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Rock music in the '70s became a dominant force

By WAYNE ROBINS
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NEW YORK — Rock, as we know it, was invented in the 1950s by Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Buddy Holly and hundreds of honorable vocal groups. It was institutionalized in the 1960s by the Beatles, Rolling Stones, The Who, The Doors, Jimi Hendrix, Jefferson Airplane, Otis Redding, Aretha Franklin and many other innovators.

But the 1970s has turned out to be anything but the vacuum it has been perceived as by those nostalgic for the more dramatic triumphs of the earlier decades.

The 1970s are ending without the kind of massive cultural extremes, such as the benign Woodstock, that ended the 1960s. Rock no longer represents merely a counter-culture. As American popular entertainment, it has become a dominant, over-the-counter force, a rival of television and movies as a shaper of the country's shared myths, symbols and experiences, not to mention one of its primary leisure time outlets.

In the last 10 years, rock has managed to absorb threads from virtually every form of pop music. By doing so, rock virtually guaranteed its continued thriving for perhaps decades to come, for the simple



Joni Mitchell

reason that it has expanded its once-primitive boundaries so far that anything that rises up to challenge it becomes absorbed into rock.

The '70s, therefore, may come to be known as the decade of "hyphen-rock." Many hybrids of the initial rock form have developed, and maintained a kind of cultural integrity in much the way that immigrants to America have kept up the traditions of the old country while at the same time assimilating themselves into this country's mainstream.

In the 1970s, those musical immigrants have included heavy-metal rock; funk-rock; the jazz-rock of Miles Davis, Weather Report and Herbie Hancock; singer-songwriter rock; the outlaw

country-rock of Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings; glitter, or glam-rock; space-rock (Pink Floyd and others); orchestral-rock (Santana); southern-rock (Allman's, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Marshall Tucker, Charlie Daniels); reggae (Bob Marley); punk-rock, new wave and disco. When you think about it, it's been quite a decade.

Above all, the 70s were dominated by the singer-songwriters, such as Paul Simon, Neil Young, Carole King, Joni Mitchell.

Most came from the acoustic guitar tradition and had folk song roots. Others extended the boundaries of the Tin Pan Alley pop songwriting sensibility that had a big influence on U.S. music in the 1950s and 60s.

Joni Mitchell was perhaps the most adventurous of the singer-songwriters, moving from the rather bland folk music sentiment of her "Ladies of the Canyon" to increasingly complex musical and lyrical self-analyses. Albums such as "For the Roses" (1972) and "Court and Spark" (1974) showed Mitchell moving into the rock mainstream, while her latest release, "Mingus," was a collaboration with the late jazz great Charles Mingus and showed Mitchell's commitment to artistic growth even at the cost of chancing commercial failure.