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## Joni Mitchell

Frank Jump [New York Times]

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The much awaited piece on Ms. Joni Mitchell by the sapient but often acerbic performance critic, Stephen Holden, was first published Sunday, December 1st in the Arts & Leisure section of the New York Times. The article offers a stunning half-page photo of Joni Mitchell by Heisler. The shot is beautifully back-lit with Ms. Mitchell holding a paper parasol, standing transfixed in a Japanese garden. An additional shot of her taken in concert by David Gahr, circa 1969.

In his article, Holden chronicles Ms. Mitchell's legendary attendance at the final evening of John Kelly's "Paved Paradise-1" at the East Village nightclub Fez earlier this past November. Holden describes Mitchell's experience of seeing Kelly's loving and tender performance. He quotes her saying "I felt like Huck Finn attending his own funeral or Jimmy Stewart in that movie where the angel walks away and she says 'I was braced for a lampooning and I didn't expect to be so touched.'" She said she cried during Kelly's riveting performance. After Kelly finished "Shadows," I remember her jumping to her feet and cheering. It was an incredible moment for all of us. I'm sure it was for everyone else in the audience, all of whom seemed so tuned in and turned on to her being there.

After Kelly's flawless performance, Mitchell and her friend Melanie presented him with a dulcimer backstage. To Kelly's delight, she gave him "A Case of You" before bestowing it upon him. Holden claims Mitchell gave Kelly the dulcimer at her birthday celebration a year later (the dulcimer was actually a gift from Melanie and Joni's art director Robbie Cavolina). Joan and John ate and gabbled with her beau Don Freed and long time friend Chaka Khan. After enjoying Kelly's performance so fully, Don Freed of course he wouldn't pass up the opportunity to spend some quality time with his mentor.

Mitchell is described by Holden as being one of the elder statesmen of rock & roll. Holden quotes Kelly saying Mitchell "is like Schumann, a great art-song writer but working through the lens of popular culture....her songwriting is infinitely more interesting than classical composers I've heard in the past 20 years, aside from Leonard Bernstein." This has been a year full of awards and accolades for Mitchell, but Holden describes Kelly's homage to her to be "probably the most heartfelt." Ms. Mitchell truly seemed to have enjoyed the evening.

Holden goes on further to illustrate the many musical transitions Mitchell made in her illustrious career. I remember when I was in "The Lawns" in 1975 when I was just fifteen. I was breathless after hearing "The Jungle Line" for the first time. I went out and bought a tape of the Burundi drummers. Joan introduced me to many other different styles and nuances in music, as she did many other things. I remember Annie Lennox. Unfortunately the critics (an often rigid and bitter group of wannabes) were not very accepting of her experimental sound. Her airplay because of it. By "Mingus," she was most certainly blacklisted by radio disc-jockeys.

Often taken out of context by interviewers, Mitchell's comments on contemporary artists have recently been hurtful. As Holden published an interview where Mitchell criticized Alanis Morissette's work and she later found out that Morissette cried after reading it. She would rather tell you what I'm listening to than I would disappoint people....I'm listening to Debussy, the Sons of the Pioneers, who she thought some Stravinsky I'd overlooked."

Holden reports that we have several literary venues of Ms. Mitchell's to which we can look forward. One is a volume of her book chronicling her painting accomplishments and an autobiography that will focus more on the synchronistic and mystical aspects of her life. The tabloid gossip about which we all could live without hearing. Mitchell told Holden, "I want to start with a phase of my life that embraces my meeting with Charles Mingus and Georgia O'Keeffe." Holden says Mitchell spoke of seeing herself writing several different phases of her life.

Mitchell recalls the period between "Blue" and "Don Juan's Reckless Daughter"- her so-called "confessional" phase- as being

life. It was, Mitchell coined, her "descent." She felt transparent and vulnerable. She could see right through people as well. self by reading all she could about psychology and spirituality. I imagine her meeting with Charles Mingus, who she once said himself, was a breath of fresh air. It was her collaboration with Mingus and her synchronistic visitation with O'Keeffe that made the psychic stimulation she needed to continue her art without any preoccupation with the expectations from the bloodsucking

She says she prefers the no-nonsense lyrical poetry of Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen to the pretentious and distant "suicidal" Sylvia Plath, to whom which she is often compared. Rather than calling herself confessional, she prefers the term "penitence of her recent lyrics as well, such as in "The Sire of Sorrows: Job's Sad Song" from Turbulent Indigo:

"Was it the sins of my youth? What have I done to you, that you make everything I dread and everything I fear come true?"

Mitchell has recently become very excited by a newly developed MIDI guitar (the Roland VG-8) that allows her to store over 1000 sounds. She is two-thirds done with recording her latest album that features this new guitar. She debuted this computerized guitar at the Jazz Festival.

The conclusion of the interview ends wistfully, but hopeful about being reunited with her only daughter she gave up for adoption. Mitchell explains that her fame has made this search somewhat problematic since there are "a lot of wannabes" out there who if her daughter could meet her real grandparents while they are still alive.

I definitely identify with Mitchell's desire to meet her daughter. One of the most profound experiences of my life was meeting my father when I was twenty-two. He died only six years after I met him, but we had a really great bond and I can honestly say that he was my father. I never laid any guilt on him. In an attempt to show me how accepting he was of me, on our first meeting, he took me to a lounge where we watched a drag performance. He particularly liked this guy who "did" Bette Midler. I'm sure if he were alive today he would have seen John Kelly do Joni Mitchell for Joni Mitchell. I can only hope for Joan that when she finally meets her daughter, it will be a positive experience for both of them as it was for me and my father. Joan, you deserve it. It will happen.

When asked by Holden if she missed those days when she was idolized as "pop's beautiful, truth-telling goddess, the queen who slept through that queendom." When asked if she was even aware of her status then she said, "It's hard to say. It's better than the Rosie O'Donnell show, Rosie asked if she is getting used to all of this adulation and she laughingly replied while sucking on a cigarette, "I'm used to my strokes."

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