

Mitchell followers delighted

By MARY JO MEISNER

A brassy, innocent, happy-sad Joni Mitchell brought her songs of love and freedom to Philadelphia's Spectrum last week, leaving the sellout crowd with a feeling of well-being that only she can create.

For the uninitiated, a Joni Mitchell concert is unique. Filling an uninterrupted two hours with a repertoire of 25 songs, she moved effortlessly from blues to boogie and from folk to rock. She played new and old, interspersing cuts from her latest album, "The Hissing of Summer Lawns," with old favorites like "Free Man in Paris."

But the fans crowding the Spectrum Monday night were no novices—these were Joni Mitchell

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troopers. Even before she came on stage, the complimentary matches were lit. They lauded her every move—clapping when she tuned her guitar and took a drag on a cigarette, and roaring when she removed her tight-fitting cap, revealing her straight blonde hair.

Judging from this overwhelming response, Joni Mitchell is riding high after moving into a new stage of her career about two years ago. The sweet love songs are still there, but freedom and individuality now dominate her lyrics.

But, probably the biggest change in Joni Mitchell's style has been the addition of her back-up band, The L. A. Express. The five-member group has facilitated her expansion into previously unexplored territories such as jazz, and has given new flavor to her old songs.

The group, which recently has put out a new album of its own, led off the concert with 45 minutes of instrumentals. Although much of its music follows the same jazz/blues strain, The L.A. Express is a talented and versatile group of musicians. Extra kudos should go to saxophonist David Duwell, who also demonstrated nice work on the clarinet and gave the group its sassy touch.

But as soon as Joni Mitchell hit the stage, The Express blended into the background, providing back-up for about half her numbers and letting the pure, unadulterated Mitchell voice speak for itself.

One of the highlights of the evening was an a cappella rendition of an Irish folk song—gleaned from the days "when I sang in coffeehouses"—that beautifully displayed her resonance and range.

She opened the concert with one of her great love songs, "Help Me", and answered the audience's cries for other "oldies" with such classics as "Big Yellow Taxi" and "Real Good for Free."

However, most of the concert was given over to cuts from "The Hissing of Summer Lawns"—the Joni Mitchell album which departs the most from her traditional style. "In France They Kiss on Main Street" has the imagery she brings to all her songs but the emphasis here is on the swift beat rather than the words.

"Harry's House—Centerpiece," "Don't Interrupt the Sorrow" and "Shades of Scarlett Conquering," all from her new LP, were also tandouts in the night's performance.

"Jungle Line," a song that was little more than the thudding of drums and inaudible lyrics, was the only flaw in an otherwise beautiful concert.

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