

Joni Mitchell's 'lyrics always scan and her chatter is warm and silly'

'The incredibly beautiful voice'

By JOHN MORGAN

I've never held it against Joni Mitchell that she is a serious lyricist.

Even as the words and images are flying by opaquely and you're too busy to devote to her the attention you'd usually reserve for James Joyce or Dashiell Hammett, her songs never fall short of entertaining.

She personifies what every pop devotee would like to believe is true of post "Blue Suede Shoes" music: She sings good, makes melodies good, gives of her inner self good, and best of all, she's fun—though serious.

EVER SINCE NED ROEM and Nat Henloff accepted and stated the fact that the Beatles were "heavily into words," and ever since some youthful English literature professor called Bob Dylan a poet, we've been besieged with a lightweight brigade of serious pop song writers.

Furthermore, we've often been compelled to pretend that some of these serious song writers needed to be taken seriously even though they were boring and dumb.

For awhile I tried to listen with an appreciated ear to some of the Shawn Phillips-Lon Reed-David Crosby early late Jim Morrison stuff.

But then I realized that they simply didn't scan musically, despite every ounce of 3 a.m.-FM disc jockey commitment.

Joni Mitchell always scans. Despite her beautiful long hair, beautiful gowns and celebrated celebrity lovers, she still looks like Chris Leachman just as she learns that she's lost another man to a more beautiful woman.

SHE DREW NEARLY 5,000 to her last night at the Dome Arena. She has such musical presence that every time she was accompanied by her competent backup band, some of her impact was lost.

She started performing as a solo acoustic guitar lady in the days of folk songs. She might still perform alone most of the time because other sounds seem to dilute her incredibly beautiful voice.

Her voice is one of the best I've ever heard. Her melodies are always interesting and take the surprising turn that somehow always comes out correctly.

Is there anything I've forgotten? Yes. Joni Mitchell has practically invented a new method of guitar playing.

She most often times the the instrument to an open chord and picks out melodies against a chordal background that is all her own.

SHE'S AN OLD FASHIONED GIRL.

I would think her songs would make a liberated lady unhappy. They often beg for strong men for whom she'll knit and sew and get herself back on her feet, or some such.

The old fashioned girl image is reinforced by groups of young men who burle about the stage, holding her chair, plugging in her instruments and generally letting their faces fill with benignity as they work for her.

For me, the peak of rock 'n roll lyricism has been "Deliver the letter, the sooner the better." Joni Mitchell has written:

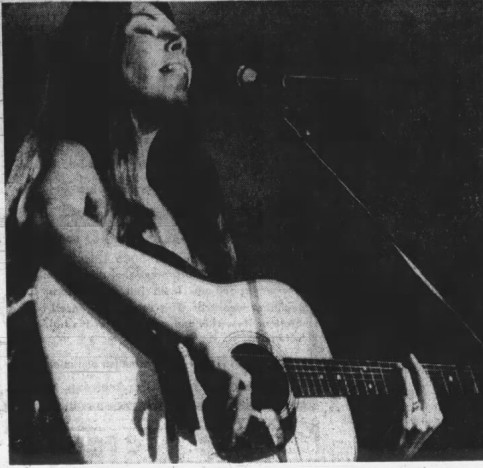
"It's love's illusion I recall.
"I really don't know love at all"

That's a good a rhyme and as good a rhythm as my first favorite. Further it has a profundity and impact that is near supernal.

THE DOME'S ACOUSTICS are no better.

If you continue to go and pay and let yourself be satisfied with the illusion of music, it will, in fact, be your own fault.

This is your final warning.



JONI MITCHELL AT THE DOME
... serious lyricist but still an entertainer