30 November 1985 45p US $2.25 (by air) ISSN 0028 6362

Aus $1.20 Deutsche DM 3.50 France Fr 10.5 Greece Dr 250 Italy L 3,500 Spain 300ptas Malaysia $2.75 New Zealand $1.25

NME

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THE CULT · DOUG E. FRESH · JONI MITCHELL · GREEN ON RED

FEARGAL SHARKEY chooses this week, hot on the heels of his No. One hit 'A Good Heart', to announce his first solo concert tour. In fact, apart from a Royal Albert Hall charity show last December and a low-key gig last week at Fulham Greyhound, he has not appeared live since The Undertones split two and a half years ago. With his self-named debut album now entrenched in the charts, he'll have a new single released by Virgin to coincide with his tour dates, which are:

Chippenham Goldiggers (27 January), Birmingham Odeon (28), Leicester De Montfort Hall (30), Nottingham Royal Concert Hall (31), Manchester Apollo (3 February), Preston Guildhall (4), Sheffield City Hall (6), Leeds University (7), Newcastle City Hall (9), Edinburgh Playhouse (10), Glasgow Barrowlands (11), Liverpool Royal COurt (17), Bristol Colston Hall (18), Portsmouth Guildhall (19), Crawley Leisure Centre (21) and London Hammersmith Odeon (22).

Venues for Belfast (13 February) and Dublin (15) have still to be announced – and other dates still being finalised are 1, 14 and 23 February, though the latter is expected to be a second night at Hammersmith. Tickets are on sale now at box-offices and usual agencies, priced £6.50 and £5.50 (London); £5.50 and £4.50 (elsewhere).

MALCOLM McLaren, currently living in Hollywood and working as a producer for CBS Films, is now branching into stage presentation. His first venture, an adaptation of his album 'Fans' featuring several new songs and "a whole new vision of opera", is to be staged on Broadway early next year by veteran New York producer Joseph Papp. The script has been written by Menno Meyjes, who has just finished *The Color Purple* for Steven Spielberg.

Besides this project, McLaren is developing several music movies, including a surfing action thriller which will introduce "the new surfing sound of the '80s". Also nearing completion is a Seventh Aventh fashion fairy tale called *Fashion Beast*. Future plans include the formation of his own record label, and he is currently considering a couple of acting roles in London film productions.

Meanwhile, McLaren's latest album 'Swamp Thing' is released by Virgin next Monday. It's a collection of musical pieces recorded between 1982 and 1984 on the "Duck Rock" world tour, mixed with a number of totally new themes, ideas and material.

Ken, Neil and the Wedgers looking for the road to parliamentary socialism.

WELL RED!

THE LABOUR Party's drive to mobilise the youth vote for the next election began with the official launch of the unofficial, loosely affiliated Red Wedge grouping at the House Of Commons last week. Speeches by Billy Bragg, Tom Sawyer of Labour's National Executive Committee and Labour leader Neil Kinnock opened the proceedings which amounted to the ambience of your average lig – much chin-wagging, drinking, snapping and words of closely guarded optimism from the likes of Heaven 17, Jimmy Somerville, Jerry Dammers, Rat Scabies, Kirsty McColl, Roland 'Cannibal' Gift, Paul Weller, Simon 'Working Week' Booth and Robbie Coltrane (the only popular entertainer from outside the world of music), plus representatives from Trade Union, Co-operative and student bodies.

Sawyer stressed that the grouping was not sycophantic to Labour but was there as a means of representing young people: "Our agenda isn't fixed, we have an open door and a blank piece of paper – we want to fill it in a co-operative manner".

"At the moment we're doing the party a mega fucking favour," admitted Billy Bragg, "but the time is coming when they're going to have to realise that this isn't just a publicity gambit, that we're not going to keep doing this all next year if there's not some positive response from within the party."

It had been Bragg's idea to call the grouping Red Wedge although Labour's PR was dubious, fearing Fleet Street would use it against them. "I mean bollocks to that," argued Bill, "I'm fed up with the way the Tories seemed to have annexed the word 'freedom', it's time people stood up and said, Yes I'm proud to be a socialist."

Jerry Dammers said he'd like to see Red Wedge eventually grouping around definite policies. One thing that could be done immediately was to draw up a clause that bands could have inserted in their contract so that records aren't sold in South Africa.

"It's something a lot of groups haven't really time to think about early in their career," said Dammers "but I think it would be effective, large record companies wouldn't object in this country. If we could get the next Wham! to have something like that in their contract it would be quite an achievement."

Billy Bragg (can anyone shut this man up) said the issue of marijuana criminalisation should be reviewed as it was often a pretext for stopping young blacks, also that the restrictions on broadcasting that prevented freedom of the airwaves.

Robert Wyatt, a staunch CP member, surprised many people by turning up: "Well the British Communist Party is never going to lead anyone anywhere. I don't support Neil Kinnock or the right wing of the Labour Party but what I like is that Billy Bragg is so sharp that Kinnock feels he has to match up to him. That sort of pressure is good."

Apology notes arrived from Junior Giscombe, Helen Terry, Lloyd Cole, Madness and Bananarama. A young black girl who grew up in Clacton-on-Sea and just happened to have a number one LP sent a poignant, regal message. ("If we shed a tear for all the sorrow she's caused, we'd drown." Guess who?)

Ken Livingston sees Red Wedge taking over from the work done by the GLC and other Labour councils and, when it goes public with a hopefully self-financing, nationwide tour in the New Year, The Communards, Junior Giscombe, Paul Weller and Billy Bragg will be joined by theatre groups and video workshops from every town.

Red Wedge say they'll be responsive to ideas and criticism from anyone. Contact Red Wedge via Paul Bower, Red Wedge, Room 104 Labour Party HQ, 150 Walworth Road, London SE17 1JY.

The left hook of Red Robbie Coltrane.

Words: Gavin Martin
Pictures: Bleddyn Butcher

THE Red Wedge tour, featuring Weller, The Communards, Bragg and Giscombe, begins in the New Year. The full dates are: Manchester Apollo (January 25), Cardiff St. David's Hall (26), Birmingham Odeon (27), Leicester De Montfort Hall (28), Bradford St. George's Hall (29), Edinburgh Playhouse (30) and Newcastle City Hall (31). As an added bonus, Lloyd Cole appears as special guest at Birmingham and Leicester, and Stephen 'Tin Tin' Duffy further augments the Birmingham bill. Paul Weller won't be with The Style Council but is appearing with "Friends".

Tickets are £6, £5 and £4 are only available by personal application to the theatre box-offices, where they go on sale this Saturday (30) and are limited to four per person. A limited number will be held back for UB40 holders at the lower price of £3.

SPANDAU BALLYHOO

SPANDAU BALLET have flunked out in their attempt to jail four of Chrysalis Records' most senior directors. Two weeks ago, the band took their record company to court, claiming that TV advertising of their 'Singles Collection' album would infringe Spandau's rights on its songs. They were then granted an injunction blocking a planned TV campaign.

However, an ad for the album was screened by Yorkshire TV on November 3 and Spandau, feeling miffed, reacted by applying to the court to have Chrysalis' assets sequestrated and its top executives, including executive Chairman Chris Wright, jailed for disobeying a court order. But, following a Court Of Appeal hearing on November 15, the original ruling was reversed and Chrysalis were given the go-ahead for their TV campaign, which begins this week.

Spandau, smarting at the setback, have since issued a statement claiming: "'The Singles Collection' is a compilation of old material and is being released against the expressed and repeated wishes of the group, who consider its release and its exploitation a bad career move. Spandau Ballet have always presented their music in the context of the highest art work and do not approve of the quality of packaging and marketing techniques being used on this record."

Despite the order being overturned on appeal, Spandau will still be taking Chrysalis to trial over what they feel is a breach in copyright and state that they view the whole affair as "clear evidence of the total breakdown in the working relationship between Chrysalis and Spandau Ballet."

Meanwhile, Chrysalis are also involved in litigation regarding John Waite, whose 'Missing You' proved an international hit a few months ago. It's claimed that Waite signed an agreement in 1981 binding him to Chris Wright's label. Two years later, he was given a release to record for Capitol in exchange for royalty payments. However Chrysalis, who are suing Waites in tandem with publishing firm Red Admiral, state that they have not been paid all such royalties and are now claiming damages in excess of $1,250,000.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN has a limited edition boxed set released by CBS next Monday titled 'The Born In The USA 12" Single Collection'. It contains extended, remixed, dub and live versions of the tracks on his smash hit album, with a total running time of 70½ minutes.

INSIDE
INFORMATION

PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST

"We're only a hairline and a few laws from incredible censorship. They're already trying to censor rock'n'roll. One of the reasons this album is so outspoken in the context of my work is that I think it's a case of use it or lose it." JONI MITCHELL tells ALAN JACKSON what has spurred her into facing up to today with her new album 'Dog Eat Dog' and what has provoked the art student in her. Pictures by Brian Aris.

SCENE ONE: 'JONI MITCHELL', New Paintings New Songs', an evening benefit for The Museum Of Contemporary Art at the James Corcoran Gallery, Santa Monica Boulevard, Los Angeles. . .

(Subtitled: *"All the people at this party / They've got a lot of style / They've got stamps of many countries / They've got passport smiles / Some are friendly / Some are cutting / Some are watching it from the wings / Some are standing in the centre / Giving to get something . . ."*

'People's Parties', from the album 'Court And Spark'. Joni Mitchell 1973.)

. . . a low building in a parade of liquor stores, restaurants and other sub-glamorous service industry ephemera. Outside faces watch figures emerging from cabs and limousines. Inside faces are watching faces . . .

Mitchell's husband Larry Klein, handsome, eyes shining, is talking with a beaming Pat Metheny, who suddenly throws his head back and laughs delightedly. A posse of the curious, gathered close by in the as-yet-uncrowded room, pauses mid-conversation and smiles, anxious to share in the joke. A tall young man with a video camera balanced on his shoulder moves in towards the room's dominant canvas, a vast and semi-figurative work titled 'Dog Eat Dog', like Mitchell's new LP. He is recording the event for Japanese TV . . .

Shelley Duvall is looking earnestly at a work called 'The Marriage Of Church And State', which features a soiled crucifix hammered onto an American flag. Within the Stars and Stripes there stands a small army of toy-shop tin generals, tacked on by hand. A woman squeezes past holding a wine glass aloft. "My God, that's Barbi Benton. She looks no older," says a whisper in her wake . . . a flurry of excitement in the entrance hall and Mitchell herself is here. The presence is palpable, long before her trademark black beret can be glimpsed amid the clamour, because waves of people radiate from her wherever she moves. Closest to her are the friends with whom she exchanges kisses and conversation, mindful of the audience. Next there are the friends of these friends, listening in. Hard by them, a broader band of spectators watch the listeners listening. Further back linger the shy, the single or the resolutely un-star struck. Fame, it seems acts like a pebble dropped into a pond . . . "Life's been pretty good to you, hasn't it?", a beautiful, dark-haired girl with wide-open eyes is asking Jack Nicholson as he lounges in a doorway granting audiences to a procession of young callers. "Yeah," replies Jack, giving that slow, wicked smile and tilting his shades forward a little. "Life's been fucking great . . ."

Wayne Shorter's saxophone trails behind the general conversation and rises to the ceiling like cigarette smoke in the smaller of the gallery's two main rooms. It is 'Dog Eat Dog' being played on continuous loop through loud speakers. Mitchell is now circulating among her guests. Having been introduced to Sheena Easton, she is craning forward in conversation. "You're from a small town too, aren't you?" those passing can hear her ask . . . outside in the warm, dark-blue night departing guests are being presented with copies of the new album. One group pauses on the sidewalk, discussing the paintings inside. "I expected them to be more figurative somehow, like her record covers," says one man. Mitchell, asked about this, her first ever collected exhibition of art work, will say later: "At their most trivial you could think of them (her paintings) as party decorations for the release of the new album. At their most trivial they are at least that good."

SCENE TWO: AFTERNOON TEA at the offices of Peter Asher Management, North Doheny Drive, Los Angeles. Joni Mitchell turns aside from the birthday celebrations of her manager's secretary, wipes crumbs from her fingers, and dissects her art, her music and her increasingly troubled view of America and the wider world.

(Subtitled: *"Fiction of obedience / Fiction of rebellion / Fiction of the goody-goody and the hellion / Fiction of destroyers / fiction of preservers / Fiction of peacemakers and shit disturbers. . ."*

'Fiction', from the album 'Dog Eat Dog', Joni Mitchell 1985.)

The flaxen-haired figure sitting behind a large glass desk in a small side office looks tired but animated. Joni Mitchell at 41 is an intriguing mixture of sage and schoolgirl. The clothes are elegant, expensively understated – heavy silk sleeves carelessly rolled up, emerald suede shoes slipped on and off unconsciously while considering a response. The look is anything but Hollywood, just minutes down the boulevard, and the effect as unselfconscious as can be. But her beauty and candour are as disarming as her music.

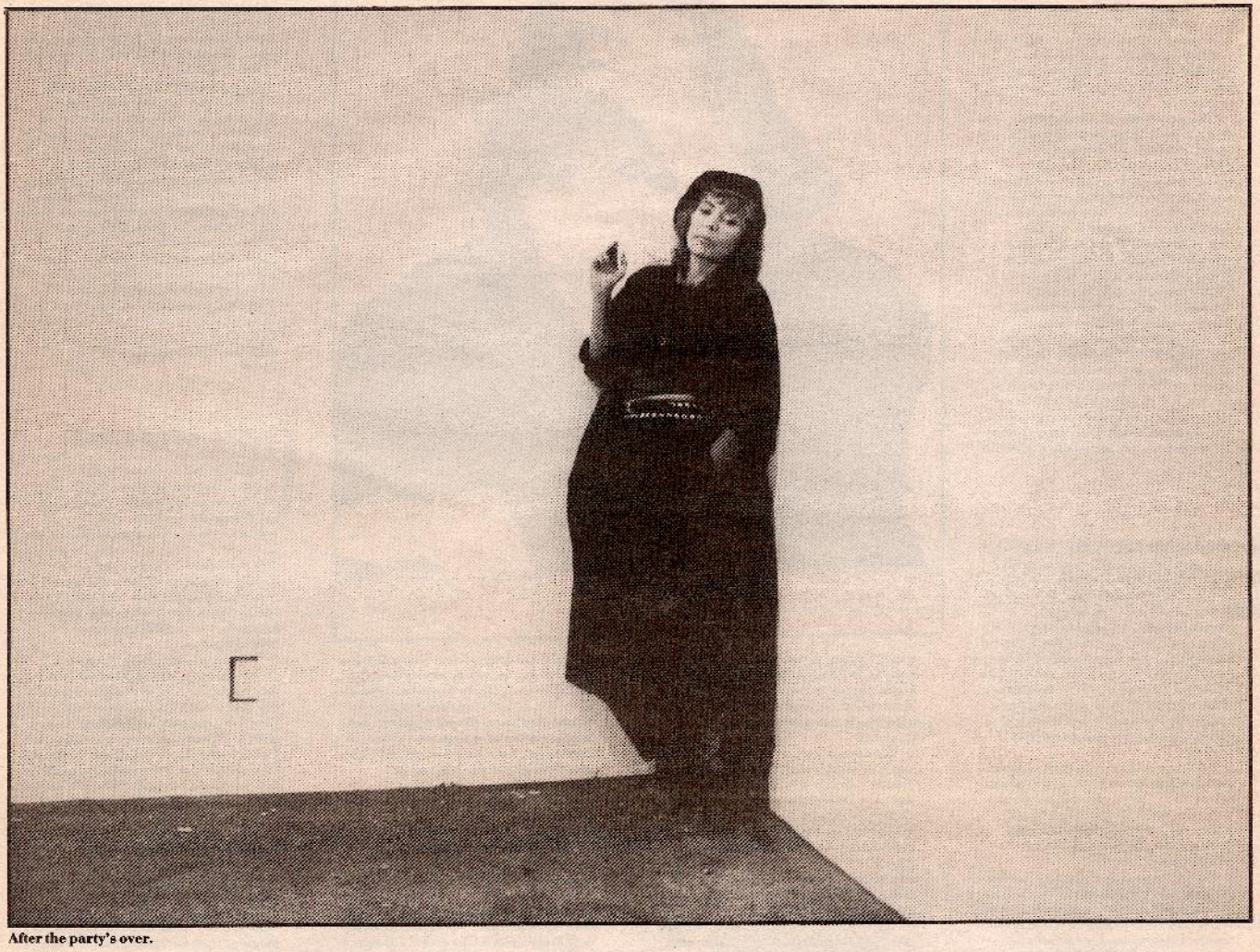
This is the woman, born in Fort MacLeod, Alberta and raised in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, who began singing while at art school in Calgary; who married and divorced the folk singer Chuck Mitchell in the mid-60s; whose songs 'The Circle Game' and 'Both Sides Now' were recorded by other artists (Tom Rush and Judy Collins respectively) before she ever released her first solo album; whose song 'Woodstock', from her third album 'Ladies Of The Canyon', became the anthem for a generation; who released the ultimate bedsitter-land soundtrack with 1971's 'Blue', expanded its folk-pop concerns in the following year's 'For The Roses', then sold self-pity down the Swanee in the search for Jazz . . .

This is the artist whose 1974 release 'Court And Spark' stands today as a milestone of romantic introspection, leading into a double live set 'Miles Of Aisles', reworking her existing songbook in a jazz-aware framework that would itself lead to 1976's historic 'The Hissing Of Summer Lawns'. An impressionistic collection of jazz-pop vignettes, it contrasted the sterile life of her suburban sisters with the threatening but fertile jungle world lying beyond the well-manicured lawns and airy interiors of Beverley Hills and Bel-Air . . .

This in turn would be developed into the pared-down, minimal jazz accompaniments of 'Hejira', an album that teamed Mitchell's guitar with the brooding electric bass work of Weather Report player Jaco Pastorious on songs about flight, fancy, fear and escape. These achievements alone would be enough to assure Joni Mitchell of her place in some cobwebbed hall of all – time fame . . .

But add a career which continued to flourish (artistically if not commercially) through a still more full blooded romance with jazz on the studio double-album 'Don Juan's Reckless Daughter', and the collaboration with the then-dying composer and bassist Charles Mingus on 1979's 'Mingus', and it becomes more difficult to fathom Joni Mitchell's place in the scheme of things.

Has she released an electro album using synthesized voices to disguise the vocal short-



After the party's over.

comings of midde age? Has she published a racy autobiography detailing her love-life with California's mellowest but most macho men? Has she even turned a well-timed back on liberalism and come out in support of nuking, nationalism and New Cold War Diplomacy? None of these things . . .? What? She's even turned in a more than half-way decent new album that brings her razor-edged lyricism into the '80s world of Fairlights and pre-Holocaust paranoia? This is *not* what becomes a Legend most, these days at least. Joni Mitchell has some answering to do . . .

THE LEGEND IS LAUGHING. "You know, I'm just one of those Spock babies. We do everything a little late . . ."

In this case the joke could be on any one of the many Joni Mitchell fans who rely on their heroine to articulate those unique-yet-universal stirrings of the heart—the circumstantial minutiae of the love affair. Her own emotional turmoil has fuelled both her art and the animosity of critics. She has been called the High Priestess of Confessional Songwriting in some columns. *Rolling Stone*, in one article featuring a family tree of her liaisons, called her 'Old Lady Of The Year'. Every silver lining has its cloud.

"It took a long time for me to remarry," says Mitchell, referring to 1983's ceremony with bassist Klein, 28. "It took me a long time to find the stability of a partner again. But what am I going to do now? Torture myself? Sit there and reminisce about the past? It would be bad for me, bad for my marriage. So with that taken care of, you begin to look around you. It's a natural sociological phenomenon, you know."

She is explaining the logic behind the new-found politicism of her music. 'Dog Eat Dog' has the odd strand of romanticism in its lyrical fabric, but also contains attacks on consumerism. Right wing evangelism, media hype, international aid policy and good old-fashioned greed. It's a list of targets that might be considered hip if addressed less articulately by someone half her age. As it is, Joni Mitchell has made one of the most political albums to come out of America this year. The title track refers to a nation of *"snakebite evangelists and racketeers"*—a *"culture in decline"*.

"Land of snap decisions / Land of short attention spans / Nothing is savoured long enough / To really understand. . . ."

"Although I see it in America because I'm here, it's more of a global point of view," she says, gesturing with a cigarette. "We are so inter-related with the news being the way it is . . . world incidents broadcast into your living room . . . the Western world has all the symptoms of downfall if you study it and compare it with all the other civilisations which have gone under. There are the youth cult obsessions, a greater openness regarding homosexuality, the decadent theatre reflecting the repressed savageness of a culture. Look at German theatre before Hitler. It's very similar to MTV with all its black studs, that one pocket that rock went through a couple of years ago that was dominantly savage, apocalyptic . . . the enactment of surviving a holocaust . . . savage scavengers. Even though there's a certain theatricalness, there's also a truth to it." This awareness, coupled with the stability of marriage, led her away from what others would call her "confessional" muse.

"I never thought of myself so much as a confessional songwriter," she says, "but in order that my work should have vitality I felt I should write in my own blood. The closer it was

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FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

to my direct experience, the less it was going to be hearsay, the more poignancy it should have. My job as I see it is to be a witness. I am a witness to my times. The world had become so mysterious from the vantage point of the '70s. The disillusionment, the killing of the president, the stain of the Vietnamese war. It was a natural thing for people to look into themselves . . .

"That period was one of soul searching. The dream, everything that America stood for, was broken, and the people break a little with the dream. Where do you have left to go but in?" It was, she concedes, a very particular moment in time, experienced by those coming of age in the '60s. "We really broke from our elders. There was a clear cut. A line was drawn. This generation kind of resembles my parents' generation, like a throwback, which often happens. Their aim is to get a job and hold it, because they came up in a depression, although not one as severe as that of the '30s. But they came up under the same pressures. We came up in the greatest pocket of affluence post Second World War though. The country was rich, the economy was in good shape, and we were raised on certain philosophies. Like, spare the rod. Yes, do spoil the child. So we never really reached adulthood in a certain way. We were a kind of freaky generation; very self-centred as a rule, in a good way and a bad way . . ."

LIBERATED FROM THE NEED TO introspect, Mitchell found inspiration in full measure by looking around at the confused kingdom her babyboomer peers had inherited. To her, one of the most disturbing phenomenons was the eerie interplay between religion and politics which began as a reaction to the soft-pedal Carter years and which has found full expression during Ronald Reagan's presidency. Her song 'Tax Free', from the new album, analyses the implications, employing actor Rod Steiger's melodramatic oracular talents to simulate one of the hawkish TV preachers.

"Lord there's danger in this land / You get witch hunts and wars / When church and state hold hands . . ." she sings, as Steiger counters *"I think we should turn the United States Marines loose on that little island south of Florida and stop that problem . . . I am preachin' love . . . I am . . ."*

'Tax Free' starts from the premise that the new right-wing religious are playing the same stadiums as the rock bands they so despise, and can outdraw even Springsteen. It then shows how the *"immaculately tax free"* preachers combine with the President to inculcate the idea that any opposition to church or state is Communist induced, and that perhaps the right of free speech should be taken away from its instigators.

"So now it starts to get really scary," says Mitchell, leaning forward and jabbing the air with her cigarette. "You think, we're only a hairline and a few laws from incredible censorship. They're already trying to censor rock'n'roll. One of the reasons this album is so outspoken in the context of my work is that I think it's a case of use it or lose it. If I don't start speaking out, taking a chance and addressing things that are important to me in this way, we might not have this outlet very long."

Having taken part in the recent Farm Aid benefit and joined in the recording of 'Tears Are Not Enough', the Canadian equivalent to 'Do They Know It's Christmas', did she detect a reactive movement back to more Woodstock-style values among the young?

"Woodstock was Woodstock . . . it had its own identity. There'll never be another Woodstock," she says. "Every time there's been one of those large gatherings of people, any one of them, they've been entirely different. Collectively, each of those crowds had its own personality. To me, Woodstock was a very high event. It was the height of the hippie movement. Afterwards it began to recede. Live Aid didn't have the same things up against it as Woodstock did. It was much more commercialised. They were flashing up the band's latest album after every song. I don't think people were weeping in the wings. I don't think there was the same poignancy surrounding the event."

'Dog Eat Dog' contains the song 'Ethiopia', her own comment on the political inertia and shortsightedness that contributes to the famine and threatens its repetition elsewhere. It will also provide royalties for charitable causes, but is far removed lyrically from the self-involved smugness of, for example, 'We Are The World'. It fuses the ecological concerns of past songs like 'Big Yellow Taxi' and 'The Hissing Of Summer Lawns' with the bleak, minimal sound of 'Hejira' and provides a despairing, angry whole. Mitchell admits that, yes, she worried that she might be accused of picking up on a *chic* subject and that, yes, there was opposition in some quarters to its inclusion on the album.

"It's too good a song to even think about what people might think of it on the downside. I'm used to people thinking of my work on the downside. I've had plenty of it . . ." Mitchell's husky voice has a hard edge to it now. "The song was too good to kill, I thought, it's not a pretty subject. It will be too sad for some people. They won't like it, won't want to look at it. But what would you do? If you'd written that song, would you abort it? Wouldn't you put it on record . . . ?

"After I'd done the Canadian Band Aid, I felt that all the songs that had been written, while they were good for generating the spirit to gather money and to focus people on a cause – in that they were perfect – they were more about us, we the performers and we the contributors of money, than they were about the people of Africa themselves. So once I had that idea I did the portrait more of the Ethiopians themselves in the context of our own world hunger. To me it's not like they're over there and they have a drought, they've mismanaged their soil, it's now sick and their government doesn't really care about them. That could happen anywhere in the world at any time, closer to home. We can cause the same problems with our pesticides going into the ground . . . you're going to get me into my apocalyptic vision now . . . terrible things are being done in the name of commerce. The rain forests are coming down around the globe. We're going to have deserts springing up all over the place. It's not just going to be in Ethiopia."

The song's impression is made all the more powerful by the simplicity of its musical form in contrast to the computer-age pop she has adapted elsewhere. The sound is expensive – it is Mitchell's most costly album to date – and, uniquely for her post-folkie work, production credits are given to outside agents. Nile Rogers and Thomas Dolby both volunteered, but she was wary of turning her music over to someone so completely.

"I found it difficult, because I've always been kind of a benign dictator on my dates," she says of the production-by-committee (Mitchell and Klein, engineer Mike Shipley and, on some of the tracks, Dolby as well) that resulted. "There's been no producer. There was never a credit given, and I leaned heavily on artistic contributions from my players. A producer is kind of the guy who has the last word. Often he's a formula man. He's trying to make something commercial, and that can be a watering down. I don't think of producers generally speaking – and there are exceptions – as people who play long shots."

Mitchell says that she and her husband had been attracted by the best of recent music using Fairlights and drum machines, and wanted to assimilate that sound into her own work. But Shipley was invited onto the sessions to handle the more complex functions of the equipment that they had not yet learned to perform, and then the need for a fourth person – Dolby – to speed up programming was recognised. There have been rumours that it was not an altogether harmonious relationship.

"I was reluctant when Thomas was suggested because he had asked to produce the record," she admits. "Would he consider coming in as a programmer and a player . . . So we met with him and said, now we know you're used to being a frontliner and this is kind of a foot-soldier position . . . and he said 'I would love to do it. I am sick of people always looking to me for the answers'. And when he said that I thought of the play *A Chorus Line*. I thought, I know his intentions are the best and that at this moment he believes he can do that, but he's still a lead player and can he go back into the chorus line? He's going to have to subordinate his ideas.

"So on that level we did have some problems because he'd get excited with some idea and I couldn't get him off the keyboards. Then I'd feel bad. I'd think, Oh God, I understand. He's on a creative roll. But he can't because if he does that he'll decorate me right off my own project. He may be able to do it faster. He may even be able to do it better, but that fact is it won't really be my music."

It would be hard not to see the irony in the fact that Mitchell has just released her most rock-aware album in more than a decade at a time when the American mega-sales are going to artists testing their toes in jazz. Her own complete immersion in the form led to her being pilloried by many critics on her home continent, and being largely ignored by record buyers. Is she bitter?

"I felt bitter at the time. I had bitter moments. I had to fight it. But I did not become 'an embittered person', so I won some of the battles. I took a lot of hard knocks. Mean knocks, not smart knocks. People weren't thinking . . . they were just afraid of it. It was just different at the time . . . and now this is a good time for it. I'm glad it came about this way because it gives me optimism. I like to make that kind of music and I like the idea of it having a broader communication . . .

"There is a tendency on some projects for something to be considered jazz, because jazz is now chic. But it's not good jazz. It's beginner's jazz. But the players that Sting is working with, for instance – those are real virtuosi. I like the idea that good musicians can have a broad public communication. And you've got to start somewhere. Even if I'm thinking, God, you think this is hip but you haven't even digested the history of jazz enough to know that, like, this giant existed and he did that . . . it may be very beginnerish, but it's still where to begin to educate the public. Maybe if they can like that, then they can like something else too and gradually acquire a taste for this magnificent pocket of music which has always been designated as something for kind of '50s cellars in Europe."

As for herself, there are no plans to explore the area further now that the rest of the industry is catching up. "All people have to do is go back and play the old records," she says. "I already did that."

Old wounds are still discernible though. 'The Hissing Of Summer Lawns', widely considered to be her landmark album of the '70s, was voted 'Worst Album Of The Year' by the staff of *Rolling Stone*, on its release in 1976.

"I got a telegram from Paul and Linda McCartney that year saying, 'We really liked it'. It was the only good review that it got, and then it was almost a sympathy telegram. It was destroyed on so many levels and that really hurt. There's no way, just on a level of craftsmanship, that you could say it was the worst record made that year. If they'd just said they hated it, you could take it, because it would be a personal opinion. But to say it's the worst. Stay as you are and bore us, or change and betray us. That's your choice." Mitchell smiles and shrugs, pausing to light another cigarette.

ASKED TO CONSIDER HER position in relation to the women's movement, she draws herself up behind the desk with shoulders hunched and hands clasped, like a pupil concentrating in class. On one level she has done more than any other female songwriter to express the sexual and emotional landscape of the past two decades. On another, she has always seemed apart from other women, either isolated in her art or distanced from them by her romantic relationships. She admits she has never seen herself as a feminist, finding the structures of the movement too limiting and divisive.

"I had a good relationship with my father," she says carefully. "He taught me a lot of things that, had he had a son, he would have taught a boy. How to make bows and arrows and so on. I enjoy men's company, and I grew up enjoying it. My best friendships generally speaking that I've made in my life were with men. It's not that I don't like women. I've made good friendships with women too, but I'm so driven as women go that I can relate more to driven men. A lot of women would like to paint, for example, but they have 101 things that keep them from doing it. I can have friendships with these women, but sometimes I remind them of their inability to get going, which leaves a hole or a potential hole in the relationship.

"Feminism was too divisive. It was us against them . . . but it did something to open things up. I hate the word *Ms* but I like the idea of a person, that a man and a woman can sit and for a moment all of these sexual considerations are bypassed and you have an open dialogue from person to person. I have basically tried to live my life as a person in that way."

Suddenly she lightens, remembering an article she has read recently about one of the new right-wing women's organisations. It is hard for her to keep from laughing while relating the story.

"I forget the name of the particular group but it was Christian women linked to getting the devil's language out of Rock'n'Roll," she says. "They like being housewives. They're anti-feminist. And they were in training to go out and visit the media, because some of them had appeared on television and had felt awkward. So the training programme consisted of a woman standing up and saying (Mitchell adopts a prissy Miss Manners delivery): 'Now remember girls, on TV your knees are your best friends. Keep them together . . .', and then, 'take out your pocket mirrors girls. I want you to notice that if, when you're speaking, you raise your eyebrows up and down, your voice takes on a more melodious quality' . . ."

Mitchell is laughing with delight now as she winds up the anecdote: "The last thing the article said was that the women prayed, they sang songs, and then they looked at an aborted foetus, and I thought, God, this is a new movement? It's just as sick and limited as the old one. It's the pendulum springing back too far against a reaction which was itself already too extreme. When is the pendulum going to get to the middle?"

She talks a little about the art show, her recent move into abstract painting – "I've just broken into a movement that happened in the '50s. I'm still an art student." – and of her plans for coming to Europe with her band next year. Outside the room her husband lounges in a chair chatting with office staff. He grins when he sees her. With the heart soothed, Joni Mitchell has found fresh sources to energise her music.