

Paved Paradise

by Howie Green

EDGE Contributor

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John Kelly, is currently bringing the peerless Joni Mitchell to life in Paved Paradise: The Songs of Joni Mitchell for Theatre Offensive's Out on the Edge Festival in Boston's South End at the Center for the Arts. But don't go expecting to see a clown drag show.



The often imperious-looking Joni is an unlikely subject for this kind of treatment. While Kelly does wear a long blonde wig and a dress, his performance as Joni is affectionate and reverential while being hilarious and musically stunning. The show's humor is not at Joni's expense rather it comes from the between song banter that Kelly has transcribed word-for-word from Mitchell's many live recorded appearances. Although most think of the singer as a serious poet/artist/goddess, she has a killer sense of humor that has always been on display when she's on stage. Her goofy, rambling, stories could easily serve as stand-up comedy routines. Having seen the real

Joni in concert half a dozen times it was startling to hear Kelly recreating some of her bits verbatim. At one point Kelly fumbled one of the stories and the audience, obviously Joni fans, filled in the blanks for him.

Then there is the music. I'm a lifelong Joni fanatic and worshiper. I have all the recordings, know every word and every note and have trekked to the ends of the civilized world tracking down bootleg recordings at any cost. From the opening guitar chords Kelly had me in the palm of his hands. His voice perfectly matches the intonations and range and inflections of Joni's from her early career stratospheric soprano acrobatics of Conversation to the later more conversational tones of Night Ride Home and Slouching Towards Bethlehem. Kelly does 14 Joni songs including Big Yellow Taxi and Circle Game and Blue and recreates each one with all, or most, of Joni's musical accompaniment with only a bass and a keyboard player on stage with him. Kelly's two accompanists are also presented in typically goofball Joni style. Honored to have two such brilliant artists on stage with her Kelly/Joni introduces the bass player as Vincent Van Gogh (he has quite an ear for music - get it?) and the keyboard player is Georgia O'Keefe.

Joni had retired a few years ago after referring to the current state of the music industry as a cesspool. But with the release of her new album Shine On Joni has shown that she is far from done with her musical career. Joni will probably never tour again leaving an entire generation who will never get the chance to see her perform live. However, Kelly's show can continue to mine the rich mother-load of Joni's recordings and with his ability to deliver the level of performances he is displaying on stage now I will keep coming back for more. And ANY fan of Joni's should get a ticket now!

Calderwood Pavilion
Boston Center for the Arts
527 Tremont Street
Boston, South End

Friday Nov. 2, 8 PM
Sat. Nov. 3, 8 PM
Sun. Nov. 4, 3 PM
Tickets \$20 -48
617-933-8600
www.bostontheatrescene.com