

FOLK MUSIC

Joni Mitchell displays maturity

By PETER GODDARD

In folk and pop music, creativity has become the latest con-game, the newest cant. Record producers rarely offer opportunities to new artists who lack "original material."

Joni Mitchell's folk songs last night at the Riverboat were not only original but distinctive. Their long-breathed melodies, personal imagery and complex guitar accompaniment were a treat to the ear.

In her hands complexity was reduced to simple, deceptively naïve statements. She seemed, like Alice, to have been asking the question, "Who am I, where am I?" then answering with a song. And, as in *Chelsea Morning*, all reality was reduced to a childlike state of an innocence.

But last night she added something new. The experience gained since her pre-

vious Toronto appearances added a more somber and sobering side to Miss Mitchell's singing. Her voice was more darkly colored. Many of the lyrics had become more starkly simple. One basic idea could escalate into a song of explosive proportions.

All of which is to say that her songs and singing displayed a hard-won maturity that made them seem less fragile and more lasting.

This wider range in mood made the older, quieter songs all the more impressive. And the quiescent and introspective Miss Mitchell had greater impact than most folk singers when they're yelling. She seemed to admit a line rather than sing it. She worked these tranquill songs without fuss.

But the importance of her style still lay in its quietness; in its peaceful expansion of microscopically observed de-

tails. In the space of the four-or-so minutes allowed for each song, she sketched in enough material for a short story.

Her music and lyrics showed greater discipline. In one song she sang "tomorrow he will come to me and speak his sorrow constantly" to a pensive, drone-like accompaniment that underlined the song's despondent mood.

Technically she was as secure as ever. But it was in the wide range of emotions that she made the most meaningful contact with the audience. For, despite critics and the jeers of hippydom's avant-garde, Miss Mitchell has retained her highly personal style.

Not a servant to reality, she molded it for her own uses. She didn't make meaningless protests, nor mumble psychedelic nonsense. She just sang to bring happiness.