality at the variation of each phrase.

Each song utilizes syncopation, by deemphasizing the strong beats in the melody, contrasted with a more regular rhythm in the accompaniment. The melodies presented here often emphasize notes external to the accompanying triad- there are many instances in Joni's music where she sings a dissonant note over a chord that does not contain it<sup>33</sup>- and her chords frequently include dissonant tones. She frequently jumps large, and sometimes dissonant intervals.

All of the present songs include modulations and modal mixing. Lloyd Whitesell writes, "[p]olymodal bases as these in fact represent the most common harmonic scheme found throughout Mitchell's career."<sup>34</sup> Sometimes the key is ambiguous (like the start of "My Old Man", and the entirety of "I Had a King"; Whitesell notes a similar ambiguity in "Cold Blue Steel and Sweet Fire" from *For the Roses*.<sup>3536</sup>)

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<sup>31</sup> See additional analysis of "I Had a King" in Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, p. 17.

<sup>32</sup> Marilyn Beker, "Gentle Joni of the Mythical Mood in Folk-Rock," *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 20 April 1968, *Jonimitchell.com*, accessed 19 September 2021, [https://jonimitchell.com/Library/originals/jmOriginal\\_764.pdf](https://jonimitchell.com/Library/originals/jmOriginal_764.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> Ford, "Searching for Ghosts," p. 404.

<sup>34</sup> Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, p. 133.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>36</sup> Joni Mitchell, "Cold Blue and Steel Fire," *Spotify*, [https://open.spotify.com/track/45XSmn7yPZMTIgo9kdErh9?si=0xyVzA5WT0SKt\\_1SXKRBdw](https://open.spotify.com/track/45XSmn7yPZMTIgo9kdErh9?si=0xyVzA5WT0SKt_1SXKRBdw).

Her songs are written in a variety of forms, from regular strophic, to verse-refrain-verse, or verse-chorus-verse or bridge form. She also has songs that are through-composed, such as “Blue”,<sup>37</sup> “Blonde in the Bleachers”<sup>38</sup> and “The Arrangement”<sup>3940</sup> which were not touched on here. Another element elucidated by Whitesell is that “Mitchell characteristically avoids uniform phrase length.”<sup>41</sup> This is notable in the songs in sampled for this analysis as well, although this is not an element I chose to dwell on. Additionally, Mitchell plays with metric flow throughout her first five albums as well as *Court and Spark*. We saw this in “My Old Man” and “Lesson in Survival” but it occurs as well in many other songs.<sup>42</sup>

My analysis only includes a very limited sample of her early work, but many of the harmonic elements are noted more comprehensively by Lloyd Whitesell in his book *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, where he organizes Joni’s music into various harmonic styles.<sup>43</sup>

## **Jazz and How it Compares**

The purpose of this paper is not to define what “jazz” is. That would be beyond the scope of my capability and apparently that of most music researchers as well:

Although few jazz historians have delineated what they mean by the term “jazz,” most have adamantly taken it to refer to something specific and have fiercely guarded its borders, often by objecting to what is included or excluded from jazz history as interpreted by other writers, past and present. For those historians whose debates do attempt to define jazz in musical terms, perhaps the most influential principles were laid out in the 1940s in the disagreement between Hugues Panassié, who found the essence of jazz in its stylistic and rhythmic qualities, and Robert Goffin, for whom jazz was defined by its emphasis on improvisation.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Joni Mitchell, “Blue,” *Spotify*, <https://open.spotify.com/track/1yWIsH3TC51gmzvQxZNCQC?si=il0boh72Snmj1cOx0CkeDA>.

<sup>38</sup> Joni Mitchell, “Blonde in the bleachers,” *Spotify*, <https://open.spotify.com/track/33vz15yfffUp8WHoSY4kxL?si=X4rYHnVAQMmpylRw5N-7fw>.

<sup>39</sup> Joni Mitchell, “The Arrangement,” *Spotify*, [https://open.spotify.com/track/5fvvHLUeL9CgZTuV4uGONO?si=gwNP\\_E9ZQ\\_C-PozDOXOL4A](https://open.spotify.com/track/5fvvHLUeL9CgZTuV4uGONO?si=gwNP_E9ZQ_C-PozDOXOL4A).

<sup>40</sup> Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, pp. 137, 153-54.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 161-62.

<sup>43</sup> See Table 5.1 in Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, pp. 120-25.

<sup>44</sup> Sherrie Tucker, “Historiography, jazz,” *Grove Music Online*, 2003, Oxford University Press, accessed 19 September 2021,

Instead of attempting to enter this long-standing debate and defining Joni's music based on "improvisation" or "stylistic and rhythmic qualities" as jazz or not-jazz, I will simply compare elements of jazz to elements of Joni.

### *Harmonics*

First, the most ubiquitous chord progression in jazz is ii-V(7)-I.<sup>45</sup> I found no evidence of this progression in the songs I have analyzed from Joni's early music. This would indicate that she was not intending to imitate a specific sound from the world of jazz, as this would likely have been the most accessible and easily imitable. Another common progression is "V of V" meaning, playing the dominant of the dominant.<sup>46</sup> Possible hints of this progression can be found in "I Don't Know Where I Stand": (D)-C-(D)-F7-Bflat, and in "My Old Man" with the use of the tonic in a dominant 7<sup>th</sup> format, pulling it to its subdominant (although the progression E7-A7-D does not show up directly.)

Slash chords are when a triad is played over a note that is not a tonic of that chord. Jazz musicians didn't begin playing them commonly until the 1960s,<sup>47</sup> but Miles Davis, was playing them already in the 1950s.<sup>48</sup> Mitchell uses many slash chords throughout her early work.<sup>49</sup> I found examples of slash chords in "My Old Man," "Lesson in Survival," and in a manner in "I Had a King".

While it is not something that is found in every jazz piece, a common element in jazz harmonics is a section of a song modulated to a different key.<sup>50</sup> More commonly, jazz musicians will make use of the "mode" of any given chord in order to improvise over it. (Modal jazz began in the late

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<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-2000591400>.

<sup>45</sup> Mark Levine, *The Jazz Theory Book*. (Petaluma: Sher Music, 1995), p. 15.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid* page 109

<sup>49</sup> Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, p. 19.

<sup>50</sup> Smith, *Jazz Theory*, p. 67.

1950s with Miles Davis's *Kind of Blue*, and other musicians followed in the 60s.)<sup>51</sup> So, while no key change is taking place, many modes are being utilized.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, most of Joni's music modulates to a different mode or key.<sup>53</sup>

It was common in jazz as early as the 1930s for jazz musicians like Duke Ellington to play the 9<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> notes over seventh chords.<sup>54</sup> We find evidence of this, even in her earliest songs, like "I Had a King" in the second measure of the verses, and in "I Don't Know Where I Stand". Charles Ford notes the following in his overview of Joni's music:

A different type of dissonance arises when the note Joni Mitchell sings does not correspond with its harmonic accompaniment. For instance, she might sing g<sup>1</sup> over F major, or d<sup>2</sup> over A minor. This type of melody/chord disagreement has been common practice in post-war jazz...<sup>55</sup>

Harmonic ambiguity is a phenomenon that has existed in jazz since the early 60s with the advent of modal jazz. This is achieved using stacks of 4ths.<sup>56</sup> Joni's music also includes harmony that is ambiguous, through her extensive use of suspended chords. Other examples include "Ladies of the Canyon"<sup>57</sup> in which she plays an A minor but sings an a# (see Whitesell's analysis).<sup>58</sup> Pedal point is sometimes used by jazz musicians to enable tonal ambiguity.<sup>59</sup> We see this same technique used in "I Had a King". Furthermore, sus chords became common in jazz music in the late 1950s early 1960s, but Duke Ellington was already using them in the 1930s-1940s. Miles Davis also used one in 1956 where he alternated between Absus and Ab7<sup>#11</sup>.<sup>60</sup> We see that sort of alternating in "My Old Man," "I Had a King," (and further on in this paper in "For Free,") and free use of sus chords throughout Joni's music. In fact, Joni refers to sus chords as "chords of

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<sup>51</sup>Mark Tucker and Travis A. Jackson, "Jazz," *Grove Music Online*, June 30, 2020, Oxford University Press, accessed 21 May 2021,

<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-90000358106?rskey=4uRuGK>.

<sup>52</sup> Levine, *The Jazz Theory Book*, pp. 31-94.

<sup>53</sup> Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, p. 133.

<sup>54</sup> Levine, *The Jazz Theory Book*, p. 31.

<sup>55</sup> Ford, "Searching for Ghosts," p. 404.

<sup>56</sup> "Modal Harmony in Jazz Composition," *Berklee Online*, Original author: Ted Pease, Berklee College of Music, <https://online.berklee.edu/takenote/harmonic-considerations-modal-harmony/>.

<sup>57</sup> Joni Mitchell, "Ladies of the Canyon," *Spotify*,

<https://open.spotify.com/track/1Q8BMaKg8czMR2Y6wLIXJf?si=zZNhDY5xS4md7MIP9nH8IA>

<sup>58</sup> Whitesell, "Harmonic Palette in Early Joni Mitchell," p. 176.

<sup>59</sup> Smith, *Jazz Theory*, p. 70.

<sup>60</sup> Levine, *The Jazz Theory Book*, pp. 44-46.

inquiry” and makes free use of them in her music; people would call these sus chords that she used “Joni’s weird chords,”<sup>61</sup> which indicates a level of pervasiveness in her work.

### *Melody, Rhythm, Form, and Instrumentation*

A common element of bebop jazz is an added chromatic passing tone in order to enable a more effective emphasis of chord tones.<sup>62</sup> A similar technique is notable in “My Old Man.”

Syncopation is possibly a defining element of jazz music. It is created by placing accents on unexpected parts of the bar that seem to contrast with the meter.<sup>63</sup> A common way to do this is by swinging eighth notes. Another way is through rests and tied notes.<sup>64</sup> Joni’s melodies are very often syncopated using rests and ties.

“Swing” is a rhythmic treatment of eighth notes in jazz that treats the pair like a set of triples by elongating the first of an eighth note pair to be the length of a quarter note (two eighth notes of a triplet set) and shortens the second note to be an eighth note of a triplet, which enables syncopation.<sup>65</sup> We hear swinging of notes in “Lesson in Survival,” the chorus of “I Had a King,” and in the third verse of “I Don’t Know Where I Stand” on the words “muted” and “know.”

Jazz music began exploring alternative time signatures in the late 1950s with the Brubeck Quartet’s *Time Out*.<sup>66</sup> In Joni’s music, she plays with metric flow and complex time signatures,<sup>67</sup> seen distinctively in “Lesson for Survival.”

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<sup>61</sup> “Joni Mitchell Interview,” *Youtube*, Uploaded by Charlie Mars, 24 March 2019, accessed 21 September 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QIO-Su7hKzQ&t=589s>, 09:45.

<sup>62</sup> Levine, *The Jazz Theory Book*, p. 171.

<sup>63</sup> Dariusz, Terefenko, *Jazz Theory: From Basic to Advanced Study*, (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 20.

<sup>64</sup> Mark Gotham, et al., “VI. Jazz: Swing Rhythms,” *Open Music Theory*. Version 2, (Viva Pressbooks, 2021), *Open Music Theory*, <https://viva.pressbooks.pub/openmusictheory/chapter/swing-rhythms/>.

<sup>65</sup> Smith, *Jazz Theory*, p. 10.

<sup>66</sup> Tucker and Jackson, “Jazz,” *Grove Music Online*.

<sup>67</sup> Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, pp. 161-62.

A common form in jazz is taking a “head” or a theme and playing multiple variations around it.<sup>68</sup> Joni makes free use of variation in her melodies, rarely singing the verses in an identical manner. This is done very clearly in “Lesson in Survival,” (as well as in “A Case of You.”<sup>69</sup>)

Jazz music frequently contains trumpets, saxophones, and solo pianos. Although horns are rare in Joni’s music, she does have a saxophone solo in “For Free” and “He Comes For Conversation.”<sup>70</sup> (She begins using more jazzlike instruments in *For the Roses* with her introduction of winds and percussion.)<sup>71</sup> She also simulates a trumpet solo in “I Don’t Know Where I Stand.” Additionally, the piano is given a soloing role in “My Old Man” and plays a counter melody to the voice. This piano styling is also reminiscent of the “polyphonic weave” of New Orleans jazz.<sup>72</sup>

It is clear that Joni Mitchell’s music shares many elements that are ubiquitous in jazz music. Although not any element is by definition “jazz,” the number and pervasiveness of overlapping qualities indicates that there may in fact be a connection between Joni and jazz.

## **Where Joni Meets Jazz and Alternative Evaluations**

### *Where Joni Meets Jazz*

Whitesell considers *For the Roses* a transitional album, looking forward towards Mitchell jazz exploration,<sup>73</sup> but perhaps it is an album more clearly looking *back* toward Joni’s early proclivities. Even at a young age, Joni was drawn to more complex melodies. Among the music that she chose to listen to in high school were jazz musicians: Ray Charles, Miles Davis, Duke

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>69</sup> Joni Mitchell, “A Case of You,” *Spotify*, <https://open.spotify.com/track/7shVwhUdVbHpykOfbzyDc1?si=vw752kU8SY26FdLFGuUjSw>.

<sup>70</sup> Joni Mitchell, “Conversation,” *Spotify*, <https://open.spotify.com/track/1wcbiRER4ChnikvcLc2OE6?si=Qd32jpiqRd20F66g1xrBTQ>.

<sup>71</sup> Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, p. 21.

<sup>72</sup> Tucker and Jackson, “Jazz,” *Grove Music Online*.

<sup>73</sup> Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, p. 21.

Ellington, and Johnny Hodges.<sup>74</sup> And significantly, she adored the vocal jazz ensemble Lambert, Hendricks, & Ross. Joni is quoted as saying,

My jazz background began with one of the early Lambert, Hendricks and Ross albums, the one called 'The Hottest New Sound in Jazz.' It was hard to find in Canada, so I saved up and bought it at a bootleg price. I considered that album to be my Beatles. I learned every song off of it, and I don't think there is another album anywhere - including my own - on which I know every note and word of every song.<sup>75</sup>

Lambert, Hendricks & Ross's undertaking was to translate the big band sound into a small jazz vocal ensemble:<sup>76</sup> they used their voices as the primary instruments. Perhaps echoes of this instrumental style of singing can be found in Joni's "trumpet solo" in "I Don't Know Where I Stand," and the unusual number of melodic leaps in her music for popular melodies.<sup>77</sup>

Additionally, perhaps the instances of blues-based elements- for example the blue-note I noted in the first verse of "Lesson in Survival"- can be traced back to Mitchell's familiarity with Lambert, Hendricks & Ross. Songs like "Moanin'"<sup>78</sup>- which can be found on the album referenced by Joni Mitchell- were expressions of a move in jazz music in the 1950s to incorporate more blues stylings.<sup>79</sup>

Whitesell delineates Joni's second period of songwriting, starting with her sixth album, *Court and Spark*, as follows:

Throughout her second style period, Mitchell combines characteristic elements of her musical language—for example, extended harmonies, modal/tonal complexity, flexible melodic phrasing, and syncopated rhythmic hooks—so as to evoke an affinity with jazz.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> David Yaffe, *Reckless Daughter: A Portrait of Joni Mitchell*, (New York: Sarah Crichton Books, 2017), *Google Books*, accessed 21 May 2021, [https://books.google.co.il/books?id=RGMDQAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=reckless+daughter&hl=en&sa=X&redir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q=reckless%20daughter&f=false](https://books.google.co.il/books?id=RGMDQAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=reckless+daughter&hl=en&sa=X&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=reckless%20daughter&f=false), pp. 9, 16, 24-25.

<sup>75</sup> Feather, "Joni Mitchell Has Her Mojo Working," *Los Angeles Times*.

<sup>76</sup> Jessica Bissett Perea, "Vocal jazz ensemble," *Grove Music Online*, January 3, 2014, Oxford University Press, accessed 19 September 2021, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-1002258661>.

<sup>77</sup> Ford, "Searching for Ghosts," p. 405.

<sup>78</sup> Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, "Moanin'," *Spotify*, [https://open.spotify.com/track/2UMCqIP3oN645gPuOtIIFj?si=V\\_GWxTXDSxah0LX1MOvnyg](https://open.spotify.com/track/2UMCqIP3oN645gPuOtIIFj?si=V_GWxTXDSxah0LX1MOvnyg).

<sup>79</sup> Tucker and Jackson, "Jazz," *Grove Music Online*.

<sup>80</sup> Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, p. 23.

As previously discussed, the elements Whitesell lists are also characteristic of her early music. They are, perhaps, simply not used with the same *intentionality* to “evoke an affinity with jazz” as they are used in the second period of songwriting.

### *Alternative Evaluations*

But despite this early affinity towards jazz music, I can’t ignore that other possibilities can play a role in explaining unique elements of her musical style. There is also a connection to classical genres, an explanation regarding her use of alternative tunings, and the obvious folk music connection.

Firstly, the modulatory nature of Joni’s music can be explained by an early love of classical music. Modulation is very common in classical music and, for example, plays an instrumental role in sonata form.<sup>81</sup> Additionally, the richness of her melodies and harmonies can also be influenced by this love of classical music, especially those by-in the words of Lloyd Whitesell- “composers known for melodic and harmonic invention” like Chopin, Rachmaninov, Tchaikovsky, Debussy, and Stravinsky.<sup>82</sup> (Stravinsky’s ballet, *Rite of Spring* is a great example of “discordant harmonies and convulsive metric irregularities”<sup>83</sup> which perhaps has aided in developing Joni’s affinity towards dissonance and the metric irregularities found in “Lesson in Survival” and “My Old Man.”) Whitesell draws connections to her piano stylings and Schumann, describing the piano introduction to “Rainy Night House”<sup>84</sup> (*Ladies of the Canyon*, 1970) as having “Schumannesque...expansiveness.”<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, Mitchell has compared her songs to German Lieder as opposed to the typical pop song.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> James Webster, "Sonata form," *Grove Music Online*, 2001, Oxford University Press, accessed 19 September 2021, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000026197>.

<sup>82</sup> Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, p. 118.

<sup>83</sup> Stephen Walsh, "Stravinsky, Igor," *Grove Music Online*, 2001, Oxford University Press, accessed 19 September 2021, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000052818>.

<sup>84</sup> Joni Mitchell, “Rainy Night House,” *Spotify*, <https://open.spotify.com/track/3ZGKe1PrwxQ16sCHwioCyE?si=FanLurgRsqMs1qjYhbPBQ>.

<sup>85</sup> Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, p. 134.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Secondly, it is possible that a *lack* of training, in addition her hand weakened by polio, are what led to the inventiveness of her harmonies. Charles Ford argues that the harmonic richness in her early guitar and dulcimer pieces was the result of the randomness of her tunings. He argues that the harmonies arise in an undirected manner, unlike jazz harmonies.<sup>87</sup> Lloyd Whitesell argues that Joni's lack of training enabled a freedom from musical preconceptions.<sup>88</sup> But as opposed to Ford, Whitesell proposes that it was because of Mitchell's "highly diversified field of harmonic resources" (which included folk and jazz modal harmonies, "the sophisticated language of standard American songwriters", and the stylings of romantic and modern classical composers,) that she experimented with tunings.<sup>89</sup> Meaning, the effect that Joni was chasing guided the tuning and it is not the tunings that guided the results. (I personally prefer Whitesell's interpretation, as it gives Joni more credit for her compositions.)

Thirdly, Joni's connection to folk music<sup>90</sup> could in large part explain the modality of her music. To quote Whitesell: "Modal harmony was already a common alternative for popular music in the late twentieth century; folk-derived styles in particular grew out of a venerable tradition of modal usage."<sup>91</sup> Folk-music frequently uses Aeolian, Mixolydian, and Dorian modes, which commonly appear throughout Joni's music.<sup>92</sup> <sup>93</sup> Modal mixture was also common in popular music at the time, but Joni's use of it is "unprecedented" with 130 of her 152 songs using modal mixture.<sup>94</sup> Additionally, the large leaps that I've noted in Joni's melodies could be attributed her familiarity with folksong tunes.<sup>95</sup>

But even early on in her career when she was playing covers of folk songs, Joni was drawn to more experimental and individualistic aspects of music. She experimented with more dissonant harmonies and chromatic progressions. For example, in her rendition of "Sail Away,"<sup>96</sup> she

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<sup>87</sup> Ford, "Searching for Ghosts," p. 401.

<sup>88</sup> Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, p. 117.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>92</sup> Carole Pegg, "Folk Music," *Grove Music Online*, January 20, 2001, Oxford University Press, accessed 21 May 2021, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000009933?rskey=d35Yit&result=1>.

<sup>93</sup> Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, p. 119.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127

<sup>95</sup> Pegg, "Folk Music," *Grove Music Online*.

<sup>96</sup> Joni Mitchell, "Sail Away- Live at the Half Beat, Yorkville, Toronto, Canada 10/21/1964," *Spotify*, <https://open.spotify.com/track/4HFIPML2dCEIDNgmUMIKgr?si=9pFGOYD1RxaWHxxPPLHi2w>.

arranges the piece with a “jarring tritone chord progression that is not in the original” (in the words of Rob Weinert-Kendt) and continues to utilize this sort of progression throughout her career.<sup>97</sup> An example of Joni adding chromaticism can be found in her rendition of “Pastures of Plenty” by Woodie Guthrie,<sup>98</sup> in which I noted a chromatic descent in the guitar accompaniment.<sup>99</sup>

Furthermore, Mitchell was influenced by Bob Dylan. Joni’s whole understanding of being a songwriter who put poetry to music came from Dylan.<sup>100</sup> The chant like effect in some of her songs when she hovers over a couple of note patterns is inspired by Dylan and folksingers.<sup>101</sup>

Ultimately, the singularity and profundity of Joni’s music can be traced to her fusion of elements and inventiveness. Joni states, “I loved the beautiful melodies that belonged to the Crooner era. But those melodies had very simple texts, there wasn’t much room for poetic description...but I liked the more storytelling quality of Dylan’s work.”<sup>102</sup> This is a clear example of Joni’s desire to take the best of each world: the folk/singer-songwriting of Dylan, and the melodies of the Crooners, which were of jazz derivation.<sup>103</sup> Joni compares herself and relates to Duke Ellington, Igor Stravinsky, Claude Debussy, and late Marvin Gaye as her harmonic peers,<sup>104</sup><sup>105</sup> another mixture of modern-classical and jazz.

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<sup>97</sup> Robert Weinert-Kent, “Joni Mitchell’s ‘Archives Vol.1’ Show a Songwriter Navigating Art and Life Before a Record Deal,” *American Magazine*, January 15, 2021, *Jonimitchell.com*, accessed 19 September 2021, <https://jonimitchell.com/library/view.cfm?id=4749>.

<sup>98</sup> “Pastures of Plenty,” *Roll On, Columbia: Woody Guthrie in the Pacific Northwest*, (School of Library and Information Management at Emporia State University, 2011), <https://woodyguthrieinthepacificnw.omeka.net/about>.

<sup>99</sup> Joni Mitchell, “Pastures of Plenty- Live at the Half Beat, Yorkville, Toronto, Canada 10/21/1964,” *Spotify*, <https://open.spotify.com/track/12d6Xqvk8ynwB0kF0XBjsz?si=-hzquRCiQW-SGYUaHqJRIQ>.

<sup>100</sup> David Wild, “A Conversation with Joni Mitchell,” *Rolling Stone*, 30 May 1991, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/a-conversation-with-joni-mitchell-172726/>.

<sup>101</sup> Ford, “Searching for Ghosts,” pp. 416-17.

<sup>102</sup> Lacy, “Joni Mitchell: A Woman of Heart and Mind,” *Youtube*, 15:00.

<sup>103</sup> Tucker and Jackson, “Jazz,” *Grove Music Online*.

<sup>104</sup> “The Joni Mitchell Interview,” *Youtube*, Uploaded by CBC Music, June 11, 2013, accessed 19 September 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pEJuiZN3jI8&t=451s>, 57:00-58:00.

<sup>105</sup> For a discussion on Gaye’s later style, see Rob Bowman, “Gaye [Gay], Marvin,” *Grove Music Online*, 2001, Oxford University Press, accessed 19 September 2021, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000045923>.

Joni expresses that she never wanted to imitate anything and always wanted to be authentic,<sup>106</sup> so it is logical that the beginning of her career is characterized by a subtle fusion of elements, rather than an imitation of any one style. In fact, as stated in Stuart Smith's book *Jazz Theory*, "The rhythmic, harmonic, and formal components together confine jazz to a fairly narrow range of musical possibilities."<sup>107</sup> Perhaps Joni's early music was not yet ready to be confined to the limitations of jazz and she drew on other musical forms to gain freedom in her music.

*Final Song Analysis: "For Free" Ladies of the Canyon (1970)*<sup>108</sup>

This song starts off with a piano opening that, for merely two bars, emphasizes off-beats and uses triplets to create a syncopated feel, then veers into a more regular rhythmic accompaniment. The piano accompaniment remains consistent in style throughout the song, but as the verses progress, Mitchell plays variations of the initial content. It is played in the key of C with a relatively simple chord progression: I- bVII- vi7sus4- vi7-ii- IV-bVII-IV...V. Though she consistently uses the flatted seventh chord of the scale (B flat), this modulation is considered rather standard in pop music and can be understood as a replacement for the dominant of subdominant positions.<sup>109</sup> The song consists of three verses that are each made up of four parts consisting of about eleven bars each. The melody is structurally quite simple, and its basic tendency is to move from e to d to c with other notes surrounding used to decorate that basic phrasing (figure 3). The melodic line is primarily in stepwise motion but with occasional decorative jump down to a and g. Only during the first verse at the start of the fourth internal section are these jumps emphasized in a non-standard way, back and forth (figure 4). Throughout, the melody does vary to accompany the lyrics. In total, the song has a rather pop-ballade-like feel, drawing on the narrative style inspired by Bob Dylan, and surprises the listener with a clarinet solo "tacked on" as the outro.

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<sup>106</sup> "The Joni Mitchell Interview," *Youtube*, Uploaded by CBC Music, June 11, 2013, accessed 19 September 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pEJuiZN3jI8&t=451s>, 1:18:00-1:22:00.

<sup>107</sup> Smith, *Jazz Theory*, p. 9.

<sup>108</sup> Joni Mitchell, "For Free," *Spotify*, <https://open.spotify.com/track/4lTcqxs7OWzg5pqC3UEM5?si=n81kGeq4RE2apXa-neGs3Q>.

<sup>109</sup> Hutchinson, "Subtonic VII in Pop Music," *Music Theory for the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Classroom*.



[T]he music which people identify with in their youth can seem to ‘haunt’ their adult lives. Surely some of the things that affect us most are those very phenomena that we don’t notice, and don’t even know are affecting us: phenomena that are un-conceptualized, free from language and reason.<sup>110</sup>

Much of Joni’s composing is intuitive.<sup>111</sup> According to psychology theorists, intuition is characterized as a cognitive process that activates prior knowledge unconsciously.<sup>112</sup> This would indicate that, while not necessarily meaning to, Joni took components of classical, folk, pop, et.al. and surely components of jazz as well, to compose her music. The jazz influence can be seen and heard harmonically, through her use of sus chords, slash chords, modality, modulation, the use of complex, dissonant chords and ambiguous tonality. The echoes of jazz can also be heard in her occasional chromaticism, her syncopated melodies, complex time signatures, variation in her melodies, and her occasional use of jazz “instruments”- sometimes reflected in her own voice. While she is influenced by all these genres, Joni always seemed drawn to the complex aspects of each genre, and even used her limitations to experiment and allow for more ingenuity. Her lack of training enabled an unconscious confluence of styles, while her creativity allowed them to be expressed in new ways through her music.

When viewing the pre-existence of jazz elements in her early music, and a natural pull towards complexity and experimentation, the rationale behind Joni’s foray into jazz starting with *Court and Spark* and culminating in her project with Charles Mingus becomes much clearer than when merely classifying her early albums under the label of “folk-aesthetic.”<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Ford, “Searching for Ghosts,” p. 400.

<sup>111</sup> Tony Hale, “Rock Master Class, (A Music & Interview Program),” Transcribed by: Lindsay Moon, *Capital Radio 95.8 FM*, December 29, 1985, *Jonimitchell.com*, accessed 19 September 2021, <https://jonimitchell.com/library/view.cfm?id=646>.

<sup>112</sup> Frankish, Keith. “Dual- Process and Dual-System Theories of Reasoning.” *Philosophy Compass* 5/10 (2010), pp. 914-916, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-9991.2010.00330.x>.

<sup>113</sup> Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, p. 12.

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# Appendix

## I Had A King

Transcribed by Michael Dunn - itranscribe@me.com

Joni Mitchell

♩ = 120 A Am9

5 **A** A Am9

3 3

1. I had a king in a te - ne - ment ca - stle. Late - ly he's ta ken to  
 2. I had a king dressed in drip dry & pai - sley. Late - ly he's ta ken to  
 3. I had a king in a salt - ru - sted car - riage. Who car - ried me off to his

8 A2(omit3) Fmaj7/A

3

pain - ting the pas - tel walls brown; He's ta - ken the cur - tains down; —  
 say - ing I'm cra - zy and blind. He lives in a no - ther time. —  
 coun - try for mar - riage too soon. Be - ware of the - pow'r of moons. —

12 Amadd9 Em7/A

He's swept with the broom of con-tempt and the rooms have an  
 La - dies in ging-ham still blush when he sings them of  
 There's no - one to blame, no, there's no one to name as a

*p*

Ped. Ped.

15 Am7 E2(omit3)/A Amadd9

emp - ty ring; He's cleaned with the tears of an  
 wars and wine. But I in my lea - ther and  
 trai - tor here. The queen's in the groove and the

Ped. Ped. Ped.

18 Em7/A Am7 E2(omit3) rit.

ac - tor who fears for the laugh - ter's sting.  
 lace, I can ne - ver be come that kind.  
 king's on the road till the end of the year.

Ped. Ped. Ped.

**B** A Tempo

22 Asus4 Asus4 A Asus4 Asus4 A

*f* I can't go back there an - y-more. You know my keys won't fit the door;—

26 Asus4 Asus4 A Am9

You know the thoughts don't fit the man. They ne-ver can,—

29

2. 3.  
A

— they ne-ver can. —

*f*

*Red.*

30 A Am9

ne-ver can. \_\_\_\_\_ They ne-ver

Ped. \_\_\_\_\_ Ped.

33 A rit. . . . . A2(omit3) (Rpt 4 x)

can, they ne-ver can. \_\_\_\_\_

\*Last x only

Ped. \_\_\_\_\_

Mitchell, Joni, composer. "I Had a King." 1968. *Song to a Seagull*. Transcribed by Michael Dunn. *Jonimitchell.com*. <https://jonimitchell.com/music/guitarfiles/417.pdf>. Accessed 22 May 2021.

# I DON'T KNOW WHERE I STAND

Words and Music by  
JONI MITCHELL

*Moderate*  
mp

Fun - ny day,      Look - ing for laugh - ter and find - ing it there. ———  
Crick - ets call,      court - ing their la - dies in star - dap - pled green. ———

Sun - ny day,      braid - ing fall flow - ers and      leaves ——— in my hair.  
Thick - ets tall      us - til the morn - ing comes      up ——— like a dream.      All

Picked up a pen - cil and wrote I love you      in my fin - est hand. I  
mut - ed and mist - y, so drows - y new; —      I'll take what sleep I can. I

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114

<sup>114</sup> Note on sheet music- this is a simplified version that was transposed a whole tone up to E Mixolydian. The introduction is very inaccurate, so I also included a more precise tablature transcription of the introduction.

want-ed to send it, But I don't know where I stand,  
know that I miss you, But I don't know where I stand, *Fine*

Tel - e - phone,

ev - en the sound of your voice is still new. All a - lone

in Car - o - lin - a and talk - ing to you and

feel-ing too fool - ish and strange to say \_\_\_\_\_ The words that I had planned,

This system features a vocal line with lyrics and a piano accompaniment. Chord diagrams for G and D7 are shown above the vocal staff.

Guess it's too ear - ly cuz I don't know \_\_\_\_\_ where I \_\_\_\_\_ stand, \_\_\_\_\_

This system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. Chord diagrams for Cm, D7, D7sus, D9, and G are shown above the vocal staff.

Doo \_\_\_\_\_ too too too too too too \_\_\_\_\_

This system features a vocal line with a melodic phrase and piano accompaniment. Chord diagrams for B and A are shown above the vocal staff.

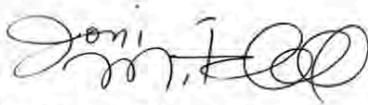
too too too too too too too \_\_\_\_\_

*D. S. al Fine*

This system concludes the piece with a vocal line and piano accompaniment. Chord diagrams for Cm, Am, and G are shown above the vocal staff.

Scanned with CamScanner

Mitchell, Joni. "I Don't Know Where I Stand." *Joni Mitchell Anthology*. Van Nuys: Alfred Music, 1983, pp. 12-14.



JoniMitchell.com Transcription for Guitar

# I Don't Know Where I Stand

Author: Sue McNamara

FFCGAC, 'Joni' Tuning: x07723

This transcription is the author's own work and represents their interpretation of the song. You may only use this file for private study, scholarship, or research. Copyrighted material on this website is used in accordance with 'Fair Use'

(Note that the bottom two strings are tuned in unison, not in octaves.)

INTRO:

```

          open          open
|||*|4  |||*|1  |||*|1  |||||  |||*|1  |||||
|**||   |**||   ||*||  |||||  ||*||  |||||

          open          open
|||*|4  |||*|1  |||*|1  |||||  |||*|1  |||||
|**||   |**||   ||*||  |||||  ||*||  |||||

***** 9
|||

```

Mitchell, Joni, composer. "I Don't Know Where I Stand." 1969. *Clouds*. Transcribed by Sue McNamara. *Jonimitchell.com*. <https://jonimitchell.com/music/guitarfiles/225.pdf>. Accessed 19 September 2021.

# MY OLD MAN

Words and Music by  
JONI MITCHELL

Medium Folk Tempo

My old man, he's a sing-er in the park;

he's a walk-er in the east; he's a dan-cer... in the dark.

We don't need... no piece of pa-per from the ci-ty hall. Keep-in' us tight... and true...



My old man, keep-in' a-way my blues.

Chords: D, D, D (A Bass), E7sus (E Bass), D (E Bass), A, D (A Bass)



He's my sun-shine in the morn-in', he's my fire-works at the end of the day.

Chords: A, D, E7sus (E Bass), D (E Bass), A, D (A Bass)



He's the warm-est chord I ev-er heard, play that warm chord play-in'

Chords: A, D (A Bass), D, E7sus (E Bass), D (E Bass), A7sus (E Bass), Am7



stay, ba-by. We don't need no piece of pa-per from the ci-ty hall,

Chords: A7sus (E Bass), Am7, A7sus (E Bass), D, A7sus (E Bass), A7 (E Bass), D (E Bass)

keep-in' us tight— and true. My old— man,— keep-in' a-way— my—

Chords: E7, (A Bass), D, E7sus, D, (F Bass), A

blues. But when he's gone, me and them lone - some blues

Chords: (A Bass), D, A, Abm7, Bbm

col-lide. The bed's too big, the fry - in' pans\_ too wide.

Chords: C(maj)7, D6, D(m)7, B

To Coda 1

Chords: D, (A Bass), D7, E, D, (F Bass), A, A, D, (A Bass)

Then he comes home — and he takes me in — his — lov-in' arms. —

This system contains the first two staves of music. The vocal line is on the top staff, and the piano accompaniment is on the bottom two staves. Chord diagrams are placed above the vocal line. The lyrics are: "Then he comes home — and he takes me in — his — lov-in' arms. —"

And he tells me all his trou-bles and he tells me — all my charms. —

This system contains the next two staves of music. The vocal line is on the top staff, and the piano accompaniment is on the bottom two staves. Chord diagrams are placed above the vocal line. The lyrics are: "And he tells me all his trou-bles and he tells me — all my charms. —"

⊕ Coda I      D. S. al ⊕ Coda II      ⊕ Coda II

Keep-in' a-way my lone - some

This system contains the third and fourth staves of music. The vocal line is on the top staff, and the piano accompaniment is on the bottom two staves. Chord diagrams are placed above the vocal line. The lyrics are: "Keep-in' a-way my lone - some".

blues. —

This system contains the fifth and sixth staves of music. The vocal line is on the top staff, and the piano accompaniment is on the bottom two staves. Chord diagrams are placed above the vocal line. The lyrics are: "blues. —"

Mitchell, Joni. "My Old Man." *Joni Mitchell Anthology*. Van Nuys: Alfred Music, 1983, pp. 52-55.

# LESSON IN SURVIVAL

JONI MITCHELL

$\text{♩} = 98$

Piano introduction in G major, 4/4 time. The piece starts with a *sfz* (sforzando) dynamic. The first two measures are marked *mf* (mezzo-forte). The chords are A<sup>7</sup>sus, A, G/A, A, and G.

4 **A**

Vocal line: Less-on in sur-vi-val spinn-ing out on turns that gets you tou-gh gu-ru books, the Bib-le on-ly a re-mind-er that you're

Piano accompaniment: Chords G, D/G, G, D/G, G, D/G, G, D/G.

8

Vocal line: just not goo-d e-nough you need to be-lieve in some-thing once I could in our

Piano accompaniment: Chords E/A, D, D. Includes triplets and a 5/4 time signature change.

12 **B**

Vocal line: love. black road, doub-le yell-ow li-ne friends and kin

Piano accompaniment: Chords D, A/D, E, D/E, A/E, E. Includes triplets and a *mf* dynamic.

transcription by Dave Blackburn [www.daveblackburn.com](http://www.daveblackburn.com)

16

cam-pers in the kit-chen that's fine some times\_\_ but I know my\_\_needs my sweet\_\_ turn - ble wee - d

*D/G* *F#m7* *F#m7* *D/E* *E/A*

*mp* *f*

20

I need more\_\_ qui - et ti - mes by a riv - er flow - ing you and me deep kiss - es and

*F#m7* *E/F#* *G2/E*

*mp* *p*

24

the sun go ing down.

*G2/E*

*p* *pp*

Ped.

26

*f* *mf* *f*

*A7sus* *A*

*♩ = 98*

29 **C**

May-be it's par-a-noi-a may-be it's sen-si-tiv-i-ty your friends pro-tect you scru-ti-nize me I get so damn tim-id not at

**G D/G G D/G G D/G G D/G**

33

all the spir-it that's in-si-de of me oh ba-by I can't seem to make it with you so-cial-ly, there's this

**E/A D**

37 **D**

reef a-round me I'm look-ing way out at the o-cean love to see that green

**A/D E D/E A/E E**

**f**

41

wat - er in mo - tion I'm gonn - a get a boat and

*mf*

D/G F#M7 F#M7 E9(SUS4)

44

POCO RIT. - - - - -

we can row it if you e - ver get the no - tion to be need - ed by me

*mf* *p* *pp*

E/A POCO RIT. - - - - - F#M7 E/F# G2/E

Ped. Ped. Ped.

48

♩ = 98

fresh sal - mon fryin' and the tide roll in' in.

*mf* *f*

E/A F#M7 E/F# G2/E

Ped.

52

**E**

Musical score for measures 52-55. The system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The vocal line begins with a rest for two measures, then enters with the lyrics: "I went to see a friend to-night was ver-y late...when I...walked in my". The piano accompaniment features a bass line with eighth notes and a treble line with chords and eighth notes. Chord symbols above the piano part are: A7sus, A G/A A, G G, D/G, G, D/G. Dynamics include *mf* and *mp*.

56

Musical score for measures 56-59. The system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The vocal line continues with the lyrics: "talk-ing as it ram-bled re vealed... sus-pic-i-ous rea-son-ing the vis-it seemed to dark-en hi-m I came". The piano accompaniment features a bass line with eighth notes and a treble line with chords and eighth notes. Chord symbols above the piano part are: G, D/G, G, D/G, E/A. Dynamics include *f*.

60

Musical score for measures 60-63. The system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The vocal line continues with the lyrics: "in as bright as a ne-on light and I burned out right there be-fore him". The piano accompaniment features a bass line with eighth notes and a treble line with chords and eighth notes. Chord symbols above the piano part are: D, D, A/D. Dynamics include *mf* and *f*.

64

I told him these things I'm tell - in' you now watch them buck - le up in his brow

*f* *mp*

Chords: E, D/E, A/E, E, D/G, F#m7

68

when you dig down deep you lose go - od sleep and

*mf*

Chords: F#m7, E9(SUS4), E/A

72

makes you heav-y com - pan-y I will al-ways love you hands a - like

*p*

POCO RIT.

Chords: F#m7, E/F#, G2/E, A7(SUS4)

76

mag-net and i - ron. the souls.

80

SEQUE INTO "LET THE WIND CARRY ME"

*ppp*

Mitchell, Joni, composer. "Lesson in Survival." 1972. *For the Roses*. Transcribed by Dave Blackburn. *Jonimitchell.com*. <https://jonimitchell.com/music/guitarfiles/488.pdf>. Accessed 19 September 2021.

# FOR FREE

JONI MITCHELL

Measures 1-4. Chords: F, C. Includes a triplet of eighth notes in measure 2.

Measures 5-8. Chords: G7, C, F.

Measures 9-12. Chords: C, Bb. Includes lyrics: I slept last night in a hotel, Nobody played for me, Nobody stopped to hear him.

Measures 13-16. Chords: A7sus4, Dm, F. Includes lyrics: good hotel, for tunes, hear him, I went shopping today for a new suit, and those velvet curtains, though he played so sweet and

transcribed by Dave Blackburn

17

jew  
calls  
hi gh. els

21

**A2**

the wind rushed a-round in the dir-ty town  
I've got/a black lim-ou-sine and two gentle-men  
they knew he had never b-een on their TV

25

and the chil-dre-n I-et out from the schoo-  
es-cort-ing me to the ha-lls  
so they passed hi-s mus-ic

29

by I was  
And I

**B**

FOR FREE

33

stand - ing on a nois - - - y cor - ner  
play if you have the mon - ey  
meant to go over and ask for a song

37

wait - ing for the walk - in - g green  
or if you're a friend t - o me  
maybe put on a harm - o - ny

41

**C**

a - cross the street he stood and he  
but the one man band by the  
I heard his re - frain as the

45

played real good on his clar - i - net  
quick lunch stand he was playin' real good  
sig - nal changed he was playin' real good

49 1.

for fr

B<sup>b</sup> F AM

55

- ee. Now

G

57 2.

for free

B<sup>b</sup> F AM

63

G

The musical score consists of four systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. Measure 66 shows the vocal line starting with the lyrics 'for fr' and the piano accompaniment with chords Bb, Fsus4, and AM. Measure 70 features the vocal line with the lyrics 'ee.' and the piano accompaniment with chords AM and G. Measure 72 shows the piano accompaniment with chords C and AM. Measure 73 concludes the system with a piano accompaniment featuring chords F and C.

Mitchell, Joni, composer. "For Free." 1970. *Ladies of the Canyon*. Transcribed by Howard Wright. *Jonimitchell.com*. <https://jonimitchell.com/music/guitarfiles/341.pdf>. Accessed 19 September 2021.