Matchless Miss Mitchell

JONI MITCHELL'S three albums have come to mean so much to me that I was risking a lot by going to see the lady in person.

It's often deeply disappointing to see your favourites in the flesh and find that songs which have taken on a personal meaning are merely items in a routine performance. And I had a foreboding that Joni was getting just a little too much of a cult figure — the lady that most hip chicks would like to be and the one most guys would like to know.

I needn't have worried. She IS a cult figure, in the sense that she's telling truths in a relevant way. But there's none of the remoteness that that may imply. It was like listening to an old friend. She is, as someone wrote this week, "the priestess who used to live next door."

She looks heartbreakingly vulnerable as she stands in the spotlight in her peasant dress and sings open, honest songs about the men she's loved, the places she's been and the things she's lost. She had a little trouble with her guitar tuning and her piano parts and at times she forgot her words, but it only served to make her more real.

She sang "Chelsea Morning," "Conversation" and "Cactus Tree" then sat down at the piano for a new song about Christmas; then "Rainy Night House," "For Free," and "The Arrangement." Her piano playing is fairly limited; little more than a swirling velvet undercurrent into which she drops her crystal clear images. But her guitar is something else: strong and vibrant, full of shining chords and rich textures, a perfect foil for her songs.

"Big Yellow Taxi" began as a spoof Rock session with "Bonie Moronie" and Peggy Sue" and was followed by "Both Sides Now," "The Gallery" and the cruelly effective evocation of the nightmare of city life, "Nathan La Freneer."

A dulcimer made by a friend in Big Sur provided the backdrop for "Marcie" and a stunning new song, "I Could Drink A Case Of You Darlin' And Still Be On My Feet," dedicated to a man she met during her five weeks in Crete this summer.

Back to the piano for another new song about "My old man" and her "Woodstock" which put back the spirit and meaning so missing from the insipid Matthews Southern Comfort version. Graham Nash and manager Elliott Roberts joined her for the sing-along "Circle Game" and she closed with "Michael From Mountains" from her first album.

I think it was the most beautiful, and certainly the most purely enjoyable, solo performance I have ever seen. — ALAN LEWIS.

CAUGHT IN THE ACT

JONI MITCHELL: listening to an old friend

ELLINGTON

BILLY Eckstine pouring his heart into the sublime beauty of "Come Sunday" . . . the same melody returning 20 minutes later, sung in Hebrew by Tony Watkins . . . a 26-piece all-white, apparently all-Gentile choir singing "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" . . . under the guidance of a black director . . . Brock Peters, the distinguished black actor, bringing his virile bass voice to bear on a song inspired by the first four words of the Bible, "In the Beginning, God" . . . Cat Anderson as a human wailing wall . . . . tambourine-shaking singers prancing jubilantly up and down the aisles of the Synagogue in a massive, joyous finale.

These were just a few of the unusual sights and sounds on Sunday night at Temple Emanuel in Beverly Hills. Four years earlier to the day, Duke Ellington had set a precedent by bringing his music to a Jewish house of worship. Now he and his orchestra were back with a new programme, seven different men in the band, and a new line-up of guest singers.

In essence the programme was similar to that presented by Duke in Coventry Cathedral, except for the unique parade of singers. In addition to those mentioned, Trish Turner returned to the orchestra for just this one night, delineating the unforgettable strains of "Heaven," with obligato by Norris Turney's mellifluous alto. The sweet, floating soprano of Angeline Butler, a singer heard briefly last year with Count Basie, successfully met the challenge of "Almighty God Has Those Angels," one of Duke's more complex and demanding melodies.

Like all Ellington's sacred performances, this evening's programme put the total compass of the man and his music on display: as writer for instruments, for voices, composer of music and lyrics and even of narration.

The audience, predominantly white, but definitely interdenominational, was bouyantly receptive to the Ellington way of praising God. Harry Carney, Paul Gonsalves and every other soloist in the band had a chance to mix in his own reverential ingredients.

After the final standing ovation, Rabbi Meyer Heller presented the Maestro with a Bible, on which were inscribed the words "Love You Madly" in Hebrew; a wine cup, and a prayer shawl. To top it off he awarded Duke an honorary Bar Mitzvah. "Tonight," said Rabbi Heller, "you gave us all added soul." — LEONARD FEATHER.

FLEETWOOD MAC

FLEETWOOD MAC were given a lesson in musicianship by a comparatively unknown group at their concert here last Tuesday, Warm Dust, grossly underrated in England but big on the Continent, opened the show with some of the most interesting sounds, an unusual feature being the use on some numbers of two organs. Particularly outstanding were the two reedmen, John Surgery and Alan Solomon. By comparison Mac's line sounded dull and uninteresting, which was not helped by some of the dullest guitar solos I have heard for a long time. Peter Green is most felt by his absence! The rest of the group did little to redeem themselves, although there were some good moments from the piano. — ALAN KILBURN.

FACES

GOOD old Rod Stewart, as haywire as ever, tilled the air with his leg, spun the mike stand like it was a vaudeville umbrella, and then scorched the thick Marquee atmosphere with what is surely the best blues voice in England. The Faces smiled, and Ronnie Woods played his blues guitar, and Lane pumped bass. It's fine to have the Faces back home.

It seems so strange, and so absurd that this was only the band's seventh gig in England — strange and annoying, for they are one of our best bands. There's nothing pretentious about Faces, they are what they are, and they do what they do, and that's it. It's fun, and if you want you can bop, and if you want you can shake your head. Seems funny that the basis for some of the most necessary blues actually stems from happiness.

No one could surely boast that Faces are musically revolutionary, because they ain't, they are just pure rockers that'll get you shakin' and your hand clapping and your head heady.

A more than full house went wild and shook, and the gig went on and on. "Cut Across Shorty," the lot, honky-tonk, clanging guitar, thick vocals. Fabulous, gay and yet bluesy. — ROY HOLLINGWORTH....

MICHAEL GARRICK

MICHAEL GARRICK must be Britain's most iconoclastic pianist — a jazz equivalent of Thunderclap Newman if you like, always a fresh supply up his sleeve.

At the 100 club on Monday, the fusion of what is basically the old Rendell/Carr Quintet (Henry Lowther replacing Ian Carr on trumpet and flugel) plus Art Themen (reeds), Norma Winstone (voice) and bassist Coleridge Goode, with a school/church choir from Aldershot seemed a typically English eccentricity — yet true to form, Garrick's impish touch magically transformed it into a powerful vehicle for his compositions.

Shazam! The forty-piece choir mounted the podium, leaving the audience suddenly decimated and gazing in amazement as the assembled ranks climbed on to rows of ricketty Mackeson crates. The first number a three-part Mass, was notable for the emotional impact of Norma Winstone's gorgeous voice — naked and pure enough of tone to penetrate the hardest heart — and Don Rendell's mournful, wildly keening soprano.

The consort stormed through "Sanctus," "Psalm 73" in which Errol Garnerish blues piano suddenly popped up over some heavy rhythmns and "Salvation March" which Peter Mount conducted with a superbly sure touch. Finally, it was "Behold the Pale Horse," the horse of death from the Book of Revelation. Garrick played a brilliantly menacing solo and leapt up to stir the choir into a climax of big band vocal space music behind the soloists.

Throw away your Led Zeppelin 111 album and wait for the new Jazz Praises album. The message is "Rejoice and be exceeding glad!" — PETE MATTHEWS.

SADLERS WELLS

AN evening at the ballet must be worthwhile if one can hear Stockhausen, Steve Miller and Santana at the same time.

Last week, Sadlers Wells presented the Netherlands Dance Theatre, who performed two new works, "Mutations" and "Twice." The former, a sinuous exposition of the varying stages of man's evolution which culminated in an unclothed pas de deux, was danced to Stockhausen's "Telemusik," an electronic composition full of menacing bleeps and rumbles, and "Mixture," which contained reassuringly conventional sonorities.

"Twice" was a rock 'n' roll ballet, using Herbie Mann's "Memphis Underground," Steve Miller's "Song For Our Ancestors," Santana's "Savor," and James Brown's "Sex Machine." It was brief and a lot of fun, but rarely broke away from the precedence, set in terms of gesture, by West Side Story. — RICHARD WILLIAMS.

Beach Boys: surf wasn't up

THE Beach Boys always seemed the embodiment of Young America: sun, surf, sand and some irresistible songs that projected happiness. Without that natural high-school effervescence, they are nowhere — and their British tour opening at Hammersmith Odeon last Friday damaged their reputation.

First, their sound was atrocious — and they repeatedly ignored pleas from the audience to improve it. The result was that the very core of their act was lost and they were forced to rely on other assets.

Secondly, the chat by Mike Love and Bruce Johnston was slow, boring and lacklustre, so they were leaning even more heavily on a true Beach Boys sound to create a good performance.

Thirdly, the Beach Boys' panache was missing. If you like their music, you are perhaps clutching at memories of open-topped cars and summers and "Wouldn't It Be Nice," "Good Vibrations," "I Can Only Knows," "I Get Around" wafting from the radio.

Well, they sang these and other specialities, but they all came across like clockwork.

There wasn't any spark. Bruce Johnston bubbled as he always does; Al Jardine played guitar with the furrowed-brow concentration of a chess player; Mike Love looked like a principal boy in a panto and clowned about embarrassingly.

The Flame, a South African group who are the Beach Boys' proteges, proved uninspiring and lacked individuality.

If their future shows are not going to reach the standard of previous years, we will all be better off staying at home playing "Pet Sounds."

There is nothing sadder than a diminishing magic. — RAY COLEMAN.