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PHOTOGRAPH BY GREGORY HEISLER

JONI MITCHELL The Century Award

Billboard's
highest
honor for
distinguished
creative
achievement

A Portrait of the Artist
By Timothy White



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U.K. Labels, Artists Allied In Gov't Fight Trade United In Battle For Increased Royalties

■ BY JEFF CLARK-MEADS

LONDON—A groundbreaking agreement between U.K. record companies and artists over broadcast royalties is giving the industry a united front for potential new battles with the government.

Indeed, the two sides may even stand shoulder to shoulder as they take on the U.K. government in the European Court over royalty issues that are yet to be resolved.

Harmony was reached between the labels and their performers after the record companies decided to raise artists' share of broadcast income from 32.5% to 50%. The increased share for artists means a smaller share for the record companies.

Now all parties want the U.K. government to give the record industry a statutory share of income from college activities and the public use of music; the legal process to oblige ministers to do so is already under way.

The record companies' collecting society, Phonographic Performance Limited, estimates that it loses \$15.5 million each year from certain university-based activities and pub and cafe owners who play radios and music television to their customers but do not pay royalties. In the 12 months before May 1994 (the latest figures available), PPL had a total licensing income of \$51.4 million.

The rise in performers' share of broadcast income is a result of the U.K. government's publication this past spring of the "Copyright And Rights Of Performers Regulations 1995" (Billboard, April 8). The music industry was given two months to comment on the document; the revised draft is expected to be passed into law as a statutory instrument without further public or parliamentary debate.

The draft legislation as it stood in April—which was introduced to comply with a European Union directive aimed at harmonizing copyright provisions across the EU's 15 member states—gave performers a statutory right to broadcast income for the first time.

At present, artists receive voluntary payment from PPL of 32.5% of net distributable income from broadcasters. Of this, 20% goes to named performers and 12.5% to the Musicians' Union for distribution to session players.

However, the April draft regulations state that in the future, performers should receive "a reasonable proportion" of broadcast income. The government left it to the music industry to decide how to define "reasonable" in financial terms.

PPL and the British Phonographic Indus-

try discussed the issue—not always cordially—with the International Managers Forum and its offshoot, the Assn. of United Recording Artists; the record industry bodies also conducted extensive internal debates.

Unanimity was finally achieved last week, though, when PPL chief executive Charles Andrews phoned IMF chairman John Glover to say that PPL believed a 50-50 split was reasonable; Glover concurred.

This split will not, however, result in greater costs for radio stations. It is simply a new division of existing income from broadcasters.

A PPL spokeswoman says her organization has been debating the issue for more than a year. The outcome of that debate, she says, was a conclusion that 50% for artists was both equitable and an assistance to harmony within the industry. She adds that the split between named performers and session players

has not yet been addressed.

She points out that the figure applies only to existing broadcasting media and that income from new delivery systems is not included.

The agreement will not affect songwriters and composers, whose royalties are handled by the U.K.'s Performing Right Society.

Glover says he regards the new proportion as "very fair," as it brings the U.K. in line with other European countries.

However, he states that this is not the end of the issue, as there are two omissions in the draft regulations that cause disquiet to artists and record companies equally. These are the fact that charities are not obliged to pay broadcast royalties and that public establishments may play the radio without incurring a royalty payment.

On the issue of charities, Glover says, "It (Continued on page 94)

Berman, Valenti Blast China For Continued CD, Film Piracy

■ BY BILL HOLLAND

WASHINGTON, D.C.—China, hailed by government and entertainment industry officials for its agreement in February to stem massive CD and film piracy, could find itself again the target of U.S. trade sanctions for allegedly ignoring its promises to monitor CD manufacturing and enforce anti-piracy measures.

In a Nov. 29 hearing, members of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations' Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs heard testimony about China's actions since the landmark Feb. 26 agreement with the U.S. pledging a shutdown of illegal CD-manufacturing operations, institution of enforcement procedures, and adherence to CD code and verification procedures (Billboard, March 11).

Jay Berman, chairman/CEO of the Recording Industry Assn. of America, and Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Assn. of America, testified that China's bid to join the World Trade Organization could be derailed and that U.S. trade penalties should be imposed if the Asian giant does not take action against its pirates.

Opening his testimony, Berman said he was "very disappointed" with "the past nine

months of implementation of the agreement."

The hearing, said Berman, "should serve as a strong signal to Chinese authorities that failure to strictly abide with the agreement will have serious implications both for China's WTO bid as well as for the imposition of sanctions under [the U.S. trade law's] Special 301."

He cited China's inability to initiate source-identification code mold markings on CDs and title verification.

"Production of [illicit] compact discs by China's CD plants continues unabated, and measures designed to halt such production remain unimplemented or nonutilized," he said.

Berman also told lawmakers that rights have not been cleared for production orders, that there has been no monitoring of plants to determine code compliance and no creation of compliance mechanisms, and that 30 or more plants are producing CDs but there only have been five verification requests.

Valenti took a softer tone in his general remarks, but echoed Berman when it came to the CD-piracy problem. "The illegal production of the CD plants has become the (Continued on page 94)

THIS WEEK IN BILLBOARD

A JONI MITCHELL PORTRAIT

This year's recipient of the Century Award, Billboard's highest honor for creative achievement, is Joni Mitchell. Editor in chief Timothy White offers an in-depth profile of this acclaimed singer/songwriter. **Page 13**

PREVIEWING BILLBOARD'S MUSIC AWARDS

The Billboard Music Awards, to be telecast live Dec. 6 on the Fox network, will be making its debut in New York this year. A special section gives a complete rundown on the show and its headlines. **Page 45**

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Billboard honors Joni Mitchell with its highest accolade, the Century Award for distinguished creative achievement. The laurel is named for the 100th anniversary of the publication in 1994.

While Billboard traditionally has reported on the industry accomplishments and chart-oriented commercial strides of generations of talented individuals, the sole aim of the Century Award is to acknowledge the uncommon excellence of one artist's still-unfolding body of work. Moreover, the award focuses on those singular musicians who have not heretofore been accorded the degree of serious homage their achievements deserve. It is a gesture unprecedented in Billboard's history, and one that is informed by the heritage of the publication itself.

For her 1971 "Blue" album, 27-year-old Joni Mitchell wrote a song called "A Case Of You," in which she sang, "I am a lonely painter/I live in a box of paints/I'm frightened by the devil, and I'm drawn to those ones that ain't afraid."

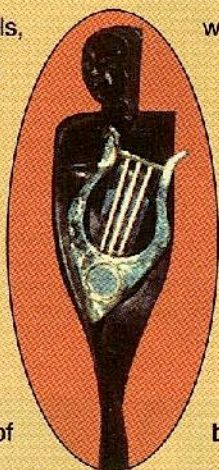
In that song, as in all her music, this musician was willing to tell the plain truth about herself. And in the process, Joni Mitchell invented her own job. In fact,

that's the definition of a great performer: a person who invents his or her own job. Appropriately, the best adjective yet found for the body of work created over the last 30 years by our 1995 Century Award honoree remains her name: It sounds like Joni Mitchell.

Observers and critics have occasionally called some of Joni Mitchell's songwriting "confessional." But that's not really true, because to confess something, one has to hesitate over the difficulties of the expression, and Joni Mitchell has *never* hesitated with any aspect of her music.

She believes that truth and beauty are the prime challenge and ultimate destination of all meaningful art, and she has struggled mightily to ensure that her guiding spirit will not be diverted from those transcendent goals.

We can think of no artist more deserving than Joni Mitchell of Billboard's most respectful symbol of esteem, because in folk and blues, in jazz, in world music, and in every alternative that one must find to arrive at rock'n'roll, she has taken humanity's most noble strivings and made them intimate for each of us. In short, Joni Mitchell has educated our hearts. And that is why she is receiving the Century Award. — T.W.



JONI MITCHELL

1995 RECIPIENT OF THE CENTURY AWARD

As designed by jeweler/sculptor Tina Marie Zippo-Evans, the Century Award is a unique work of art as well as an emblem of artistic supereminence. Struck in bronze once a year, the handcrafted, 14-inch-high statue is a composite representation of the Greco-Roman Muses of music and the arts (among them Calliope, epic poetry; Euterpe, music; Terpsichore, dance; Erato, love song; and Polyhymnia, sacred hymns). The form is female, in keeping with an ancient definition of the arts: "Sacred music is a symbol of nature in her transitory and ever-changing aspect." The lyre held by the Muse is a specially made adornment that changes annually in order to personalize the honor for each recipient. In homage to Joni Mitchell, the 1995 lyre is of solid silver adorned with topaz (Mitchell's birthstone).



Joni Mitchell

"Staring out your winter window
At a silver sky you know you've been to
In a kiss, upon a day
Before a spring."

—"Winter Lady," Joni Mitchell, 1967,
unrecorded song

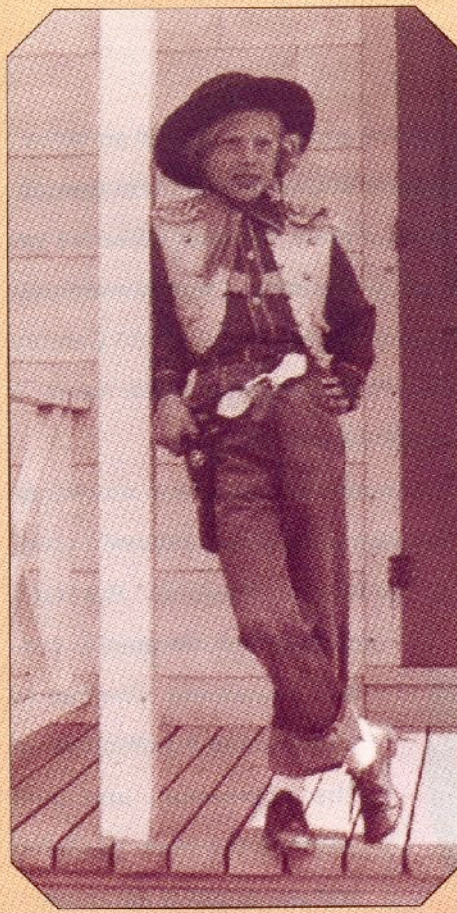


Day and night. Blindness and sight. Poverty and prosperity. Love and loneliness. Shadows and light. From the instant Joni Mitchell became aware of these contrasts, she has felt them acutely, and so they have defined her life experiences.

"Above my crib as a baby," recalls Mitchell, "was a roll-up blind. This was a poor household, and they had those kind of blinds that came in beige and dark green. This one was dark green, and it was perforated and cracked in a lot of places from frequent rolling. I can remember lying in my crib, seeing the filtered little stream of light and the fluffs of dust floating in it. I was 1½, and that's my earliest memory."

Other first impressions absorbed by the infant Mitchell were of a single room, shared by two young couples and bisected by a sagging curtain. The humble apartment was located above a drugstore on Main Street in Fort Macleod, Alberta, a frontier town on the Great Plains of north-west Canada. The year was 1945, and Joni's father, William Andrew Anderson, a flight lieutenant in the Royal Canadian Air Force, was sharing the cramped quarters in the remote flyers' encampment with a fellow married recruit.

Bill Anderson had met his young wife, the former Myrtle "Mickey" Marguerite McKee, while she was working in a bank in Regina, Saskatchewan, and they had run off to Medicine Hat, Alberta, for a hasty wedding. Less than a year later, on Nov. 7, 1943, daughter Roberta Joan Anderson ("They wanted a boy named Robert John," Joni notes)



"Paradise Lost," as well as pacifist reformer Mohandas Gandhi and psychiatrist Sigmund Freud. All of them were destined to be seekers along the precipice between the sensual and the spiritual, eager to renounce the world's embittering possibilities yet inclined to grapple with its material indulgences.

Joni herself sang of these extremes in her prayerlike 1975 song "Shadows And Light": "Threatened by all things/Devil of cruelty/Drawn to all things/Devil of delight/Mythical devil of the ever-present laws/Governing blindness, blindness and sight."

Out amongst the vast Canadian short grasses and snow fields, legends concerning the necessity of sober reflection over impulsive action run parallel with the practical wisdom of Inuit hunters, who could interpret the *iceblink* (glare of ice beyond the horizon) and *water sky* (dark patches signaling distant, impassable pools of sea) that shone against the sprawling clouds in the foreground. Likewise, children of the plains, like Roberta Joan Anderson, had their imaginations sharpened by an awareness that on certain wintry walks to school they might see the skyline mirages of grain elevators 20 miles away, since frigid morning temperatures in the far North can literally bend light rays over the curvature of the Earth.

The walls of Mitchell's Bel Air home are lined with snowscape paintings of the Canadian wilderness, each done during seasonal respites at her lakeside retreat in British Columbia. The luminous canvases are steeped in auburn and alabaster sunbeams that intensify as they rebound between water, frosty glaze, and sky.

Twenty-eight years ago, before her formal

A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST

BY TIMOTHY WHITE



recording career had commenced, the artist's painterly vision was foreshadowed in the lyrical *iceblink* of a song Joni sang on March 17, 1967, at a Philadelphia club, the Second Fret:

*Winter lady, walking sadi
Does your lover treat you badly?
Do you dream or wish on stars
To hear him say:*

*Oh winter lady, I won't hurt you
I won't cheat you, I won't desert you.
Winter lady, you need loving
I need loving too, I need loving you.*

Mitchell is recently divorced from second husband Larry Klein, a noted bassist/producer who remains her friend. However, the lover dimming her spirits on this chilly spring afternoon is not an ex-spouse but rather the fickle music business—which has dealt her more dire blows and disappointments than has any other relationship during her remarkable transit to personal and artistic maturity.

Like the innocent who once peered through the slats of misshapen blinds, Mitchell is drawn to the light, judging its portents as it mingles with the darkness of the past and future. These days, it sometimes seems as if all the peak lessons and punishing episodes she has sustained are streaming back to re-establish their prominence in the sum of her emotional sophistication.

Few musicians of her stature have undergone more private and public trials. At the beginning, she had to fend off imitators and detractors of both sexes, plus the persistent jealousy of an early '60s folk school whose post-Dylan com-



Songs To Aging Children Come: early photos, this page and opposite. At top, Don Juan's Reckless Cowgirl: slouching toward North Battleford, Saskatchewan, Canada. Next page, Cold Blue Steel And Sweet Fire: making a snowman in Creelman, Saskatchewan, 1945. At right, Blonde In The Bleachers: Roberta Joan Anderson, 2½ years old.

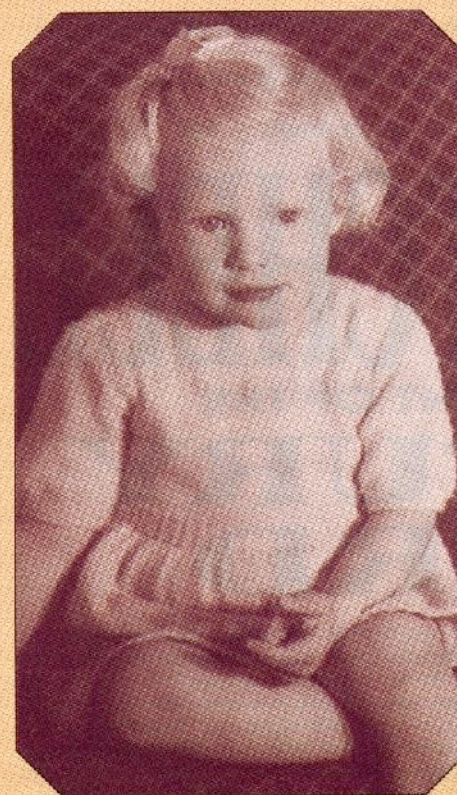
entered the distressed picture that was her parents' wartime subsistence.

"Fort Macleod was coming out of the Great Depression and into the war," says Mitchell, who is an only child, "so every house was weathered-out and derelict-looking with no paint on it. There had been a drought, too, so gardens were nonexistent. Some of the people who had no money for paint would try to brighten things up by stuccoing their houses with chicken feed and broken brown, green, and blue bottle glass.

"I was born materialistic, and from an early age I always liked to look at light through transparent colors, so when I was let out into the yards to play, I would collect the glass that had fallen off onto the ground. Coming back into the house on more than one occasion with my cheeks bulging, my mother would say, 'Open up,' and my mouth would be full of this broken colored glass. But I never cut myself."

Half a century onward, chatting in the kitchen of her hacienda-like Bel Air home in Los Angeles last May during the first of a six-month series of talks, Mitchell notes with an uneasy chuckle that she is "a Scorpio with Scorpio rising, which, according to astrologers, gives you resilience to bounce back from dire adversity."

It also appears to lend one a propensity for attracting such perils. Mitchell may not know it, but her ominously creative/confrontational rising sign was shared by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, creator of the dramatic poem "Faust," and also by John Milton, author of the poetic epic



mercial/artistic strides she almost singlehandedly eclipsed with three hugely influential Reprise albums ("Joni Mitchell: Song To A Seagull," 1968; "Clouds," 1969; "Ladies Of The Canyon," 1970).

Having regularly supplied troubadours like Tom Rush, George Hamilton IV, Judy Collins, Dave Van Ronk, and Buffy Sainte-Marie with prime material, such as "Urge For Going" (the first song she ever wrote), "Song To A Seagull," "The Circle Game," and "Both Sides Now," Mitchell resolved in 1967 to get serious about a major-label contract. After rejecting an offer from Vanguard as a "slave-labor deal," she was lured to Reprise Records from her Detroit club base by A&R executive Andy Wickham and was signed by Mo Ostin in December 1967. The producer for her debut album was David Crosby, who had just left the Byrds to join Crosby, Stills & Nash.

"I worked with Crosby, who I'd met while working in a club in Miami," explains Mitchell, "and then I didn't work with another producer for 13 projects—except for one cut ['Tin Angel,' produced by Paul Rothchild] on my second record. I found that all the producers were men, and if I stood in defiance of them, then someone would call me a 'ballbuster.'"

"There were a lot of good things David did in producing that record, but mainly his theory was [approximating Crosby's high-pitched, fast-talking earnestness]: 'I'm going to pretend to produce this record but I'm not going to do a damn thing—but because I'm folk-rock, and that's happening and you look like a folkie, in order to make you commercial we have to rock you up and I don't want to hear you rocked up, so I'm going to pretend to rock you but I'm not going to do it.'"

11 hit in 1970 (with friend Neil Young lending his nasal Canadian singing to the act's accent blend).

All her previous albums' poetic and sparsely instrumental strengths culminated in 1971 with Mitchell's masterful "Blue." A million-seller (as "Ladies" soon became) at a time when such feats were exceptional, "Blue" remains the vocal, lyrical, and compositional equal of any celebrated album of rock's first 40 years, whether it be "Blonde On Blonde," "Rubber Soul," "Pet Sounds," "Tapestry," "The Joshua Tree," or "Diva."

"Blue's" doleful, fiercely adroit arrangements were built around Mitchell's supple piano, guitar, and dulcimer, and the songs themselves were so precedent-splintering in their candid self-pronouncements that the mere mention of their titles ("All I Want," "My Old Man," "Little Green," "Carey," "Blue," "California," "This Flight Tonight," "River," "A Case Of You," "The Last Time I Saw Richard") is sufficient to evoke note-for-note reminiscence among the cognoscenti—along with a mental Rolodex of songwriters who borrowed the melodic/rhythmic structure of the tunes to buttress their own output. But for Mitchell, "Blue" was a triumph that took a stunning toll.

"I have, on occasion, sacrificed myself and my own emotional makeup," Mitchell told this writer in 1988, "singing, 'I'm selfish and I'm sad' [on 'River'], for instance. We all suffer for our loneliness, but at the time of 'Blue,' our pop stars never admitted these things."

Hacking away at every vestigial rule of rock-'n'-roll's raucous hauteur, the resoundingly intimate "Blue" stretched the tape measure for unfathomed personal inquiry until it snapped free of the spool. The deeper Mitchell delved, the high-



Renewed by the effort but frustrated that she had no band of her own to help foster her muse, Mitchell took the advice of increasingly confounded pop session players and secured jazz musicians better equipped to back up her unorthodox material or meet her impressionistic sonic needs. The result, made in 1974 with saxophonist Tom Scott and the L.A. Express, was "Court And Spark," an immaculate jazz-rock exploration; the wide-open, freeway-entwined vistas of the "city of the fallen angels" became aural panoramas in which the singer lost, rediscovered, and ultimately surrendered herself.

Arriving at a juncture when horns were all but disdained in rock-'n'-roll, she made the best use of them to denote urban life since Gershwin's "An American In Paris" (1928). Moreover, the production and ambient orchestration of the pieces was ingenious. The track "Car On The Hill" employed a "Doppler effect," in Mitchell's words, in which the wavelength and frequency of the horn passages were carefully altered and panned. "I wanted to make them move like traffic," she enthuses with a giggle, "so their pitch would change as they came nearer and then rode past."

The 1974 live "Miles Of Aisles" collection with the L.A. Express further ratified the graceful facility of the fresh, new approach. Contemporaries like David Bowie and Jimmy Page were dumbfounded by the tangibility and musicality of the effects. "She brings tears to my eyes," Page later commented. "What can I say?"

In Pontiac, Mich., the lustrous gleam of Mitchell's latest music attracted the devotion of fans, including one Madonna Louise Veronica Ciccone, who recently told Billboard, "In high school I worshiped Joni Mitchell and sang everything from 'Court And Spark,' my coming-of-age record."

A 17-year-old Prince, and Annie Lennox, then about to turn 21, felt similar developmental admiration for Joni's gold follow-up release from 1975, "The Hissing Of Summer Lawns." But contemporary music critics were less charitable—Rolling Stone warranted that the world beat-anticipating Burundi drummers on "The Jungle Line" and modified jazz-waltz gems like the title track, "In France They Kiss On Main Street," "Edith And The Kingpin," and the lovely "The Boho Dance" somehow added up to the worst album of the year.

Mitchell pressed on in her quest for novel trajectories, re-emerging in 1976 with her second modern masterpiece, "Hejira." Brilliantly utilizing the flickering drum patterns of John Guerin and the near-liquefied fingerflow of notoriously troubled bassist Jaco Pastorius, "Hejira" probed a realm of dream states, metaphysical insights, and otherworldly eroticism; apparitional songs like "Amelia," "Black Crow" and "A Strange Boy" helped the album match the commercial success

of "Hissing" even as critics scratched their heads.

A trip by Mitchell to Carnival in Rio de Janeiro precipitated the transitional Afro-Latin explorations in 1977 of "Don Juan's Ruckless Daughter." The record was slammed in the white rock press yet attracted Mitchell's first support from the African-American media and music community—most notably renowned jazz bassist/pianist Charles Mingus, an acerbic champion of racial equality who loved the "nerviness" of the release, including the Norman Seeff cover photography in which Mitchell portrayed characters that included a blackface male.

Having built his reputation on left turns, such as 1963's "Hora Decubitus," on which he merged deconstructed free jazz sonorities and 12-bar blues while abandoning conventional beat concerns, Mingus was sympathetic to Mitchell's periodic urge for going AWOL artistically. The ailing jazz great, who was confined to a wheelchair due to amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig's disease), invited Mitchell to collaborate on what became her 1979 release, "Mingus."

Now the jazz world joined the rock jury in its disparagements, plainly perplexed that the distinguished, irascible jazz titan would deign to compose with a white guitar damsel, let alone allow her to put words to his classic "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat." Listening today to the sometimes brittle but always brave music, it's difficult to imagine what all the fuss was about. "Sweet Sucker Dance" is marvelously sexy and sinuous; "God Must Be A Boogie Man" is just delightful, and "The Dry Cleaner From Des Moines" is top-rank acid jazz.

Nonetheless, "Mingus," in Mitchell's mind, "pretty much cost me my airplay, my radio presence." The broadcasting engine that drives record sales shunned Mitchell for the next 15 years, even as she turned out some of the most tuneful, melodic, steady-rocking, and danceable songs of her creative unfoldment on Geffen albums "Wild Things Run Fast" (1982), "Dog Eat Dog" (1985), "Chalk Mark In A Rain Storm" (1988), "Night Ride Home" (1991), and the excellent album that marked her 1994 return to Reprise, "Turbulent Indigo."

"The worse curse I ever heard," quipped Mitchell over lunch in Los Angeles in 1988, "was a Yiddish curse which said, 'May you be wise among fools.' What a horrible feeling!"

During her years of radio exile, Mitchell and 11 other musicians had to wage a costly legal battle against the California State Board of Equalization. The state charged in an experimental "wholesale tax" levy that she owed additional taxes totaling 15 percent of her income from the period 1972 to 1976, due to an artistic-control clause in her recording contracts that the board suddenly interpreted as meaning that musicians were taxable independents.

It took Mitchell and her colleagues 10 years to win the case and get their money back. Meantime, the Geffen company put a lien on Joni's songwriting royalties for unrecouped monies spent on her product for the label. Though Geffen later returned the cash, due to Mitchell's ire, the dispute underscored the savvy of Mitchell's decision three decades earlier to retain complete ownership of her publishing rights—historically the most lucrative aspect of an artist's estate and the primary source (as it turned out) of Mitchell's professional income since the beginning.

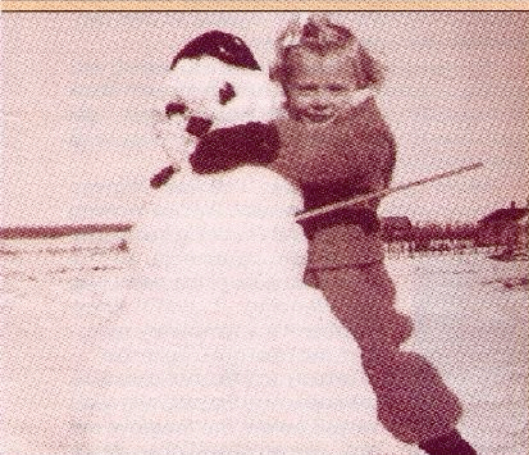
Midway through that tangle, Joni learned via fans' complaints that the songs on her early Reprise and Elektra-Asylum albums had been casually resequenced for the cassette versions—"with no artistic reasoning behind it at all," she asserts with a shrug—so the tracks would more easily fit on the standard cassette format. (She says Reprise has corrected this matter, and she's still discussing it with Elektra-Asylum.)

Having chronicled the Winter Lady's public challenges, the focus of this tale must now proceed to the more private aspects of her story; i.e., the truly painful part.

"I was a sickly child," says Mitchell, chain-smoking as her thoughts drift beyond her care-free days as a toddler feasting on shards of brightly hued glass. "At 3 my appendix burst, and they rushed me to the hospital. Then I had German measles and red measles, one of which nearly killed me. At 8 I had chickenpox and scarlet fever, plus the arbitrary tonsillitis."

To what did she attribute her low resistance to malady?

"Well," she muses, "we were living in small rented rooms and shacks with outdoor toilets, in tiny



'I am a lonely painter. I live in a box of paints. I'm frightened by the devil, and I'm drawn to those ones that ain't afraid.'

"So that was the ruse that we perpetrated in making that first record," concludes Joni, laughing. "There wasn't even much overdubbing, because I couldn't overdub, really, in the beginning. I couldn't separate my playing from my singing sense, it was locked together from so much touring."

"I liked the sound of my voice and my guitar on that first record because I wasn't influenced by anything. But on the second album, I'd been singing a lot with CSN—I introduced those guys to each other—because we used to jam when they were in the throes of their musical courtship. You've got an Englishman and a Southerner and a California boy and a Canadian trying to get an accent blend, and they ended up with this twang and a nasal thing which I also ended up singing my second record in! I mean, 90% of the singers in this business pretend they're Southern blacks, and I didn't want to fall into that pitfall of losing my natural song-speech."

Unduly hard on herself, Mitchell won the instant albeit modestly remunerative respect of her songwriting peers, selling 70,000 units of her initial album. (It would take until 1981 to near the 400,000-unit mark.) But she went gold with its successor, whose title announced the presence of "Both Sides Now" (or "Clouds," as it's still continually misused by DJs), which had been the biggest hit (No. 8 in 1968) of Judy Collins' career.

"Ladies Of The Canyon," as crisp and uncluttered as her other releases, got Joni herself on top 40 radio with "Big Yellow Taxi," which became one of her most frequently covered hits (redone in 1995 by both Amy Grant and Maire Brennan). And she included her rendition of "Woodstock," which Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young made a No.

11 hit in 1970 (with friend Neil Young lending his nasal Canadian singing to the act's accent blend). All her previous albums' poetic and sparsely instrumental strengths culminated in 1971 with Mitchell's masterful "Blue." A million-seller (as "Ladies" soon became) at a time when such feats were exceptional, "Blue" remains the vocal, lyrical, and compositional equal of any celebrated album of rock's first 40 years, whether it be "Blonde On Blonde," "Rubber Soul," "Pet Sounds," "Tapestry," "The Joshua Tree," or "Diva."

"Blue's" doleful, fiercely adroit arrangements were built around Mitchell's supple piano, guitar, and dulcimer, and the songs themselves were so precedent-splintering in their candid self-pronouncements that the mere mention of their titles ("All I Want," "My Old Man," "Little Green," "Carey," "Blue," "California," "This Flight Tonight," "River," "A Case Of You," "The Last Time I Saw Richard") is sufficient to evoke note-for-note reminiscence among the cognoscenti—along with a mental Rolodex of songwriters who borrowed the melodic/rhythmic structure of the tunes to buttress their own output. But for Mitchell, "Blue" was a triumph that took a stunning toll.

Emotionally spent in the wake of "Blue," Mitchell left Reprise, her departure accelerated by Warner Bros.' irksome promotional policies as typified by headlines on consumer advertising like JONI MITCHELL IS 90% VIRGIN and JONI MITCHELL TAKES FOREVER. Jumping to the Asylum label, Joni planned a sequel to "Blue" in 1972 called "For The Roses," which was conceived as a possible farewell to the music business. Flashed out in solitude under the rustle of arbutus trees in her remote British Columbia hide-away, the bucolic project yielded a hit with "You Turn Me On, I'm A Radio," as well as a batch of experimental, tempo-shifting ballads of exquisite beauty, such as "Cold Blue Steel And Sweet Fire," "Barangrill," "Electricity," and "Woman Of Heart And Mind."



towns without running water that had names like Maidstone, leading a life almost like [people on] the Russian tundra. Drinking water was delivered, and bathing water was captured off the eaves of the houses. The only recreation I had was waving from our living-room picture window in Maidstone to the steam locomotive that blew its whistle at the bend in the track as it entered town—but at least that gave me a curiosity about going places.

"Before meeting my dad, my mother had been a Depression-era country school teacher—making her own books by hand, instructing all grades in one room. My family was accustomed to hardship. These were people reared in a complete pioneer setting, and nobody thought to complain."

Mitchell relates that her father was the son of a violin maker who emigrated to Alberta from Norway at the turn of the century, earning a living in the New World as a carpenter and cabinet maker. On her mother's side, the McKees were homesteaders in Creelman, Saskatchewan.

"Her father, James McKee, an Irishman plowman, was one of the first settlers to come to the prairie around 1905, when the first railroads got through. They were giving away sections of land for pennies, and all you had to do was build a house, so he built a 12- by 14-foot place."

McKee wed Sadie Henderson, Mitchell's great-grandmother, whose father labored in the highly organized canoe brigades inherited from Canada's original French colonists, the heavily burdened *canots de maître* carrying trade goods and railway building materials over distances measured by the time it took to smoke a pipe's worth of tobacco.

Joni supposes she "got the bard" from Sadie Henderson, "a fine musician who wrote poetry in a thick Scottish brogue like Robert Burns about the lifestyles of the French and Indian traders. ('Oh the sighing o' the pines/tis a lowerin' winter's night [sic].') And Sadie's great-grandfather was employed back in Scotland by Sir Walter Scott"—famed author of "Rob Roy" (1818), "Ivanhoe" (1820), and a crucial collection of Celtic ballads, "Minstrelsy Of The Scottish Border"—"who gave her ancestor a medal for plowing the fastest furrows in the shortest time."

Being descended from such hardy stock, little Joni was expected to shake off common disease and discomfort, which she did—until the polio epidemic swept into western Canada in 1952. At this postwar point, Mitchell's father was out of the service and employed as the manager of an outlet of the O.K. Economy chain of general stores in North Battleford, Saskatchewan, a rural suburb of the provincial city of Saskatoon.

"I vividly remember the day I got polio," says Mitchell. "I was 9 years old, and I dressed myself that morning in pegged gray slacks, a red and white gingham blouse with a sailor collar, and a blue sweater. I looked in the mirror, and I don't know what I saw—dark circles under my eyes or a slight swelling in my face—but I said to myself, 'You look like a woman today.'"

"After I got outside, I was walking along with a school friend, and at the third block I sat down on this little lawn and said, 'I must have rheumatism,' because I'd seen my grandmother aching and having to be lifted out of the bathtub. I complained a bit more but still went and spent the day in school. Next day I woke and my mom said, 'Get up, come!' I said, 'I can't.' She didn't believe me and yanked me out of bed, and I collapsed. They rushed me to the St. Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon.

"The infectious part of the disease lasts two weeks, and it twisted my spine severely forward in a curvature called lordosis, and then back to the right in a lateral curve called scoliosis, so that I was unable to stand. One leg was impaired, but the muscles didn't atrophy, so there was no withering, thank God. I was put in the children's ward, and with Christmas rolling up it became apparent I wasn't going home. Someone sent me a coloring book with pictures of old-fashioned English carolers and the lyrics to all these Christmas carols. I had ulcers in my mouth that they'd come and swab [with] an antibacterial solution called gentian violet and they'd leave the swabs behind, so I used the swabs to color the carolers purple. And I sang these carols to get my spirits up.

"My mother came with a little mask on," Mitchell says weakly, drained by the remembrance, "and put a little Christmas tree in my room with some ornaments. The first night they allowed

me to leave it lit an hour after lights out. And I said to the little tree, 'I am not a cripple,' and I said a prayer, some kind of pact, a barter with God for my legs, my singing."

Although not expected to walk again, Mitchell gamely withstood her excruciating treatments, in which scalding flannel rags were applied to her bare legs with insulated gloves and then stripped off with tongs, bringing the raw skin to the brink of blistering. One day she suddenly announced she was ready to walk, and the skeptical nuns wheeled her to a ramp with long railings.

"If the disease spread to your lungs," says Mitchell, "you were doomed to pass the rest of your life reclining in an iron lung with your head sticking out. As I rose to make my walk, I could hear the iron lungs wheezing in the background." Miraculously, she was able to stagger to the end of the bannistered ramp—and was discharged from the ward. At home, she refused her corrective shoes, braces, and wheelchair, embarking on an initial yearlong rehabilitation program. (She also became a secret cigarette smoker, hopelessly hooked on nicotine before she was 10.)

She took up ballroom and rock-'n'-roll dancing, winning local contests after her family moved to Saskatoon during her teens, excelling at the Lindy Hop while attending Queen Elizabeth Public School and Nutana and Aden Bowman high schools. Ravenous for any regime that could increase her sense of poise, she studied abstract art and figurative realism on an extracurricular basis. ("I changed the spelling of my name to Joni at 13, because I admired the way the last name of my art teacher, Henry Bonli, looked in his painting signatures.")

The seventh-grade teacher, Arthur Kratzman, complimented her on the drawings she was pinning up at a PTA gathering, adding, "If you can paint with a brush, you can paint with words." The year she passed as a pupil of Kratzman was so inspirational that she inscribed on her debut record, "This album is dedicated to Mr. Kratzman, who taught me to love words."

Alas, Mitchell had scant affection for the rest of her schoolwork and was compelled to repeat senior math, chemistry, and physics on a part-time basis. Much of the remainder of her free time she devoted to professional modeling, another useful post-polio discipline regime.

"There were no fashion shows in the region," she explains, "but I worked in dress shops in Saskatoon, and traveling salesmen came through town and hired 'wholesale models' locally, who were basically quick-change artists exhibiting clothes for retail buyers. You wore a black slip and changed behind a screen because you were a young woman working in a hotel room with a traveler, and you had to be a size eight. But the pay was pretty good, and that's how I got the money to go to art school."

Enrolling in 1963 at the Alberta College of Art in Calgary, she brought along the \$36 baritone ukulele she had purchased with modeling money. Between the romance of art classes and the aura of the local coffeehouse scene, she got a life-altering dose of bohemia and its dangers.

"I was late to lose my virginity," says Joni. "I was 20, and it was a crush with a fellow painter, and I got pregnant immediately. To be pregnant and unmarried in 1964 was like you killed somebody. So what happened was I met Chuck Mitchell in trying to keep my child, and he was willing to take us both on."

Mitchell was a 29-year-old American cabaret singer whom Joni encountered while he was appearing upstairs at a nonunion Toronto club on Yorkville Avenue called the Penny Farthing. Too poor to afford the union card that would gain her entry to better gigs, Joni was playing the basement room of the Farthing when she got into a tiff with Chuck, who had dared to change the words of an unrecorded Bob Dylan song in circulation called "Mr. Tambourine Man." Intrigued by this handsome young woman who decried his folkie infraction, he coaxed her into his act and then his hearth.

"He kinda latched onto me at this very vulnerable time," says Joni, "when I had no money, no work, and a child in a foster home, which was tearing me up." One month later, they were wed in his parents' backyard in Rochester, Mich., and took up residence in an apartment near the Detroit campus of Wayne State University. The disparity in age and worldliness quickly proved insurmountable, and the pair separated, the marriage disintegrating within two years.

Consumed by a sense of failure, Joni allowed her daughter to be given up for adoption and then relocated to a one-bedroom billet in Manhattan's Chelsea district, covering the walls with tinfoil and draping Old Glory in the window. Frightened that the growing folk-rock boom would eradicate the old-guard folkie orbit that was her bread and butter, Joni "worked for 40-some weeks on the Eastern Seaboard, just getting this nest egg so that when the whole thing collapsed, I could afford to go back into women's wear."

She generated numerous songs for her newly instituted publishing company, a BMI-administered entity she christened Siquomb. The name

stemmed from an acronym-based cast of mythological characters she created for a possible children's book; Siquomb stands for *She Is Queen Undisputedly Of Mind Beauty*. The word games carried over into "Sisotowbell Lane," a song on her first album whose title stands for the hopeful maxim "Somehow In Spite Of Trouble Ours Will Be Everlasting Love." Among the still-unrecorded songs from this interval were

"Just Like Me," "Brandy Eyes," "Mr. Blue," "Drummer Man," "Carnival In Kenora," and the aggrieved "Eastern Rain."

While the sun eventually came out for Joni Mitchell, none of the pieces of her own fledgling family unit were ever reassembled—a decision Mitchell accepts as having been the most responsible course.

"I've never seen the child since," Mitchell says somberly, "although I've always thought of her. I know a lot of people who have looked for their parents, and parents who have looked for their children. The reactions to it could go either way. The foster parent who had her until she was adopted contacted me the last time I was in Toronto—she was an old woman by that time and ready to die; she said she recognized me on TV because of my bone structure—and gave me all the child's early baby pictures."

"For years I didn't talk about this because of my parents," she concludes softly, "although I did leak little things, little messages into my songs for the child, just to let her know I was thinking about her."

Friends of Joni's begin arriving in her Bel Air kitchen for a pot luck dinner in the evening; local young musician and actor chums, they carry covered dishes of pasta salad, fried chicken, vegetable salad, and bottles of red wine. Heartened by the sight of her festive guests, she switches on the radio and begins to Lindy Hop to an old Motown chestnut, briefly taking the hands of a sequence of partners after each sets his or her food on the table.

Mitchell's full lips widen into a radiant smile, and she is transformed back into Roberta Joan Anderson, dancing in defiance of poverty, polio, or any shadowy forces that might prevent her from viewing life through the colorful prism she prefers.

As the Motown tune fades, she begins to recite a new song she's just finished, "Happiness Is The Best Facelift."

"It's about a Romeo and Juliet situation," she offers, pausing in midverse. "It's a love song between a mother and daughter; you know, parental disapproval."

The lyrics appear to mirror Mitchell's blossoming ties to new boyfriend Donald Freed (Joni's mother introduced them), a 45-year-old Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, singer/songwriter/librarian well known in that region. The stanzas also resemble a both-sides-now rewind of the iceblink/mirage prescience of her childhood, reflecting on the past and its meaning from the clouds' perspective.

"Oh, let's see," Joni resumes. "I went so numb on Christmas Day/I couldn't feel my hands and feet/I shouldn't have come/She made me pay/For gleaming with Donald down her street/. . . I said why is this joy not allowed/For God's sake, I'm middle-aged, Mama/And time is swift/Happiness is the best facelift. . . /Oh, the cold winds blew/At our room with a view/All helpful and hopeful and candle light/We kissed the angels/And the moon eclipsed/You know, happiness is the best facelift."

The heartfelt ballad leaves her small audience visibly moved, but Mitchell snaps the poignant spell with bashful laughter and a flutter of her hand, shooing most guests onto the twilight patio to get a blaze going in the outdoor fireplace.

Then Joni steals into her studio in the rear of the house, where she stoops to lift a bright green Stratocaster guitar out of an open case. "This instrument is going to be my savior," she asserts, proudly displaying the modified guitar built by Fred Walecki at Westwood Music in Los Angeles that will enable her to perform without tinkering with or changing her instruments for the myriad intricate tunings that 17 albums' worth of songs demand. Prior to Walecki's prototype, which hooks up to the foot-pedal-controlled "computerized brain" of a digital Roland VG8 unit, Mitchell was contemplating quitting the concert stage.

"I've had symptoms of a thing called post-polio syndrome," she later confides. "My compensation with yoga and other methods was good for about 40 years, but now the wiring in my central nervous system is overtaxed, and when I don't conserve my energy, the disease manifests itself in loss of animation. Last year and the year before I was experiencing a lot of muscle aches, joint aches, and extreme sensitivity to temperature changes. When I fly, I have to layer up and peel off assorted clothes as the plane is going up and down, because my body doesn't regulate its own temperature like a normal person's."

"So naturally the strain of travel and playing and setting up dozens of special tunings for each show is physically tough. But with these gadgets, I get each new tuning automatically, 'cause they're all preprogrammed."

"As for me," she adds, "I've had Chinese acupuncturists and a Hawaiian kahuna working on me, and I'm doing kombucha mushroom treatments, so I've eliminated a lot of the pain I was experiencing. I don't know whether it's a temporary recession, but I feel good right now."

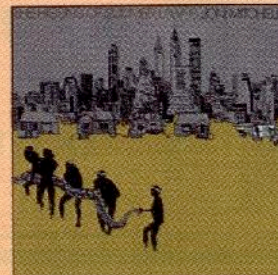
Certainly Joni Mitchell looks fit as she bops out to the patio and seats herself before the fireglow, her high, unlined cheekbones starkly silhouetted against the flames. The final lyrics of her new song spring to mind: "Bless us, don't let us lose the drift/Happiness is the best facelift."

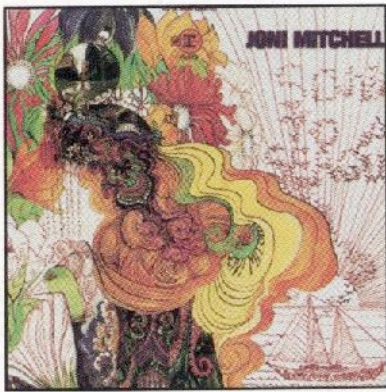
Months later in New York, on Nov. 6, Mitchell tests her magic green Stratocaster and its digital memory bank at a surprise gig at Greenwich Village club the Fez, old and new supporters like Eric Andersen and Natalie Merchant joining 200 fans as Joni and noted jazz drummer Brian Blade offer a bravura presentation.

On the phone the following afternoon, Joni says that she and Don Freed have just collaborated on a song called "Love Cries," the refrain declaring, "When that train comes rumbling by. . . No one can hear love's cries." Gleeful, Mitchell intersperses her girlish giggles with assurances that "the impossible is now possible."

Indeed, as she plots her next surprise shows and negotiates with Reprise for an unprecedented boxed-set retrospective (she has never even issued a "Best of" package), it seems the bitter-sweet touch points of Joni Mitchell's circle game are drawing together, each facet of her lifelong gambles achieving a kindly closure. The woman herself seems increasingly primed for even the unlikely unravelings and rectifications. But as a child, waving to that rumbling steam locomotive from her picture window in bleak Maidstone, it must have been difficult to believe the outside world would ever hear her cries.

"Oh, I didn't tell you?" says Joni. "Several years ago, my mom and dad were at a party, and they met a conductor on that railroad. He said, 'The only thing I remember about Maidstone was that there was a house with a big window where they left the Christmas tree lights up, and a little girl used to wave to me.' It was the same guy! So we had this ritual, he and I. It really makes you want to think that every prayer, every message we send eventually gets answered." ■





Congratulations, love, respect and awe to
Joni Mitchell
upon her much-deserved Century Award.
Thank you Joni,
Elektra, Geffen and Reprise.



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and Reprise Records. It's all honor.