

At New Penelope

Popular folksinger cuts first album

By DORIS GILLER

Folksinger-composer Joni Mitchell, who is currently appearing at the New Penelope, has progressively backed into the limelight.

Not that she planned it that way, it just happened.

Although she has been performing for the past three years and her compositions have been recorded by the best in the business — Harry Belafonte, Joan Collins, Buffy Sainte-Marie, Ian and Sylvia — she has never recorded anything herself. Next week all that will be changed when "Song to a Seagull," her first album by Reprise will be released.

A college dropout because she enjoyed singing so much and found she was missing too many classes, she left the art college in Calgary where she was an honors student and moved to Toronto to try the coffee house circuit.

"But it was the same old story," says Joni who was born in Fort Macleod, Alta., and raised in Saskatchewan.

"It's hard for Canadians to get work in their own country unless they have recognition. And you get that by going to the United States."

Worked in U.S.

She did and lived in Detroit for two years working in the State of Michigan mostly to fill-in on cancellation slots. She soon found "people were picking up on my music."

"Tom Rush began singing my songs and built up a curiosity about me on the Eastern circuit. Finally clubs began to hire me even though I'd never made a record. Slowly I began to work the circuit."

Last year Joni was on the road more than 40 weeks. She claims it's like "a holiday with pay. You meet your fellow musicians, poets, and some wonderful people who enjoy both. But you might get fed up with it. I've kept an apartment in New York but I'm beginning to feel that I need to set my roots down. I guess that's why I bought a home in California. I'll be moving into it next month."

The coffee house setting, says Joni, is drying up because not enough performers are coming up.

"That's because of rock and roll. There are some wonder-



Staff Photo by Allan Leishman

FOLKSINGER: Joni Mitchell, folksinger and composer, currently appearing at the New Penelope on Sherbrooke street west, will wind up her engagement tomorrow night. The artist's first album, "Song to a Seagull" will be released next week.

ful and some terrible things about it. For one it introduced overnight success.

"I'd always thought it should be a gradual growth. Not being a star in six months. Now, they put together a super band, the publicists get to work and you've got it made overnight."

"A lot of the performers got absorbed into the groups and because there aren't enough new people coming up the clubs are beginning to close. Of course, for every one that closes another one springs up but they're a new kind of club."

Concert halls

The new clubs, she says, are more like concert halls because people, more discriminating in their tastes, are listening to music.

"Today, so many people play themselves and because

they do everyone is a critic. They aren't snobbish about one style over another. Music has integrated and the new movement is giving an equal position to folk, rock and roll, and jazz.

"They're individualistic. It's like the clothes. There are so many styles and you pick what you want. It's not like it used to be. The top 50 a year ago were all basically the same. Now it's all integrated."

A prolific composer, Joni says she has no feelings about anyone else using her material first.

"I have no rules. Other performers using my songs introduces me as a composer but I have lots I introduce myself."

She says she always wrote poetry but never thought of setting the poems to music. But it became harder and

harder to discover new old folk songs because they had all been found. There was a demand for fresh material, material that people could identify with.

One song, which has been recorded by Ian and Sylvia and is included in her "Song to a Seagull" album, is typical.

It is called "Nathan Lairframer," as was her New York cab driver who was supposed to rescue her from the "fed up with New York living. I flagged his cab and he was grumbling. We ran into the rush hour at 14th street and I was worried I'd miss my plane. There was this crippled man selling gray Balman balloons on a corner. When we finally got to the airport I didn't tip Nathan Lairframer enough and he threw my bags down. That says it exactly, except it rhymes."

She wrote the song within an hour on the plane.

It's included in the Seagull album which is divided into part one and part two.

One side tells of coming into a city, the way it is and leaving it. The other side is out of the city, down to the sea and has a rural flavor.

"The record doesn't have six separate songs on each side. One song is related to the other in a kind of internal linking."

"People have always wanted to know why I waited so long to do my first record. I didn't think I was ready and I didn't want them to say 'wait for the second record'."

But that's what they probably will say. Only it won't be because the first wasn't quite good enough.

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