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MUSICIAN

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L I V I N G L E G E N D S



STEVIE WONDER

SONNY



ROLLINS

JONI MITCHELL

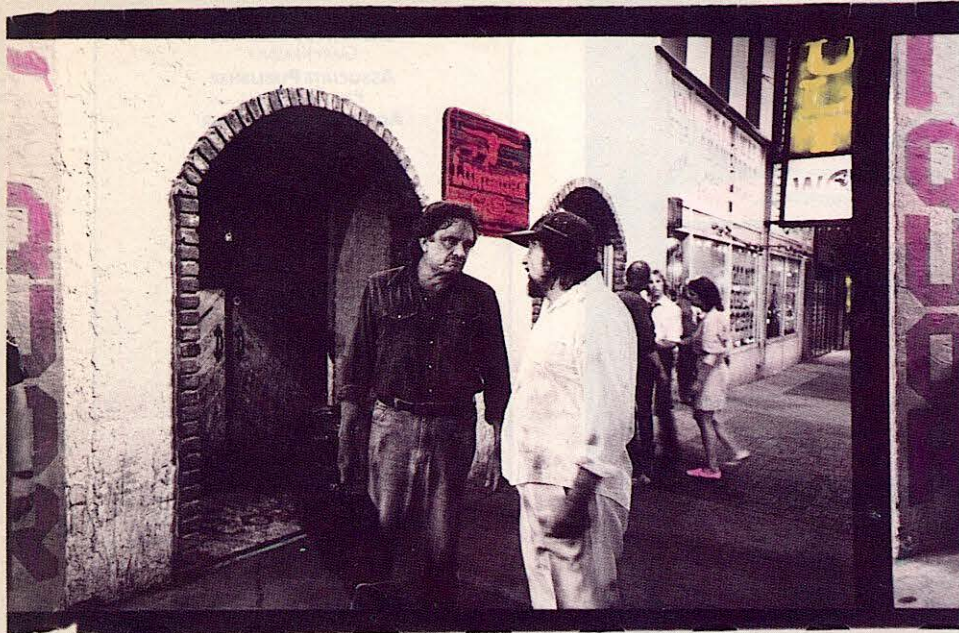


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JOHNNY CASH

From Sun Records to Folsom, from religion to drugs and back, Cash is the greatest living exponent of country, and the most complex.

by Bill Flanagan

96

JONI MITCHELL

The finest of the confessional singer/songwriters, Mitchell rejected pop and found her soul. Now she's found her heart.

by Bill Flanagan

64

SONNY ROLLINS

A quiet giant whose shadow falls across modern jazz, Newk breaks his silence to trace his history, philosophy and musical evolution.

by Chip Stern

82

KEYBOARD KRAZED: A SPECIAL CELEBRATION

STEVIE WONDER

He epitomized the Motown machine and then used his keyboards to lead the revolution against it. But what does Wonder really want?

by Steve Perry

14

JAN HAMMER

Now that he's turned in his "Miami Vice" badge, he's liable to do anything!

by John Diliberto

23

DIGITAL SYNTHESIS '88

New machines that turn numbers into notes, including sampler/synth hybrids and additive synthesizers, plus another look at venerable old FM.

By Alan di Perna and Craig Anderton

30

DAVID SYLVIAN

Beyond Japan, a Brit-synth pioneer makes his own mark in his own time.

By Ted Drozdowski

51

PAT LEONARD

Sex and the single keyboard: studio adventures with Madonna and Bryan Ferry.

By Alan di Perna

56



MASTHEAD	6
LETTERS	8
FACES	10
RECORD REVIEWS	118
ROCK SHORTS	124
CLASSIFIED	128
AD INDEX	130

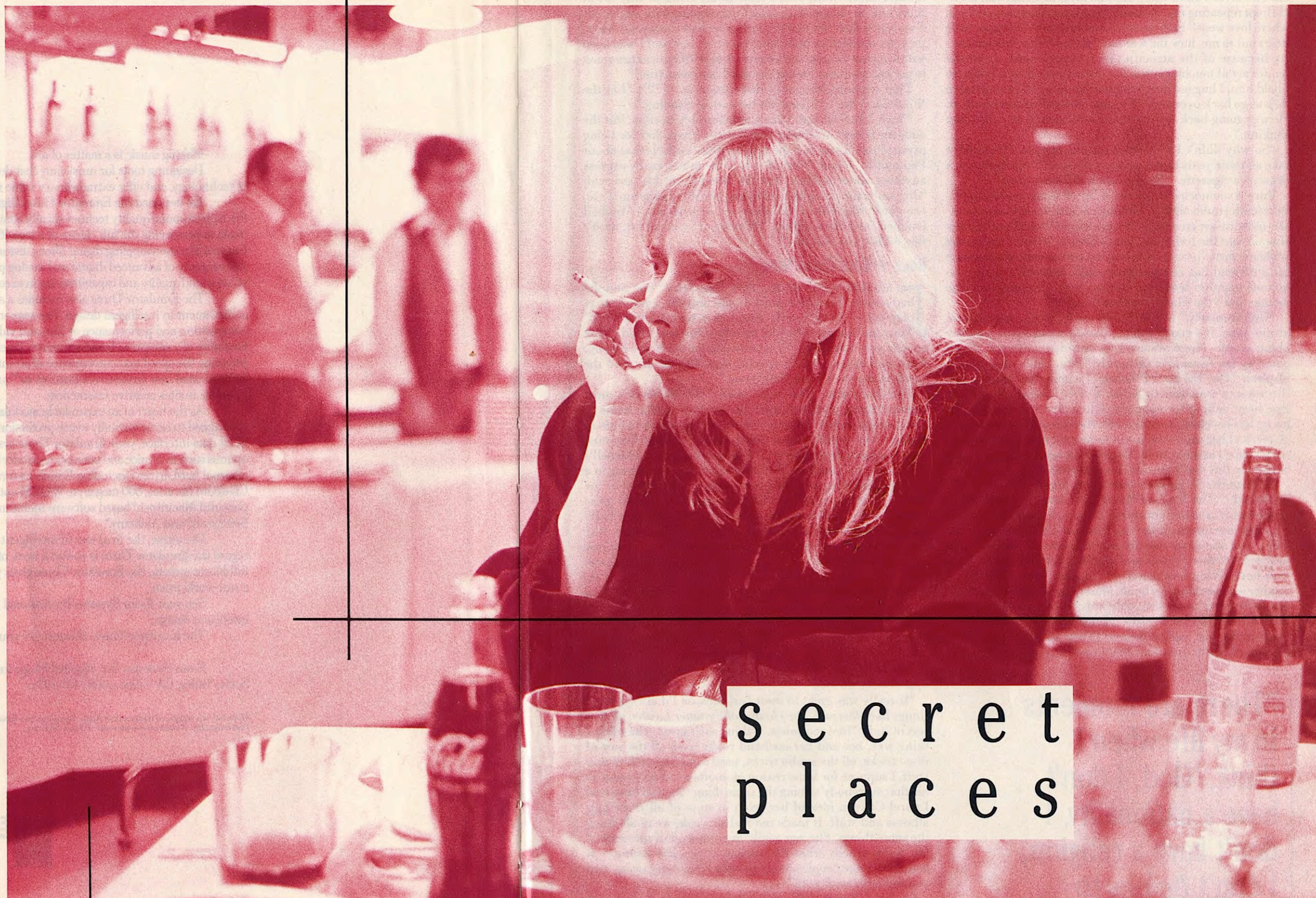
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A BILLBOARD PUBLICATION
MAY 1988 NO. 115

art and intelligence

LARRY KLEIN WOULDN'T TAKE any money for his bass work on Peter Gabriel's album *So*. In that case, Gabriel said, why don't you use my recording studio while you're here? It was a thoughtful offer, as Klein's wife was staying with him in England. Klein's wife is Joni Mitchell. So in early 1986 in the British countryside, Mitchell and Klein set to work on what would emerge, two years and 6000 miles later, as *Chalk Mark in a Rainstorm*. Gabriel's studio is perched on the crest of a valley. On the other side is the Air Force base from which the U.S. launched its attack on Libya. When Mitchell saw it, she was inspired to write a song called "The Beat of Black Wings," about a soldier called Killer Kyle. It was a song she'd been carrying unborn for 20 years.

"I started thinking about the days when I played in North Carolina," Mitchell said. "Which was 1965 to '67, when I played Fort Bragg for gung-ho boys going to Viet Nam. Although the song is not a literal portrait of him, Killer Kyle was a real person. His story was slightly different from the way I've told it in the song, because songs are fiction—they're full of details from all kinds of sources. He'd had some terrible war experiences and he confronted me in my dressing room. I came in and there was this kid, red in the face, angry,



secret
places

by Bill Flanagan

Joni Mitchell Builds Shelter from the Rainstorm

JOEL BERNSTEIN

clenched fists, looking like he wanted to kill me. His opening line, in a Tennessee Williams drawl, was 'You got a lot of nerve, sister, standing up there talkin' about LOVE. There ain't no love! I know there ain't no love, there ain't no love!' He kept repeating that. He said, 'Sit down, I'm gonna tell you where love went!' So I sat down and he poured his poor little heart out to me, how the war had robbed him of his sensitivity because of the atrocities he'd experienced. Even the tender act of touching a woman, he felt, was beyond him. So I held him, I hugged him, I felt bad for him. All he wanted to do was go back over and kill a commie for God and be killed. He was going back for vengeance—as soon as he could stop shaking."

"So why didn't I write that song right then? Why did it take all those years to write part of his song?" Mitchell took a draw on a cigarette. "They go off at different times."

Buried memories triggered a lot of songs on Mitchell's thirteenth studio album. Although *Chalk Mark* is a state-of-the-modern-art recording, images from Mitchell's whole life slipped into the lyrics. In "Beat of Black Wings," the young soldier is bitter because of his being sent to war, and because his girlfriend has aborted their child. Mitchell ties the two actions together with one chilling line: "The old hate the young, that's the whole heartless thing."

"Unfortunately," she said, "it's really true in this culture at this time. It's youth cultish, there's tremendous jealousy about youth. There always is in decadent cultures. We've come so far from love of family." Mitchell's own family inspired "The Tea Leaf Prophecy," a song that sounds like the woman's answer to Killer Kyle's lament. "Tea Leaf Prophecy" tells of a woman who falls in love with a soldier on leave, has his child, and then tells the little girl never to have children of her own—the world is doomed to war. In the song the woman's name is Molly McGee—the name of an old radio character. But that's not who Joni was thinking of.

"My mother's maiden name was Myrtle McKee," she explained. "'The Tea Leaf Prophecy' is based up to a certain point on my parents' courtship. I mean, I use it as a vehicle for other statements at the end, because I would then be the child, and she never exactly said those words to me." Joni laughed. "Although I was such a pain in the butt she might as well have. What happened was, during World War II my mother was working in a bank. Most of the available men had shipped out, so there were only kids, old men and cops left. She and a girlfriend went to this tea room in the first-class hotel in Regina, Saskatchewan. They had high tea there, from the English tradition. At the end the gypsy read her tea

"There are moments in my life when I think, 'God, I don't have a nationality, I don't have a religion, I don't belong to anything.'"

leaves. She said, 'You will be married within the month, you will have a child within the year, and you will die a long and agonizing death.' I didn't put that last one in the song. My mother said, 'Well, that's ridiculous. Look at this town, there's no one to pick from and I'm not going with anybody!' Two weeks later she met my father, he had two weeks' leave, they got married in that short space of time and I was born within a year. So now she's a real scourer! No germs are going to get her, she's not having the third one come true!"

That explains Mitchell's description in 1972's "Let the Wind Carry Me": "Mama she believes in cleaning."

"Yeah," Joni smiled. "She's unbelievably healthy. But the odds on it were so freaky that I don't blame her for being psyched out. I sent her the tape and she said, 'Is that about Pop and I?' I said, 'Part of it is.' She didn't really express anything about it. With 'Let the Wind Carry Me' she said, 'Oh, you're not going to start taking pot shots at me up there, are you?' She didn't like that one very much." Mitchell laughed, and then sighed. "Writers are a cruel lot, aren't they? They just raid life."

ROCK 'N' ROLL CHOIR BOYS

Joni Mitchell called me up," says Tom Petty. "She said she had a song about two street toughs and she wanted me to play one of them. I said, 'Hmm, that sounds interesting.' Then she told me Billy Idol was the other one. I said, 'That sounds very interesting.' There's a trio for ya! It was *casting*. I just had to learn really specific bits. I think she read the words to me—it's a neat little story."

The story was "Dancing Clown," *Chalk Mark*'s most unusual track, recorded after the sessions moved home to Los Angeles in late '86. Mitchell sings the narrator's lines in a song about a bully called Rowdy Yates (Idol) picking on a victim named Jesse (Petty): Although Petty and Mitchell's voices entwine comfortably, Idol's rebel yell is as jarring in a Joni Mitchell song as a thug at a garden party. Which is the idea. "In terms of a Joni Mitchell record, it sounds quite funny," Billy Idol chuckles. "My voice *sounds* like a bully compared to hers! I was in L.A. to do the Grammys a year ago. A day or two later she phoned me up at the hotel and explained the idea and I went straight down and did it. It was wild, really, because no one had ever asked me to do anything! The best thing was, she used some of my backing vocals on there. No one's ever used my backing vocals before, either! I really just sang my bits. I put in a 'Hot damn!' somewhere and then I sort of did my Elvis Presley impersonation over the rest." Mitchell also sampled some of Billy's howls and shouts, and dropped them into the song's fade. No opportunity wasted.

"It really was great to meet her, because I'd always liked things like *Blue* and *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*, all that sort of stuff," Idol continues. "I think she's great. The wildest thing was, her and her husband really used all the sort of disco tricks, all the studio tricks, used sampling and all that stuff. I suppose for some reason or another it didn't occur to me that everybody's doing the same thing. You still have that Laurel Canyon idea of her, even in spite of all those jazz albums and stuff. It made me realize, yeah, we're all doing the same things. She was really in command of the session. She knew exactly what she wanted, it was just a matter of getting it. I like people who know what they want to do, then you can both work at it."

Idol and Petty both admit having to sweat to match Mitchell's precise timing and odd vocal rhythms. "She's a brilliant singer," Petty says. "And a very capable producer. I was impressed by her. She and her husband Larry really



A Mitchell-retouched family portrait.

know their way around the studio. I was having trouble with one bit of phrasing, I kept coming in wrong. She stopped the track and I tried it once and said, 'Is that it?' She said, 'That's it—we got it.' She taped me singing without the backing track and used that."

Idol had a similar experience. "She had to help me to sing it really," he admits. "She has a really particular way of singing things. It was making me laugh to try to do it sometimes. But once we'd done what we set out to do it was really good fun." At that point Idol suggested they get his guitarist, Steve Stevens, in on the action. At one a.m. Stevens was recruited to add guitar to what became an eccentric track even by Joni Mitchell standards.

"There's a very wide range of opinion on that song," says Larry Klein. "A lot of people love it—it's their favorite song on the record—and some people just hate it. I was just with Peter Gabriel. He loves the record, but hates 'Dancing Clown.' The people who can't quite get in on that song just need to think of it as a little play. It's like a short film."

"I'm singing all over the track," Petty says, "but you wouldn't necessarily hear it—a lot of it's harmonies, and through the whole album she's gotten other voices to sound like her own, to blend together. It's a brilliant record."

The most subtle—and perhaps most effective—vocal blending is on "Secret Place," a duet between Mitchell and Gabriel in which it's difficult to tell where her voice fades out and his fades in. The lyric is about someone from New York being swept away by someone from Colorado, and taken to

that person's secret place, a spiritual and sexual metaphor. The music is dreamlike, the gender ambiguity deliberate. "It's a love beginning song," Mitchell says at her manager's Los Angeles office in February. "The song's about the threshold of intimacy. It's a shared thing so I wanted it to be like the Song of Solomon, where you can't tell what gender it is. It's the uniting spirit of two people at the beginning of a relationship."

With "Secret Place" and "Dancing Clown" successfully executed as vocal collaborations, Mitchell stretched her imagination. She was fooling around with an odd, rhythmically staggered reinterpretation of the cowboy song "Cool Water" and thought, "Who'd make a better 'Old Dan' than Willie Nelson?" She called Willie and down he came. Again, Mitchell was drawing on youthful associations.

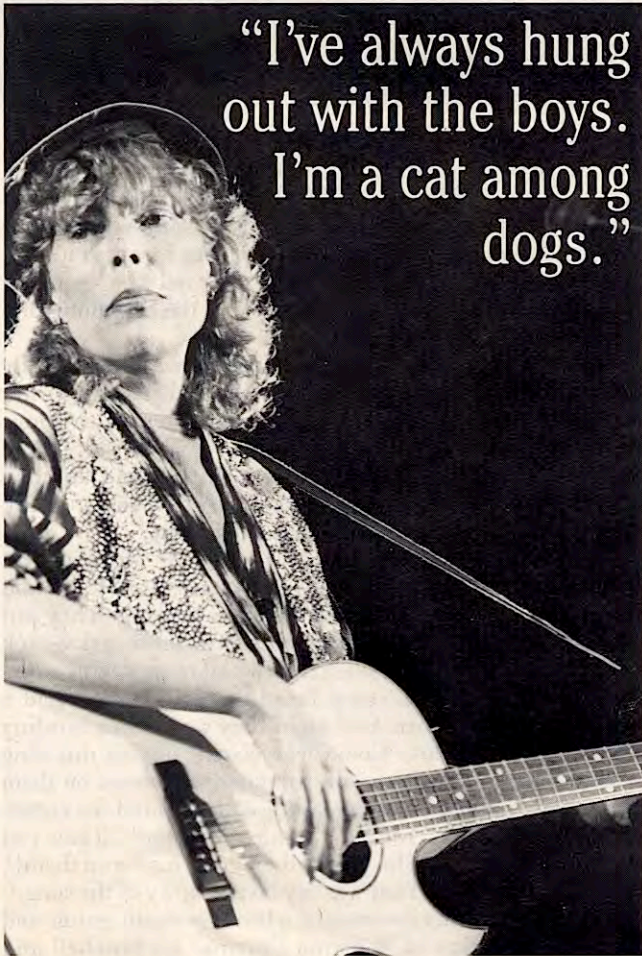
"'Cool Water' was a hit in my childhood," she explains. "My family, the Andersons, lived next door to the Moetts and the Milnes in what was called wartime housing. They put people coming out of the air force into these ticky-tack houses. They were slate-sided, had small rooms, with a tiny front porch. Our back stoop faced the Moetts, who had a penchant for the booze. One night they were really howling out on the back steps. 'Cool Clear Water,' singing this song loud and drunk. My bedroom window faced down on them and all of a sudden I hear Mr. Milne come around the corner saying, 'Cool water? You want some cool water? I'll give you some cool water!' And he turned their garden hose on them!" Mitchell cracks up. "That was my last memory of the song."

The album's other cover song, a lovely acoustic guitar and bass extrapolation of "Corrina Corrina" by Mitchell and

Klein, was cut on quarter-inch tape in the early '80s, when they had just met. It has a romantic resonance as breezy as "Secret Place"'s is profound. So there's logic in Joni's song selection, as well as in her casting of Billy Idol as a bully, Peter Gabriel as an ethereal romantic, Willie Nelson as an old cowboy. Her touchiest inspiration, though, was to ask Don Henley to sing the part of a smooth yuppie picking up an airbrushed young airhead at the shopping mall in "Snakes and Ladders," a bit of type-casting old Mister Lifeinthefastlane might have resented.

"I thought about that," Mitchell admits. "He came in and heard the song and his brow kind of knit up. I said, 'Can you get into this?' He said, 'What are you talking about? This is my life!'"

"See, I had done something with Henley years before. For 'You Dream Flat Tires' on *Wild Things Run Fast*. I wanted a female/male contrast, but because of the register I had Henley sing it in, I didn't get any contrast. We were both singing lower than usual, and you'd be a long way into it before you realized that the voice changed. So I was dissatisfied with it and Lionel Richie was working across the hall, so I put Lionel on it. I forgot to tell Henley! Years went by and when I called him up to do this he said, 'You're not gonna take me off and replace me with a Negro this time, are you?' I said, 'Oh my God, did I ever explain to you what happened there?' And he said, 'No, I don't want to know.' God knows what he was thinking. He was insulted. I said, 'I had you in the wrong register!' This time I paid special attention to that; I knew it was up high enough that he'd get that certain timbre that's distinctively his. I owed him that. And he's perfect for that song."



"I've always hung out with the boys. I'm a cat among dogs."

Mitchell says she's not as tough in the studio as her rep suggests. "I'm not tough enough. In some ways I'm a bit of a free-school type. I'm tough on myself. I don't have to be tough on Henley 'cause he's a self-starter. If anything, with him I have to say, 'You've got it, leave it alone.' He knows right after he sang it if he needs to change it. I'm like that too. Willie doesn't know that. He's more easygoing. 'You like that? Oh, good.' If it was awful and you said you liked it he'd settle for it. He's not a spit polisher by nature. Petty's the same. They just go in and sing, they're not such perfectionists."

The "Barbie doll," the "airbrushed angel" Henley pursues in "Snakes and Ladders" is a stereotype who's appeared before in Joni Mitchell songs. Does Mitchell lack patience with women who overvalue glamor? "Well gee," she says. "I've *been* one of those women. If I'm knocking them I'm knocking myself. People tend to make generalities out of some of my specifics. I feel bad for the airbrushed girl, too. That's what society has done to us. I wept the first time I went to Hugh Hefner's. I went to Hefner's one night with Jack Nicholson and Warren Beatty. The three of us had been out to dinner together. All these girls came up to me, and if their ass was their best feature they stuck it forward. 'Hi!' they said and they stuck their bum out. 'Hi!' they said and they stuck their tits out. I felt so bad for these girls. At a certain point I just decided to sneak away. And I ran out of gas in the driveway! They were running with jerry cans to get me out of there—I couldn't get out fast enough—and I burst into tears."

"The next time I went there I had adapted, but the first time I felt so sorry for women who would live the brief part of their life—'cause old age is going to come on them all too soon and then what are they going to live their life for—for this one aspect of their physical contours. For many women the culture grooms this as all there is. A woman's power is her beauty, or the illusion of it. And that's tragic."

"I'm not a feminist, you know. I'm really not a feminist in any organized or traditional way. I've just always hung out with boys. All my life. I'm a cat among dogs. There are places I can't go with them, they wouldn't want me to go. If it's too raw or something, I can't get in on that. Some women can. Bonnie Raitt gets completely down and it suits her. They'd blush at those things if I were there. I can't go that far."

Some of rock's hip-thrustingest, guitar-poundingest, double-entendingest male sex symbols, from Led Zeppelin to Prince, have swooned before Mitchell's vulnerability. She shrugs it off. "There's not that much difference between men and women. It's not as much as they think, y'know? A lot of it is cultural imposition." No doubt. But rock is a bastion of sexism, and there's something lovely about the notion of those who exploit sexist clichés being filled with awe by a woman whose work has called those clichés into question. Open your copy of *Hammer of the Gods: the Led Zeppelin Saga*. Page 225: "In interviews that year [Plant and Page] spoke incessantly of their deep love for Joni Mitchell and her then-current record *Court and Spark*." Page 246: "Later Jimmy was aglow because he had been introduced to Joni Mitchell at a restaurant called the Greenhouse. It was just small talk, but Jimmy had at last met one of his true idols. Later Robert passed up an opportunity to meet La Mitchell at a party, saying he was too shy to talk to her."

Joni has nothing to say about that, but a few days later I mention it to her husband Larry, and he says, "I can believe that completely. Robert Plant came over to the house one day when we were in Britain to talk about some unfinished songs I had. He was really looking for songs at that time. We were talking about possibly writing together, so I played him some stuff. Then afterward Joni played him two of the first songs

she had written for the record, 'Secret Place' and 'Number One.' She sang them for Robert with just an acoustic guitar. You could have touched him and he would've tipped over. He was *reverent*. After she left the room he said, 'Tell her that a *man* should sing that second song'—'Number One.' He wanted the song! He's a rabid fan of hers."

Not only did he not get that song, but two instrumentals Klein wrote for Plant were hijacked by Mitchell and turned into "Snakes and Ladders" and her lament for native Americans, "Lakota." At the end Plant jokingly said to Mitchell, "Would you please stop nicking my songs?"

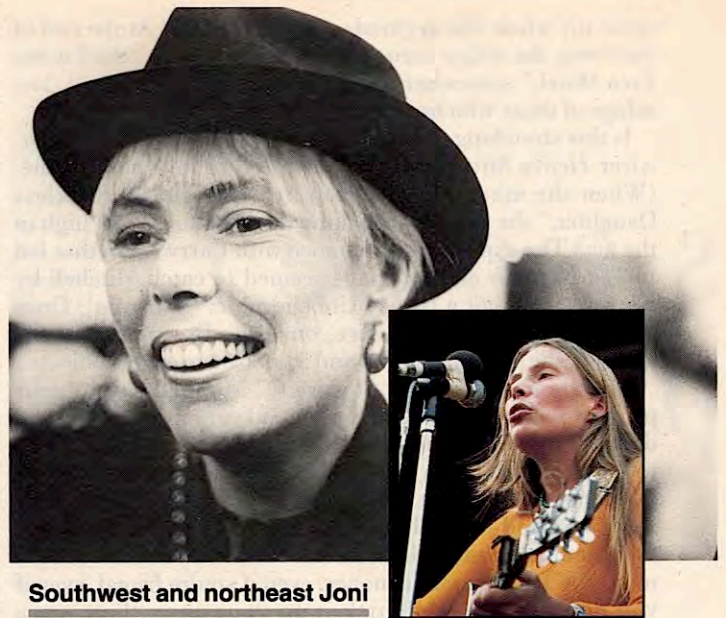
Mitchell doesn't figure there's anything unusual in machismo being intimidated or entranced by expressions of vulnerability. "Men are vulnerable," she says. "*Somebody* had to write about vulnerability. Thinking as a poet, forgetting 'pop,' what was left us? All that was left when I began to write, basically, was the internal landscape. We were coming through a psychological exploratory period. I hadn't read Sylvia Plath, but there were women who had done the pioneering already in poetry circles and taken a lot of flack for it. Pioneers take a lot of flack so that other people can do it. Not unlike Sting going over my turf after I took a lot of flack. It was still pretty shocking, especially in pop circles, to write about such intimate things in the song form. But that was the new territory. It hadn't been done there. Jazz had been done but it hadn't been brought into this tributary. I'm a freshness freak. I'm never bored because I'm always searching for something fresh. It's not that hard to find, but if it's too fresh people don't want to look at it just yet."

I NEVER MET A MAN I TRUSTED... 'TIL I MET YOU

Joni Mitchell and Larry Klein first recorded together on *Wild Things Run Fast*, the 1982 album that celebrated their love and marriage. He became her co-producer with 1985's *Dog Eat Dog*, and continued sharing that job on *Chalk Mark*. Klein concedes that it's sometimes difficult to play with, produce with and sometimes compose with the person with whom you're also sharing bed and table. "It's difficult, and it's also a plus," he says. "If our vision of a song is different, we can go into a phase of semi-war for a little bit. But far more than that, I'd say it's a plus because when we're involved in a record, we're totally immersed in it. We talk about it constantly, about ideas for songs. Most of the time it's really fun. I think it enriches our relationship, for the most part. It's just the odd time here and there when someone steps on the other's toe. Esthetically, we're in agreement most of the time, so that minimizes the conflict."

Mitchell has produced her own records since her second album; it's sometimes hard for her to adjust to having a copilot. "Through the records we've worked on together," Klein says, "I've learned a lot about how to be a good producer. Joan's got very good musical intuition. On some of the previous things I would voice my disapproval of an idea before the idea had time to reach fruition, before it paid off. That really bothered her. She's not used to having someone present any kind of negativity at the birth of an idea. I've learned through the course of these records how to time my input. Because she has very good musical intuition. Many times she'll have the germ of an idea and at the beginning it'll sound like it's going down a wrong path, but it ends up coming around to a place that pays off. She warrants that kind of trust."

"Trust" is a word Mitchell and Klein both use when describing their relationship. Says Mitchell, "I trust my husband. I don't have to worry if he calls me up and says, 'I ran into this woman, I'm taking her out to lunch.' Do you



Southwest and northeast Joni

know what a burden off me that is? This is fantastic! Because I really believe I know and he knows what we've got."

One manifestation of that trust and love is that Mitchell is no longer pouring the state of her romantic life into her song lyrics. "Secret Place" is the only love song on the new album, and it's veiled. *Dog Eat Dog* had only the fey "Lucky Girl." Since *Wild Things*, the open-hearted wedding album, Joni Mitchell has closed that door to her fans.

"Yeah," she nods. "I don't want business on the street regarding us. I'm very happily married. With my early songs there was so much gossip concerning it! I wrote a song for James Taylor ["See You Sometime"] that mentioned his suspenders. And then on his next album he went and wore his bloody suspenders on the cover! Well, then the cat was completely out of the bag! You don't really want these things being focused back. I don't anyway. One of the reasons I never expected to be in show business on a large scale was because I used to think as a kid, 'God, it must be a nightmare for Sandra Dee and Bobby Darin to have all their crap on the street like that. I wouldn't want to be publicized like that if I was going steady with somebody.'"

Klein, though, says he would not mind if Joni used their marriage for raw material: "I look at the songs more like little short stories. I can't imagine anything she would write about that I would feel bothered by. Even if it was something I was touchy about for some reason, I would think of it as *my* problem to work out. I really think all that stuff—when it comes down to 'Who was the person the song was written about?'—is so unimportant. It is just nothing compared to this piece of art that all these people are going to be able to listen to and put *themselves* in."

Mitchell began redefining her view of love years ago. On her first album, in the song "Cactus Tree" she had portrayed herself as a woman who could not settle with one man because she loved so many. That theme was refined but not contradicted by the five or six albums that followed. But 1976's *Hejira*, Mitchell's contemplation of flight and rootlessness, exposed the darker side of her wanderlust. She described the handsome flirt in "Coyote" as trying to put a flame "in this Eskimo," and from there on the ice on Joni's wings was apparent. In "Amelia" the woman who once sang of looking at love and clouds from both sides now sang, "Maybe I've never really loved, I guess that is the truth. I've

spent my whole life in clouds at icy altitudes.” At the end of that song the singer turns off the highway into “the Cactus Tree Motel,” somewhere near the end of Lonely Street, last refuge of those who have loved too little.

Is this stretching particulars into generalities? Maybe not. After *Hejira* Mitchell rarely returned to love as a theme. (When she made an exception, in “Don Juan’s Reckless Daughter,” she was again looking down on love from high in the air.) The explosion of romance with Larry Klein that led to *Wild Things* and marriage seemed to catch Mitchell by surprise (“We got a break! Unbelievable!” she sang). Once she found her heart’s desire, once the fire was lit in the Eskimo, she shut up about it and moved on to other subjects.

“In the natural order of things,” Mitchell says, “your primary instinct as an animal is to find your mate. When you do and settle into your family, then you turn your attentions to the civic. You begin to expand. Love is taken care of. I’m a late bloomer—I didn’t find my mate till I was almost 40.

“It’s a good thing those anxieties are removed because I have new, adult anxieties. I’m surrounded by sharks. I made money. When you make money, even if you’re frugal, even if you don’t smoke it or stick it up your nose, there are a hundred and one ways they can take your marbles. I’m now in two litigations. I swore I’d never get into that. One is that the California government ripped me off. [Mitchell and other musicians were double-taxed retroactively on album profits after political opponents of rock star pal Gov. Jerry Brown took over the state government.] And my *housekeeper* is suing me, which is not uncommon out here. She cat-and-

relationship...I have that still to write, I guess. We’ll see what comes out of it. But basically I think my marriage is private, and it provides a climate for me to think about other things. That’s probably one of the things that’s hardest for people to adjust to—my desire to speak on other topics.”

THE STAR MAKER MACHINERY

Joni Mitchell has a rocky, love-testing relationship with her fans, her critics and some of her musical disciples. Because Mitchell was at one time so lavishly praised, she is now thought of as bigger than life and lambasted when she doesn’t live up to expectations. What a critic does not expect is that Mitchell has never gotten used to the nastiness. She’s not thick-skinned. Her confidence has been bruised by bad reviews, even though those reviews are often recanted two albums later (in time to knock the latest work by comparison...). She mentions on two occasions that the first review of *Chalk Mark*, by *Billboard*’s Steve Gett, was a rave. “It gives me a tailwind,” she smiles. She sent Gett an elaborate floral arrangement to say thank you. She seems so sensitive to bad press, her ego so open, that finally even a critic has to say, “Joni, you shouldn’t take the reviewers so seriously.”

“The art is not affected by critics,” she replies. “It has its own course, and I just follow it. It doesn’t get affected. But *personally* you do get affected, because they have, unfortunately, an effect. Not as much as they would like to think they do. A lot of people being sheep and a lot of critics being lazy, if the first reviews come out with a certain tone, out of sheer laziness, they use that as a point of departure. Now luckily



“Somebody had to write about vulnerability. Thinking as a poet, forgetting pop, what was left us? All that was left was the internal landscape.”

moused me, but I can’t talk about it until after the trial. Anyway it’s a good thing I got love taken care of, ’cause I’ve got a lot of shit to deal with now—the ugly fruit of my labor.

“My first responsibility is to the arts, and they’re a heavy load. So I gave power of attorney, I let my housekeeper take over my house, I let my business people take over my business. I can’t do that anymore.” New concerns are reflected in more adult lyrics, but surely there are interesting things to say about mature love, about marriage.

“People don’t want to hear happy-in-love songs, anyway. People traditionally like their artists to suffer, because most of the world is suffering and artists can shed light on the suffering. I think I’ve written a real spectrum of the variations of love, I don’t know if I have anything more. I certainly am experiencing the ripening of love, but the things that I have to say about it now are pretty radical. I know just from table conversations that I’m in a pretty unique relationship. The making of a song about a good marital

with this one we have one really excellent opening review in *Billboard*. Maybe this bodes well, maybe this is good. ’Cause the first review to come out on *Dog Eat Dog* was in *Newsweek*, and they chose to pit James Taylor and me against each other, him favorably, me not so favorably.”

But the critics aren’t the ones giving Mitchell headaches right now. Joni says she’s having a tough time with her label, Geffen Records, who are worried about recouping the enormous costs of making her albums. Imagine the personal tensions involved in arguing business with a label owned by an old friend, David Geffen (the hero of “Free Man in Paris” no less). At one point the label reportedly attached Mitchell’s publishing royalties. Now the long-suffering label’s come up with another stick—they have told Mitchell that if *Chalk Mark* doesn’t earn back more than it cost they will issue a Joni Mitchell greatest hits album, something Mitchell has always fought against.

“To me the greatest hits is the kiss of death,” Mitchell says.

"It will kill my catalog. All these years I've been trying to keep it at bay. But the coming of it will be inevitable. It's in my contract, they've got me this time. I don't sell a lot of records. You know that, right? And these records are expensive to make." An edge comes into Mitchell's voice. "I think of myself as a contemporary artist. I am! I'm as contemporary as anybody. But the public don't know that and much of the industry doesn't know that. They just don't recognize it. I think some young artists in England recognize it. Some do here, like Prince. I started minimal as you can get; I can't stay there, I have to continue exploration. And that's expensive. If I don't recoup at a certain point their ace in the hole is this greatest hits, which is the kiss of death to me. You watch the stands—they'll stock that and everything else will disappear."

Obviously it's not as easy being Joni Mitchell as we might expect. In spite of being an important figure in American popular music for 20 years, in spite of doing great and varied work and having the affection of thousands of people, even in spite of being rich, famous and happily married, the blues won't leave Joni alone. And if the critics, the public and her record label seem to swing from love to anger with stomach-churning unpredictability, what's really sharper than a

serpent's tooth is the public snottiness of other singer/songwriters who have been influenced by Mitchell.

Regular *Musician* readers may recall the sniping between Mitchell and Rickie Lee Jones in 1985. Finally Mitchell said that she figured Jones must have been subjected to constant Joni comparisons when she was starting, and had developed a psychological need to "kill Mommy." The *kill Mommy* syndrome reappeared in an interview with Suzanne Vega in the February issue of the Irish magazine *Hot Press*. Said Vega, "I think that I have a tendency to write about things that are difficult, y'know? I prefer to write about things that are realistic. Partly, in a way, it's a reaction against people who had come before me like Joni Mitchell or James Taylor, who I felt wrote about things on a more superficial level..." Ouch. Synchronicity can provide instant relief, though: Simultaneous with the *Hot Press* interview was a Sunday *New York Times* piece on '70s rock that noted, "Joni Mitchell, both successfully and unsuccessfully, looked into African music before Paul Simon and to jazz-inflected pop before Sting."

Joni Mitchell's shadow is so long, her effect on a certain school of pop songwriting so great, that she runs into the *kill Mommy* reflex all the time. Like Dylan, McCartney, Spring-

INPUT, OUTPUT, ELECTRICITY

When Joni Mitchell went to England to stay with her husband Larry Klein in early 1986, Klein was producing and playing on Ben Orr's solo debut with one hand and adding bass to Peter Gabriel's *So* with the other. When Gabriel offered Mitchell the use of his studio, Klein found himself embarked on a third major project. "I don't think I've ever worked so hard in my life," Klein laughs. "I was falling apart at the end."

At first the Kleins had to get by with loaned equipment. "I borrowed Ben Orr's Stratocaster on 'Number One,'" Joni recalls. She also made use of Gabriel's old Fender Jaguar. "Whenever the acoustic comes up it's a Martin D28," Joni explains. "There's 20 Martins playing the same part on 'Secret Place.' We used up a whole roll to get that fat sound. I've stacked four acoustics before, but with this 48-track potential I wanted to stack until when I clicked one out, I couldn't hear it. You could still hear it fall out between 19 and 20, but I said, 'That's enough.'"

"Cool Water" is electrics stacked. 'Number One' is a mix of one electric and one acoustic. I use an Ibanez George Benson model f-hole electric guitar. Onstage I have five of those set up in different tunings." In the studio Mitchell either plugged into the board or played through a Roland JC120 Jazz Chorus amp. Guitarist Michael Landau played Strats, through MESA/Boogie and Marshall amps.

For bass, Larry Klein says, "I played a Yamaha. There's two basses I use all the time now, both Yamaha five-strings they were nice enough to make up for me the way I wanted. One's fretless, one's fretted. They're the BB5000 model, but kind of customized. I use an AB power amp with the Yamaha PB1 preamp. I use Energy bass cabinets; they just have one 12-inch speaker, and I used a D.I. that I really like called a Simon Systems D.I. And I use an effects switching system built by Bob Bradshaw."

And what about those eccentric rhythms? "A lot of the drum sounds were done with a Fairlight Series III," Larry says. "We used it for a lot of different stuff including all the drum sequencing on 'Snakes and Ladders.' The conga part on 'Cool Water' is sampled from a little Roland TR-808 drum machine and then played on the Fairlight. We did a lot of sampling from the early Roland drum machines, because the sounds on them are really small and warm compared to the new stuff."

Geez, Larry, a nice way to make us feel really old is to wax nostalgic for the great warm sound of those old *drum machines*. Klein laughs. "It sounds funny, doesn't it? I even think that way about

the Series II Fairlight! When it came time to get the Series III you could do a deal trading them in, but I thought, 'Gee, the Series II really does have a sound to it.' Some of the airier sounds that you hear and there on the album are the Series II Fairlight."

Mitchell warns that there's no way to list all the keyboards on *Chalk Mark* without publishing a *Musician Special Edition*. So let's just look at the main 88s: "The piano on 'Beat of Black Wings' is Peter Gabriel's beautiful Yamaha CP80 electric," Joni says. "Because of that we used Yamaha electric on several things." "Joan and I played all the keyboards," Larry explains. "I really liked the PPG Wave 2.3. I also used this old—the first synthesizer that Yamaha brought out—it's called the CS80. That's on 'Beat of Black Wings' and 'Cool Water.' We used an old Prophet 5, a Roland Jupiter 6, the DX7 with the TX rack which is like eight DX7s. A few bits with the new Roland D-50s, and some stuff with the Roland JX10."

The track called "The Reoccurring Dream" is punctuated with voices Joni lifted from TV commercials ("Radiant!" "Glamor before your very eyes!" "Hollywood's greatest legends!") and dropped into the Fairlight. "We had racks of keyboards in there," Joni recalls. "Sometimes I'd say, 'Oh, that's a good sound! I'll take that!' The intro on 'Cool Water' has a sound that Klein distilled on some ax; he made it by hand as an exercise. I call it 'Presbyterian in Peru.' It's one of those sounds that's fantastic through the whole range of the keyboard. Up in the right hand, up high, it sounded like South American flutes, and below middle C it sounded like Gregorian voices. It made you want to play churchy chords. Even if you played weird chords with a lot of seconds and funny harmony, it still sounded like church music."

So how did Larry Klein create the P.I.P.? "There's a sound I had used on the Oberheim Xpander. As a programming exercise one day I sat down and tried to get the same sound using the DX7. I ended up with the 'Presbyterian in Peru.' It didn't end up like the sound I was going after, it took a couple of left turns. We ended up using it with a few modules of the TX rack. The *pulsing* in the sound is actually, in my exercise, what I couldn't get out—but it's what made it work really well for that part."

As we talk, electricians are wiring up a recording studio in what was a junk room in Mitchell and Klein's California home. Then Klein will move his current production sessions, for a British group called the Dare, into the house to finish an album they started in England. And from now on, he's going to try to do one thing at a time.

steen and other pop icons, Mitchell has influenced a whole school of younger songwriters—who predictably pass from a period of childish imitation into a period of adolescent rejection. In particular, she seems hurt that Sting has been less vocal about her influence on his work in interviews than he has been in private. Larry Klein hopes she will agree to play at least a few concerts (she has not done a proper tour since 1979), perhaps with just him on bass and *Chalk Mark* drummer Manu Katche. But Mitchell's confidence seems to have been shaken by the indifferent reaction she got from some of the huge crowd at the Giants Stadium Amnesty International extravaganza in 1986. She went on, unrehearsed, as a last-minute substitute for Pete Townshend and faced a restless crowd who'd just tolerated six hours of support acts and were impatient to see U2 and the Police. A resurrected Elvis would have had trouble commanding that spot. But Mitchell took the crowd's disinterest to heart. It seems as if Joni Mitchell simply does not know how much respect and affection the public has for her. Without touring, her only barometers are record company audits and magazine reviews. Neither measures the importance of her music to the people who do listen.

"At a certain point," she says, "no matter what you do,



people just say, 'Oh yeah—her.' You've just been around too long. There's nothing you can do about that. You can't change into another being and get a fresh start. So that you must endure; you're dragging your past. People were annoyed with the kind of British sound of *Dog Eat Dog*. I like the mixes, I was crazy about the mixes when we did them, but I think we did make one mistake; my vocals have to be up high. It seems to really irritate people if they can't hear the words. We mixed the voice hotter on this one. One thing I must give my public," Joni laughs, "is the clarity of the lyric."

SCALES TO FEATHERS, YOU AND I

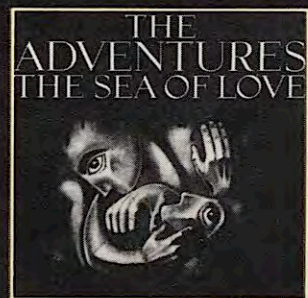
If you want a metaphysical symbol for Joni Mitchell's work (and who doesn't?) think of an eagle and a serpent, the bird representing distance, flight and perspective, the snake representing earthiness, funkiness. Snakes show up in Mitchell's work even more than flying, which is to say—all the time (Joni: "I've got snakes in my subconscious you wouldn't believe!"). "Don Juan's Reckless Daughter" found the singer in an airplane, looking down on a slowly crawling train, and juxtaposing eagles and snakes, higher nature and lower, from that contrast. It's a good metaphor for the artist's dilemma—altitude gives her clear perspective, but she can't

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get down on the ground and experience what she's observing. "Okay," Mitchell says carefully, "now we get to philosophy, to an idea I've been playing with for some years. You'll find it in some Indian teachings as the medicine wheel, Carl Jung calls it something else, you'll find it in the I Ching as the north/south/east/west aspects, the vantage points. There are four primary ways of viewing: intellect to the north; emotion, heart and feeling south; clarity to the east; sensation, tactile intelligence to the west. If I'm in my north, intellectual mode on a night out? Very bad. I'll go to hear a band and apply all of my standards to it and won't be able to enjoy it at all. But there is another mode I can be in which is not unlike a small naive prairie girl. When I go into Joni-from-Saskatoon mode I can have fun. I'm operating basically out of southwest. If I run into intellectuals at that moment they'll be very disappointed in me. But I'll be truly capable of *enjoying*. I don't really like my intellect. It's not the most fun place to go. It's a great tool and you have to go there to write. Sometimes things just pour out in a sensual way, and I think some of your best writing does bypass the intellect, but you have to go in there and prime the pump, and certainly you have to use it to double-check things, to criticize your own work. And then you have to be able to switch out.

"I produce myself. I had to learn this mobility of perspective. You almost get the bends. I have to go out and sing, for which I have to go southwest; if I don't I get a chilly tone. Then I have to come in and go back into my head and adjudicate that performance. Then I have to switch back in to open up my heart and my senses, because it's very sensual to go singing, scalloping along a line—that's west. This is my

main life's work, the ability to float, to be able to analyze the appropriate place to be in at a given moment and to be able to get there quickly. The hardest thing is to get to the opposite.

"Applied to the arts, this concept is a valuable tool. A work of art should have something for the intellect; should certainly contain something for feeling people; it should contain some kind of brief clear insight—a turn of phrase so crunchy that a Clarity Primary listening will get something from it; and sensation will be either the elasticity of the groove, or a certain attention to sensual detail in the lyric—like, 'He picks up my scent on his fingers' from 'Coyote.' That's a west observation. West would appreciate that."

ALL GOOD DREAMERS PASS THIS WAY

After leaving Joni Mitchell I visited the Hollywood recording studio where producer Peter Anderson was recording Michelle Shocked, the talented, Texas-bred singer/songwriter. When I mentioned Mitchell, Anderson said, "Oh, I used to live down the street from Joni Mitchell in Detroit in the late '60s. I used to see her all the time. She and her husband Chuck were part of the local folk scene. When Tom Rush came to town he'd invite Joni up onstage to sing with him. Everybody'd say, 'Wow, Joni knows Tom Rush!'" I thought of "The last time I saw Richard was Detroit in '68," the first line of Mitchell's brilliant 1971 epitaph for her first marriage. It made me wonder about Chuck Mitchell, the mysterious musician husband who was portrayed in that song and in "I Had a King" as a guy whose light went out early. "Joni was always really good," Anderson said. "But

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you know, Chuck was good, too.”

When I got back to New York Larry Klein called and said that he probably didn't have to say this, but he hoped *Musician* wouldn't make it sound like he, the husband, was the musical director and Joni, the wife, was somehow subordinate in the studio. I said, geez, no—Joni Mitchell has written, played and produced great albums for years; only a sexist idiot would assume she didn't know her way around a mixing board, fretboard or Fairlight. Larry laughed and said, yeah, that's right, but there are still people around who assume that *he* takes all the technical leads and she follows. I hope Larry won't mind my mentioning this; I do because it struck me as evidence of how generous and secure he must be. Many musicians want to grab all the credit they can, if only by implication and inference. And many men with wives who are more wealthy, more famous or more advanced in their shared profession get downright testy. So when Klein phoned to make sure we didn't give him too much credit, I thought that this was a great guy—a musician whose ego didn't need boosting and a husband who truly enjoyed his wife's success.

After we hung up I looked at the paper and guess who was playing at the Speakeasy, a bar down the street from my apartment? The mysterious Chuck Mitchell. Synchronicity for sure. I called the club and they said the first show was on now, the second show would start after 11. When I walked in at 11:15 the cafe's lights were going off. It was snowing and nobody had showed up. The second set was cancelled. Chuck Mitchell, a handsome man with gray in his hair, was putting on his coat and chatting with a very serious woman who

might have been a new fan or an old friend or his wife. And I thought, the guy's having a slow night, he's talking to this woman, the last thing he wants right now is for a writer who didn't even hear his music to stick a tape recorder in his face and ask about his famous ex-wife. So I went back outside. He followed a minute later, carrying his guitars across MacDougal Street. (We were at the corner of MacDougal and Bleecker, folkie heaven and site of two Joni Mitchell songs, "Tin Angel" and "Song for Sharon.") For the second time I stopped myself from speaking. After all, he was just one more working musician, slogging around playing gigs in bad places 20 years down the line. If he's still at it after all this time he can't be the cynic those old songs painted. He must have something going for him. It's just his misfortune that he was briefly married—and gave his name—to a woman who was the best.

He's just one more pop poet laboring in the same shadow as Suzanne Vega, Rickie Lee Jones, Sting and a thousand other talented singer/songwriters: He may be real good, but he's not Joni Mitchell.

Then I thought of what Mitchell said in California, as I was getting up to go. "Without credentials nobody takes you seriously. Anywhere. In my first marriage my first husband was well educated, he had degrees in literature. I'd never read anything. I used to do my book reports in high school from *Classic Comics* and *Readers' Digest* condensed books. I was very much an anti-intellectual. I was a doer and an experimenter. I was not embarrassed by things unhip. I used to go to polka dances. I absorbed a lot of my local culture. I was regional, I didn't belong to my high school. I didn't belong to

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my town. I didn't develop the chauvinism on a small scale that gives you limitations. There are moments in my life—but they are merely moments, down moments—when I think, 'God, I don't have a nationality, I don't have a religion, I don't *belong* to anything.' There are moments when I crave to belong to something. But on the other hand, there's a great freedom with not belonging to anything, there's an open-mindedness with not belonging to anything. Sharon Bell, in 'Song for Sharon,' was the singer. I was going to grow up and marry a farmer, she was going to grow up and be a singer. She married a farmer. That song has a little bit of nostalgia. Sometimes I think I'd be better suited to living on a farm..."

She put out her cigarette, stood up, and gathered her things to go meet the business, art and publicity people who were waiting for their conferences with her. Then, unexpectedly, she said, "I have no regrets. I've had a really peculiar life. I've had a very hard life and a very interesting life. My luck, my karma, or whatever you want to call it, moves in circles. I don't get burglarized once, I get a *rash* of burglaries all at once and they all have variations on them. It's almost as if, if you believe in external powers and the preprogramming of a life, I would not just be given the opportunity to experience *one* aspect of burglary, but many." She laughed. "After the last album we had a rash of car accidents. Your

odds start getting funny. The odds in my life are very funny. I have a lot of synchronicity, more than the average person. Things connect up exquisitely good and exquisitely bad. I have a certain amount of clairvoyance. According to Carl Jung the subconscious knows no concept of past/present/future; that's a conscious idea. As a poet you tap into your subconscious. I'm in touch with my subconscious a great deal in my dreaming and so on. So let's say I spaced out all through the school system. According to a hypnotist I kept the gap open to my subconscious, like a child. Usually there's a sealing-over in adults, because daydreaming is not encouraged. Well, I did it anyway. So maybe because of those things...who's to explain why?

"My father says, 'Well, you've had many lifetimes in one.' Well, I have. I've lived in tiny hamlets, I was raised in Saskatchewan, which was like a third-world country; our water was delivered in barrels drawn by horses, Indians came into town. I lived with one foot in the pioneering experience, all the way up to New York. Because of my work I was made wealthy, but I am not a natural wealthy type. I don't make my friends in wealthy circles, I don't seek society, although I find it fascinating to visit. I now have to contend with what it means to be wealthy. In the greedy '80s that means litigation. I have a lot of people trying to take my money. Now I have to grow teeth and protect it. I have to grow a kind of wildness that I don't really want, because I don't want to endanger my innocence. My innocence is regenerative in certain ways. By that I mean joy still comes to me, which I think is the main aspect of innocence. I think as a writer you want to hang onto that." ❏

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LEGENDS: JONI

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK *MUSICIAN* and Bill Flanagan for the excellent article on the legendary Joni Mitchell (May '88). I have read entirely too many articles which unjustly and insensitively accused her of arrogance, self-righteousness and several other cruel things. Mr. Flanagan's article explored a very real, serious, sensitive and beautiful artist.

Shannon Pipkin
Tehachapi, CA

I'VE LONG WONDERED WHY JONI Mitchell is not much more acknowledged for her unparalleled innovations and creations, until I recently realized—with the sale of Van Gogh's paintings—that the world's greatest geniuses are often not recognized until long dead. I just hope that volume-crazed ingrates don't drive her to cut off an ear (unless it belongs to that bastard who hit her guitar with a water balloon during the Conspiracy of Hope concert!).

Jon Eric
Mendocino, CA

I HAVE A BONE TO PICK WITH Suzanne Vega, who calls Joni's writing "superficial." It's fairly easy to take potshots at someone whose passionate integrity lives to break boundaries and hurdle into the open, especially if it's done with a sensitive, humanistic vision. The risks Joni's taken have helped unlock the doors for others to take their own risks. That is what inspiration is really about, a torch to be passed on.

S.E. Mead
Albany, NY

THANK YOU, *MUSICIAN*, FOR an article on Joni Mitchell that didn't contain the words "difficult" and "perplexing." The press, as Ms. Mitchell pointed out, are mostly sheep, lazily rewriting the "eccentric Joni leaves pop mainstream behind" article every few years when a new album arrives.

Mitchell's "difficult" and "perplexing" period paved the way for much of what's fresh and exciting in popular music today, and it's past time she got some credit for it. But that period is over. *Chalk Mark in a Rainstorm* and *Dog Eat Dog* would be right at home with albums like Peter Gabriel's *So* and Talking Heads' *Naked* on the artier end of MTV/FM radio playlists. If David Geffen can't sell this music to the masses, the problem is his marketing department, not the artist.

Michael Logan
Los Angeles, CA

I SYMPATHIZE WITH JONI Mitchell's apprehension about a greatest hits album. It might comfort her to know that this ardent fan wouldn't buy it; as a musical maverick, her lesser known works are often more captivating than the "hits." Besides, so much of her accessible music continues to go entirely ignored on the radio. How many songs actually got airplay aside from one or two from *Court and Spark*, and another from *For the Roses*? I'd be sur-

prised if Geffen Records could come up with enough hits in the strict sales or airplay sense to fill an LP. Perhaps another song dedicated to David Geffen would keep the business wolves at bay. What I'd be interested in seeing instead of a greatest hits album is a complete songbook that contains Mitchell's quirky guitar tunings. Now that could sell!

Robert Silva
Woodside, CA

Update: Joni says things are now fine between Geffen Records and her, and they are not threatening to release a "greatest hits" album against her wishes. Geffen says they never were and everybody feels bad. Also, the reason Joni's ex-husband Chuck Mitchell didn't seem much like the loser she portrayed in "The Last Time I Saw Richard" was because that song was not about Chuck. It was about a '60s New York folkie. (Try to guess who...) - Ed.

LEGENDS: JOHNNY

THANK YOU FOR A FANTASTIC article/interview with Johnny Cash (May '88). I have never cut an article out of a magazine before, but I did this one, and it's now in my "treasured" file.

David McLachlan
Toronto, Canada

LONG MINIMIZED AND MUCH misunderstood, Johnny Cash is still hanging heavy on the set with the *real* cats.

Jim Dickinson
Hernando, MS

MY HEART'S IN ROCK 'N' ROLL, but from now on I'll always love and respect the Man in Black. Long live Johnny Cash!

Nick Fannell
Roselle Park, NJ

HAMMER HEADS

THAT JAN HAMMER ARTICLE (May '88) was well-written and informative. (Thanx for acknowledging that Jan did the *My Secret Admirer* sound-

track—but was there an LP with it?) One mistake: Jan toured Japan with Jeff Beck in 1986, not '87. I have the neat tour program and the dates are June 1-11. The tour was broadcast on TV there; I managed to get a tape and have had it since May of 1987.

David Terralavoro
Poughkeepsie, NY

IN THE MAY ISSUE OF *MUSICIAN* magazine there is a mention of my name in connection with Jan Hammer and "Miami Vice." Aside from my name being misspelled, I was struck by the wording in the paragraph using my name. Although it is true that the transition of composers from Jan to myself was to be as seamless as possible, I was selected on the integrity of my own work; and although I did "borrow" some of the "electronic colors" integral to the "Vice sound," I was totally on my own in the compositional process. I guess what I am trying to relate is that I felt my name was used in such a way as to sound like a Jan Hammer clone, which I am not. I am in awe of Jan's music but I brought new blood to "Miami Vice."

John Petersen
New York, NY

SYLVIAN'S SECRETS

I COULD KISS TED DROZDOWSKI for writing that great article on David Sylvian (May '88). I think it's great *Musician* pays attention to the underground and acknowledges a brilliant artist like Sylvian. That article was enough to make me renew my subscription.

John Novella
Granada Hills, CA

I WAS HAPPY TO SEE AN ARTICLE about David Sylvian, but your researchers didn't dig very deep. *Secrets of the Beehive* isn't his third album, it's his fourth. You forgot the first instrumental album, *Alchemy: An Index of Possibilities*.

Nils Montag
Lake Forest, IL

Please send letters to: *Musician*, 1515 Broadway, 39th floor, New York, NY 10036.