

MEMOIR

Mitchell's gift for people who have it all

Morning Glory on the Vine: Early Songs and Drawings

By Joni Mitchell

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WASHINGTON POST

By the end of 1971, Joni Mitchell was riding high. Having released her impeccable, chart-topping album "Blue" in June, the singer-songwriter had already bestowed upon her fans a beautiful, if dolorous, holiday gift. "River," which begins with a languid piano rendition of "Jingle Bells," would go on to become the unlikeliest of Christmas standards. ("Oh, I wish I had a river I could skate away on," Mitchell laments in the endlessly covered breakup ballad.)

Still, Mitchell had the same conundrum that we all have as her big year wound down: what gifts to buy her loved ones.

"All my friends were kind of nouveau riche," Mitchell explains in the foreword of her new book, "Morning Glory on the Vine: Early Songs and Drawings," "so



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Among Joni Mitchell's portraits are Georgia O'Keeffe, David Crosby and James Taylor.

buying Christmas presents was going to be really difficult."

She landed on a solution popular with children everywhere, opting for a decidedly DIY keepsake. With the help of

her manager, Elliot Roberts, and agent, David Geffen, she compiled a collection of lyrics and poems, handwritten in neat cursive, alongside drawings she had somewhat obsessively been making with colored pens. (She once had to be dragged onstage, she recalls, so busy was she sketching the audience at her Central Park show.) She then sent the scrapbook to some of the friends whose portraits appeared in the volume: Georgia O'Keeffe, David Crosby, James Taylor, Graham Nash and Judy Collins, among others.

"People really liked them," Mitchell writes. That may be an understatement. Her engineer, Henry Lewy, prized what was dubbed "The Christmas Book" so highly, it was one of the items he set aside to rescue when a fire threatened his Malibu home.

"Work is meant to be seen, or heard," Mitchell writes. And so, decades after the collection became a memento for a starry set of musicians and artists, a bound volume is available for the rest of us, complete with somewhat less personal portraits. (See: "Fan on the Lawn.")