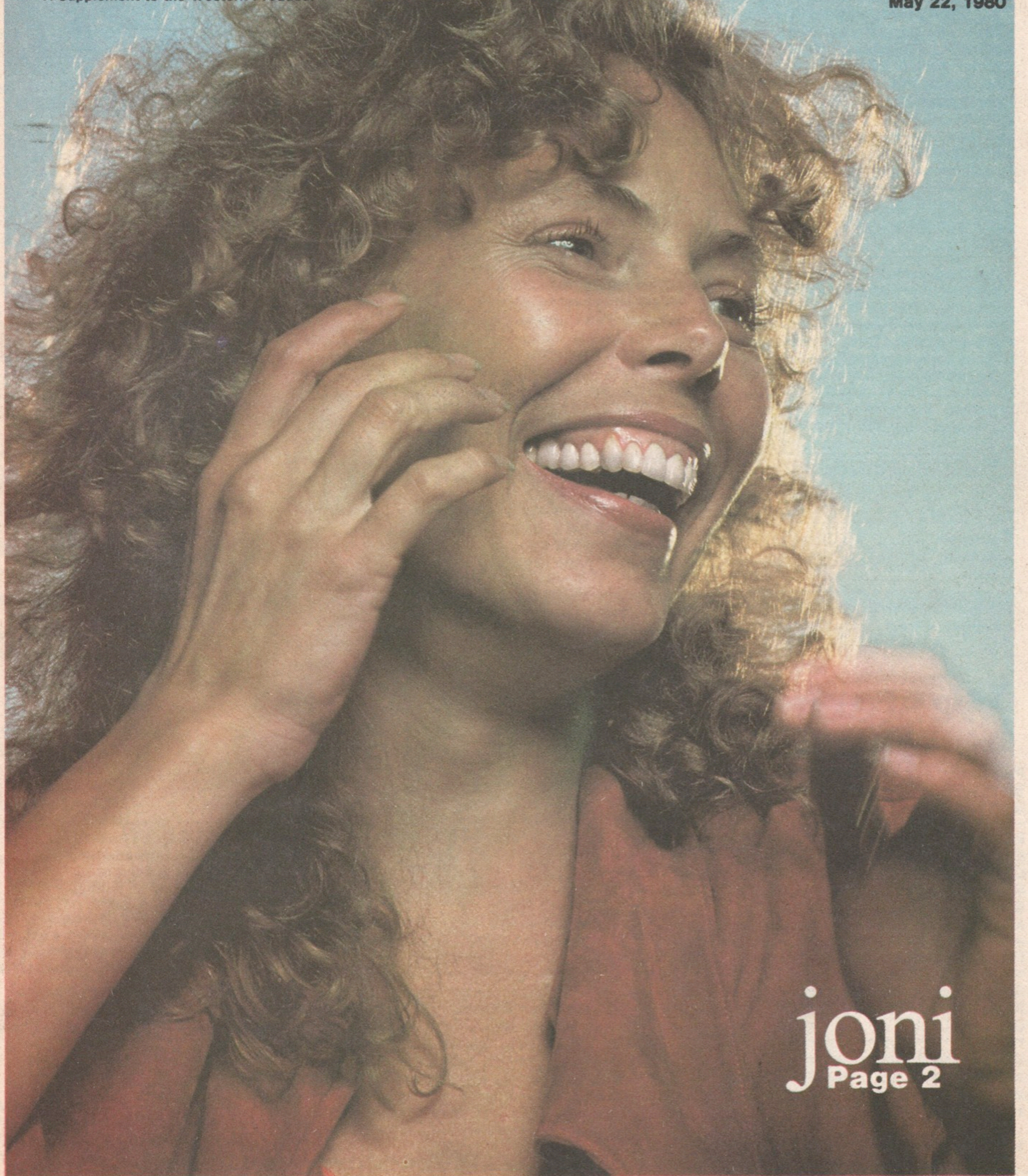


# Western people

A Supplement to the Western Producer

May 22, 1980



joni  
Page 2

# Joni Mitchell

## Seeing art in the world

**Cover photograph:** Joni Mitchell is an internationally - celebrated singer, a poet, a songwriter, an artist, recording star and now a filmmaker. She grew up on the Canadian prairies and maintains ties with friends and family here. On a visit home in Saskatoon she talked with Western Producer reporter Adrian Ewins whose story begins on this page. Cover photograph is by Norman Seefe. **2**

**Prairie wildlife:** Swallows almost forced wrens' eviction. **6**

**The Waltz:** A blistering hot sun can have a strange effect. **7**

**Poached salmon:** Women's editor Liz Delahey prepares a refreshing buffet treat. **8**

**Brave boxer:** Brian Hornberger sticks to his boxing gloves despite injuries. **10**

**Books:** Publishing novel changes Mary Ann Seitz' life. **12**

**Travel notes:** Backpacking and canoeing in the Yukon. **13**

**Western album:** Vic Draw recalls demise of the Home Bank. **14**

**Magazine editor:** Mary Gilchrist  
**Layout editor:** Jim Graham

## Western people

Published every other week  
by Western Producer Publications  
a division of Saskatchewan Wheat Pool

Bob Phillips.....editor and publisher  
Keith Dryden.....executive editor  
Clarence Fairbairn.....managing editor  
Allan Laughland.....business manager  
Ron Benson.....advertising manager  
Al Landry.....circulation manager

Distributed without extra charge to  
all subscribers of The Western Producer  
Second class mail registration number 1426  
Postal address: P.O. Box 2500, Saskatoon,  
Canada S7K 2C4

Unsolicited manuscripts are welcomed;  
address all manuscripts to Western People at the  
above address and enclose a  
self-addressed stamped envelope

May 22, 1980 Issue No. 48

**By ADRIAN EWINS**

A hot summer day in New York City. The streets resemble a noisy parking lot. A cacophony of idling engines, squealing tires, piercing sirens, shouting voices and honking horns.

To most, it sounds like headache-producing chaos. To Joni Mitchell, it sounds like jazz.

Joni Mitchell is a poet, a musician, a song-writer, an artist, and most recently, a film-maker. She sees and hears things that others don't.

Like the street noise of New York City.

"New York is jazz. . . it just is jazz," she says. To her it seems obvious, and she can't understand why you don't immediately know what she's talking about.

"You hear a car going uptown of Fifth Avenue. There's a car on one street and a car on another. They don't even see each other.

"Then for whatever reason, — maybe there's something in front of them — they hit their horns, and suddenly you have this beautiful chord. You always have these chords. The city just sounds like that."

Her ear, her ability to see musical possibilities where others don't, helped make her one of the dominant forces in contemporary music in the 1970s.

Her albums, from *Clouds to Court and Spark* to *Mingus*, and her songs from *Both Sides, Now* and *Big Yellow Taxi* to *Raised on Robbery* and *Coyote*, broke new ground, both musically and lyrically, throughout the decade.

But she hasn't always heard the street sounds of New York. She grew up with less strident sounds — the sounds of Fort Macleod, Alberta, Maidstone and North Battleford, Saskatchewan, and mainly, Saskatoon.

She moved so often as a child because her father, William Anderson, was in the air force, then became a manager in a chain of grocery stores. The three of them, William and Myrtle and daughter Joan, were never in one place very long as she grew up.

She was always the new kid in town, she remembers.



— Randy Burton photo

Joni Mitchell is also an artist, and some of her work is reproduced in a book of musician's art.

"It changes things; it makes a gypsy out of you. It changes your ability to relate, compared to somebody who grows up stationary. Even after you've settled down in one place for as long as four or five years, you still have that new-kid feeling built into you."

That mobility — rootlessness, perhaps — in her youth also may have contributed to the development of the artistic bent which is now her life.

You learn solitary play, she said, since you never really develop close friends. Add to that that she was an only child, and it becomes clear that she would become what she calls the "self-entertaining type."

That part of her life — that mobility — hasn't really changed despite the success and drastic change in lifestyle. She hasn't opted for a sedentary, comfortable existence, with a well-ordered and controlled life, with everything close by. Even now, some of that gypsy remains in her.

"I have three residences (New York, Los Angeles and British Columbia) and none of them is really home," she says.

"Even with something as superficial as dressing I notice it. I'll put on my green blouse and I'll go for the green belt. Only it's in New York and I'm in California. I come in and see the friends that live in the areas where I have these residences and they say, 'Gee, we never see you.' I say, 'I'll be back,' then two years go by."

"So it does make you kind of rootless, but in my business we're all kind of rootless."

What roots Joni does have are in the Prairies, and every now and then she returns. It's usually something like Christmas, the occasion this winter when she was interviewed.

Her now-retired father and mother



*Joni looks out at the endless expanse of prairie. Photograph taken by her mother, Myrtle Anderson in 1974.*

still live in the same house Joni grew up in, a house she said she still feels at home in. But it's not the same Saskatoon; both the city and the people she used to know have gone.

"A lot of the friends who were childhood friends have scattered and I'm never sure exactly who's in town. And a lot of times when I come home people just aren't here — they've gone off to visit their in-laws or something."

The city also looks different. The architecture has changed drastically — "There's a totally new skyline" — and the trees she

saw planted as a youngster now dwarf some of the houses.

Of course, it shouldn't be too surprising that there have been so many changes, since it was 1961 when Joan Anderson left Saskatoon for good. She headed off for art school in Calgary, stayed there a year, and then at age 20 went to Toronto to become a musician.

A lot of people have probably gone to Toronto to become a musician — it's a lot easier to say than do, though. Even someone with as much obvious talent as Joni had a tough time, and it was perhaps her determination and stubbornness as much as her talent that made the difference.

"It was really difficult. It was very expensive in Toronto at the time. While they had an enormous musical scene it was hard to get into a musicians' union... it cost a lot of money."

She worked in a clothing store to pay the bills, but still remembers with a laugh that she was "always \$30 short."

But she never looked back to Saskatoon for help once she had made the decision to make a career in music.

"I was too proud, in a certain way, to write home for money, especially since all my life I had wanted to go to art school and then abandoned it for music."

Nor did she ever consider returning to Saskatchewan when things weren't going well in Toronto: "I wasn't the type to run back into the nest, and I guess I had a certain amount of self-confidence in my talent."

Finally she got into a club that was non-union, began to play regularly, attracted the attention of reviewers and other musicians, and, perhaps just as important at the time, began to get a little money saved up. Not a lot — just enough to have \$60 in the bank "so you weren't always living on the edge."

It was while she was in Toronto that she met and married Chuck Mitchell, a musician from the United States. They

performed as a duo for a while, but her restless talent led her in other directions and their marriage ended within two years.

The next step in her journey was New York, a city she now loves but one that was doubtless somewhat intimidating to a young, single musician from the Prairies who had little but her guitar and talent to survive by.

All this time, while confident and self-assured of her musical abilities, Joni now admits she didn't expect her career to go the way it did.

"My goals were always very modest... my goal in Toronto at first was just to get hired by a club. I didn't even consider making records. My goal after that was to play at the Mariposa Folk Festival and eventually I did that."

She did that and much more. She began recording and releasing albums. Some of the songs, like *Both Sides, Now*, *Chelsea Morning* and *The Circle Game* became hits and her name began to

become well-known not only in the coffee-houses of New York and Toronto, but across North America.

She performed those songs on her early albums with little accompaniment besides her guitar or piano, relying on her voice for most of the impact. They were melodic, lilting, lyrical songs, which dealt with such themes as loneliness, lost love and growing up, often on a level of personal intensity that was unheard of at the time, which reached out and touched a nerve in most listeners.

*"She speaks in sorry sentences  
Miraculous repentances  
I don't believe her.  
Tomorrow he will come to me  
And speak his sorrow endlessly and ask me why  
Why can't I leave her?"*

(from Conversation,  
©1967, Siquomb Publishing Corp.)

"It was unusual to write that intimately at that time. A lot of people were kind of shocked by it, especially the men who were writers, because the popular style of writing was mostly a lot of posturing as a hero, not an anti-hero, not a person with problems," she says now.

*"Telephone, even the sound of your voice is still new  
All alone in California and talking to you  
And feeling too foolish and strange to say the words that I had planned  
I guess it's too early, 'cause I don't know where I stand."*

(from I Don't Know Where I Stand,  
©Siquomb Publishing Corp.)

At first that kind of writing was difficult, Joni recalled, but it happened so instinctively and naturally that she never really thought how different it was. And that style of writing may have even become a defence against the kind of superficial, star persona that takes over many successful songwriters and performers.

As the success overtook her, Joni says, she was for a time bowled over by it all. Her identity was threatened, and her parents, especially her mother, she suspects, may have had an equally hard time understanding it and dealing with it.

"Papa was just proud. For myself and my mother it became almost like Joni Mitchell was an external creation, with all this attention being paid to 'Joni Mitchell' — but what about the person?"

"Is there room for the person or is there only this fascination with the phenomenon of success. How much room is there for you to remain human?"

One way she handled the problem was through her songs, which took on an almost carthartic significance.

"I think I became a more intimate, confessional poet, in part because I wanted to maintain a certain amount of dimension as a person.

"If they were going to worship this creation, Joni Mitchell, let's see how much dimension they could take with it."

That all seems a long time ago now. Joni Mitchell and her songs have become a major part of the musical history of the late 1960s and 1970s. (She laughs that she has even heard Both Sides, Now being played in a supermarket as she shopped).

But just as success hasn't taken the gypsy out of Joni, neither has her music stood still.

Many musical artists become, in a sense, trapped by their own success. They find a formula that will produce hits and sell records, and then won't do anything else; won't risk ruining a good thing.

That hasn't been the case with Joni. Almost every album represents a departure of some sort from what came before.

The acoustical, haunting melodies of her early albums bear almost no resemblance to her latest effort, an album produced with and dedicated to the late jazz great Charles Mingus. The album is jazz, pure and simple.

She says her music has become more "textural" over the years; while some critics say she has lost her melodies, she feels her melodies have become more unusual.

"In some circles people have seen what I consider to be my progress as something else, because it's deviated from rock and roll topically and rhythmically. But the voicings that I like and the rhythms that I like aren't necessarily rock and roll.

"I'm 36 years old now. Hopefully I will mellow as I get older. Not that I'm getting old and tired, but it seems organically natural as you mature to create a mature kind of music," she said.

"I've always been drawn to more complex chords. It was a natural thing that eventually I would be led into the world of jazz, where harmony was more complex and sophisticated."

Trying to remember the way you thought or felt about things 10 or 15 years ago is an almost impossible task. Memories are selectively cloudy; you remember the way you would have liked to have felt or the way you think, in retrospect, you should have.

It's a little different for an artist like Joni Mitchell. Her songs from those years tell her exactly what she was feeling and thinking and doing. She can see how she grew up, and changed.

She doesn't look back very often, though; she's too busy learning and experiencing new things, striving for excellence, she says. It's only when she goes on a concert tour and has to learn some of her old songs again that she sees how she used to be.

"Some things I can't sing; I feel miscast. Songs that have the longings and ideals of a girl.

"But some songs have a maturity that reached beyond my experience at the time that I wrote it and these things I can still perform. Both Sides, Now is really a simple little song, but I can sing that when I'm 80... it still holds up."

*"But now old friends are acting strange*

*They shake their heads, they say I've changed*

*But something's lost, but something's gained  
In living every day*

*I've looked at life from both sides now*

*From win and lose and still somehow*

*It's life's illusions I recall  
I really don't know life at all."*

(Both Sides, Now,  
©Siquomb Publishing Corp.)



*The Reliance Grain Co. is long gone, but Joni says the spirit of growing up in Maidstone lives in her music.*

Her ability to use the language, the images and metaphors that jump out at you and tell you in one sentence what might require verses from a lesser writer, is one of the things that has set her music apart.

That lyrical ability is one of the things that can be traced back to her Canadian roots, Joni says. It's a trait her music shares with several other Canadian songwriters and performers, like Neil Young, The Band, Gordon Lightfoot, and it can be partly attributed to the British heritage in Canadian education, she thinks.

"I think we all, because of the English education we share, have a certain literary emphasis. That's certainly lost now, to a large degree, in the American educational system."

Despite those nice words about the Canadian education system, Joni doesn't harbor many positive memories of her schooling. She progressed through the system and eventually graduated from Aden Bowman high school in Saskatoon, but as she looks back now she doesn't think she got much out of it.

"Painting and poetry — the arts — were things I doodled around with while I should have perhaps been paying more attention

to the academic. But all the time I was preparing myself. I was educating myself for what my life was to be . . . intuitively."

In those early days she didn't see herself being a musician (despite an aptitude test which said that's the direction she should take). Painting was her passion and she always identified herself as an artist.

Even now she retains her love of painting — "I've been a painter all my life. I've been a musician for part of the last 15 years."

Most of her album covers have included paintings she has done. Her latest album, *Mingus*, included four of her works in the album package.

Since that was released, and since the publication of a book called *Star Art*, in which her painting is included in a collection of artwork by celebrities in other fields, she finds herself being taken seriously as a painter for the first time.

Being taken seriously and having her work shown provide great satisfaction, but also add a kind of pressure which wasn't there when her painting was more for herself and her friends, more just a hobby.

Her artwork has always been personal and precious, she said and now she finds herself having to listen to it being reviewed, sometimes dismissed by art critics as "corny."

"I'd rather not have to concern myself with whether it's corny or not. It never really mattered to me before."

Painting, poetry, music, and now film. She bemoans the impact of television on education and North American culture generally — that it has taken away skills in writing and verbal communication — but she recognizes the power and versatility of visual communication. Her latest project is designed to take advantage of that.

She's in the process of putting together a 90-minute film which "weaves" her music with visual images. For example, the song *Amelia*, a tribute of sorts to Amelia Earhart in which Earhart's fateful flight is used as an allegory of a personal relationship, is played while newsreel film of Earhart and concert footage of Joni are interspersed.

The film represents a culmination of sorts, a coming together of her art and her music for the first time, she says. She hopes to sell it to European or Canadian television.

The future? When the film is finished, it will probably be time for a break from the touring, recording and writing which has been almost full-time over the past two years.

She said she'd like to travel in Europe for a while, writing as the inspiration hits her. And all the while learning.

"For all the time I wasted in the educational system, doodling around and daydreaming and looking like a turkey academically, I'm a thirsty, thirsty student now and I just gravitate to those things which interest me strongly."

It was late. Joni and a friend came up out of the subway somewhere in New York, just enjoying the night. The album, *Mingus*, was almost finished. Charles Mingus was in Mexico, being treated for the illness that would take his life. Joni needed an ending for the final song on the album, a song which told of much of the struggle black musicians had faced in becoming accepted. Joni Mitchell hears things others don't hear and, sometimes, sees things others don't see. She stepped up out of the subway, and she had her ending:

"We came up from the subway  
On the music midnight makes  
To Charlie's bass and Lester's  
saxophone  
In taxi horns and brakes  
Now Charlie's down in Mexico  
With the healers

So the sidewalk leads us with music  
To two little dancers  
Dancing outside a black bar  
There's a sign up on the awning  
It says 'Pork Pie Hat Bar'  
And there's black babies dancing . . .  
Tonight!

(from *Goodbye, Pork Pie Hat* © 1978 Crazy Crow Music and Jass Workshop, Inc.)

*Despite the hectic world of being a musician and demanding world of a composer, Joni finds time to contemplate life.*



— Randy Burton photo