

Joni Mitchell

The folksinger unwinds and lets loose a laugh

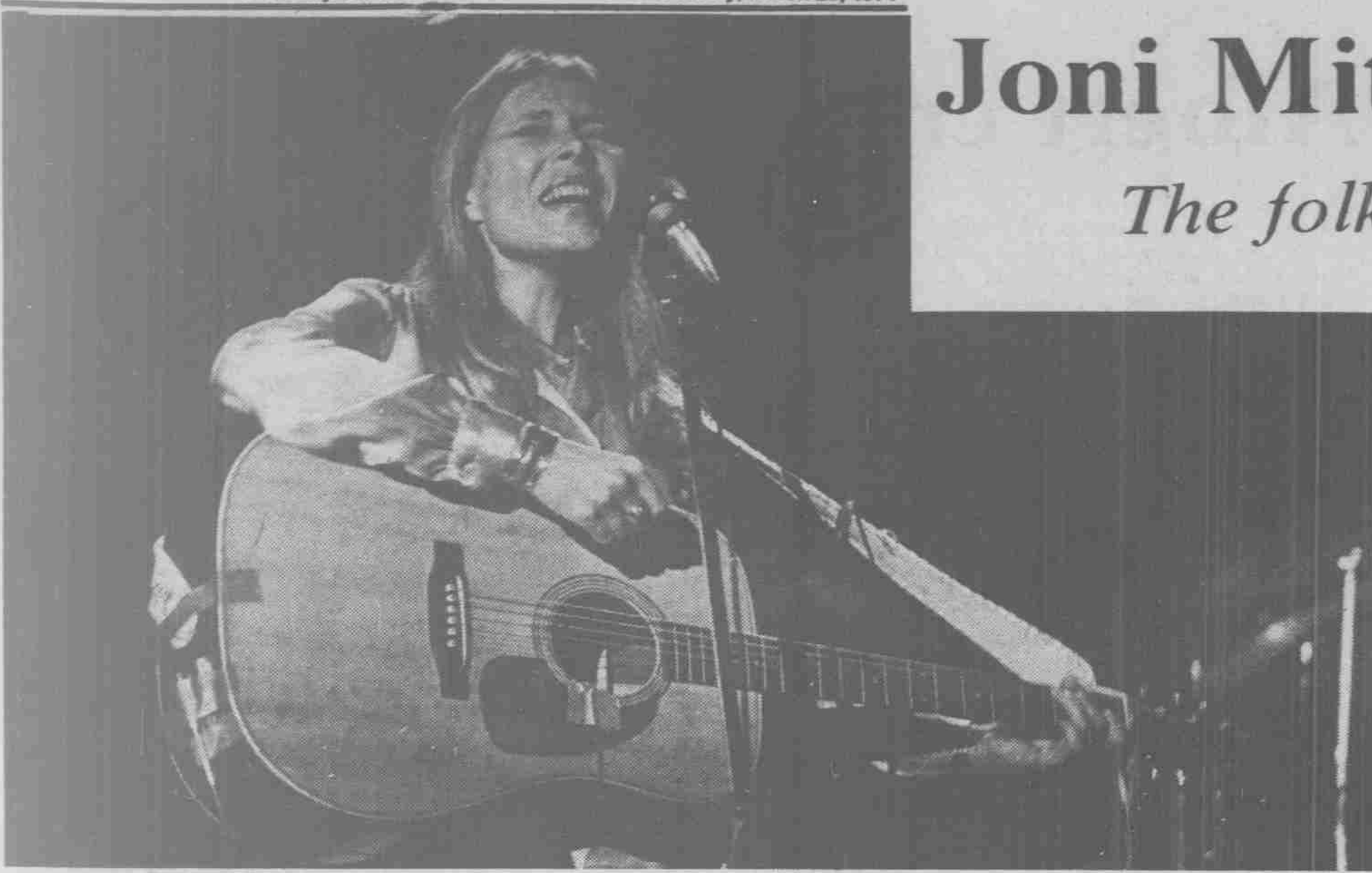


Photo by Owen Gray

by Alan Bisbort
Music Critic

What did it mean? Joni Mitchell, this hemisphere's answer to Nico (woman of melancholy), had broken up in concert. Broken up laughing. I saw it, I swear. I was on the second row watching while battling bizarre camera clickers and jaded stonies (people getting stoned to listen to Joni Mitchell?). This would be the Joni Mitchell concert Sunday night in Duke's packed Cameron Indoor Stadium, right? (No, man. You were so stoned that you were watching the ACC track finals and thought it was a concert.)

Earlier in the evening, a girl with a very pained expression had said, "Why doesn't she smile, she looks so sad?" (She said it like Joni was her big sis). That girl got more than she bargained for. In the course of the evening, Joni unwound, let loose and showed herself with a sense of humor. She moved. She smiled. And hey, she even laughed.

It took awhile, though. Tom Scott's L.A. Express, her back-up band for most of the night, opened the show alone. Looking like out of the same hair spray-club circuit mold, they all got their solos and went home happy. Tom Scott played everything that had a mouthpiece and then some (very versatile, in other words). Roger Kellaway played electric keyboards,

Robin Ford (ex- of Jimmy Witherspoon's band) played electric guitar, Max Bennett (ex- of Zappa's Hot Rats band) played bass and John Guerin played drums. A tight outfit indeed.

When Joni Mitchell walked on to too-loud-to-be-customary applause, there were roses waiting for her, one on her grand piano and twenty more in a huge vase behind her. She didn't appear to notice. She was delicately and beautifully unemotional for the opening half. To say she appeared melancholy or near breakdown would be striving for manufactured drama (making heroes live out OUR fantasies). Who can ever say what motivates those on stage and what brings out great performances? Crowd expectation, maybe? Thousands of words are wasted on such matters daily. Sports heroes, political figures, musical artists. Wasted words.

Joni Mitchell was a magnetic performer. Eyes stayed focused on her. From when she opened with *This Flight Tonight* until she closed with the encore *Twisted*, the crowd appreciated every gesture, no matter how far she ranged from the album versions of her songs.

The first half of the concert was haunting. Backed by the L.A. Express, she performed songs mostly from her post *Blue* period. She said very little to anybody (including the band), never breaking into anything resembling confidence or happiness. At times, she would open up and let pure uncensored emotional sound flow. It sounded like beautifully controlled wailing from the depths of despair. She was detached, like a quiet stranger. Just like our fantasies wanted it, right? (A little touch of Norma Jean in the night.)

But she must have had a talk with her coach at halftime, because after

intermissions she came out alone, sizing up the crowd by herself. That's when she smiled.

It seems that something in her song *Big Yellow Taxi* reminded her of a recent event in her life which she retold to the audience. In one swoop, she went from Guru Maharaj Ji ("wish him a lifetime supply of Cadillacs") to Eskimo women with cat-eye glasses doing frug-like dances in the village square.

From that point on, she was in command of how she would attack her songs — she was determined to have a good time.

Although some avid fans might have objected to the "desecration" of her career's earlier works with band backing (*Clouds*, for one) and her nonchalance with serious songs (like when she broke up laughing several times during *The Last Time I Saw Richard*, they can never say that she wasn't in control. It wasn't a manipulation; it was more like taking things as they came. With a performer like her, who does relatively few concert tours, it is almost accepted that people are going to have their expectations raised above human capability.

Still, I am reminded of the girl sitting behind me. In the frenzy of the encore, she had a near religious conversion, speaking in tongues and everything.

So, what did the laughing mean? It meant that all singer-performer-poets are ultimately human and subject to all the fragility and capacity for humor that comes with humanity. You hear her perform *The Same Situation* and *People's Parties* and think that any minute she will break down. Then, you hear her do *Twisted* or *Raised on Robbery* and wonder if she's not more in control of things than she thinks. There are no happy forever after endings. Some moments are better than others.

Sunday night in Cameron Stadium was one of those moments.

Rezzuto directs drama

by Barbara Holtzman
Asst. Feature Editor

Reading Shakespeare in the classroom can be boring? Tommy Rezzuto would probably agree.

Rezzuto, director of the Playmakers' production of *The Tempest*, says, "I don't believe in people sitting for two to three hours being bored just because it is Shakespeare. You have to present a Shakespeare that people will enjoy."

Rezzuto is presenting the full version of *The Tempest*, but he has cut some of the very

obscure Elizabethan passages that tend to be confusing.

"The basic goal of theatre is to communicate, and that communication should be enjoyed," Rezzuto says. "You have to make things clear."

Rezzuto, scenic designer for the Playmakers and a professor in the drama department for 15 years, has directed other Shakespearean plays at Carolina, such as *Hamlet*, *Comedy of Errors* and *Much Ado About Nothing*.

"Shakespeare has all the elements of theatre," Rezzuto says. "There is no better training for drama majors than doing a

Shakespearean play because they confront every single problem that they will run into doing theatre work."

Rezzuto is enthusiastic about directing *The Tempest* because it is highly theatrical and it has some of the best poetry and the most interesting characters.

But Rezzuto is also excited about the play because he is also presenting it to school groups that come to visit the planetarium, something he has wanted to do for years.

Rezzuto emphasizes that he is not doing *The Tempest* as a children's production, but the play does have a lot of elements, such as the monsters and magic, that school groups can appreciate.

The special performances of *The Tempest* will be abridged, but only the longer poetry passages will be eliminated and the essence of the play will be retained.

This production of *The Tempest* is also special, says Rezzuto, because it has an all-student cast, whereas many Playmaker productions have townspeople as actors.

In addition, the set, costumes and lighting were designed by students, and one student, Nancy Boykin, wrote some music for the production.

The Tempest will be presented at 8 p.m. today through Sunday, March 31 in Playmakers Theatre with a 2:30 matinee on Sunday.

Reserve seat tickets, \$2.50, are available at 102 Graham Memorial or at Ledbetter-Pickards in downtown Chapel Hill.

The abridged version, which runs one hour, will be presented 1:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, April 1-5 and April 8-11 in Playmakers Theatre.

Tickets for the abridged production are available for \$1.50, but no tickets will be available if the production is sold out to school groups.



Director Rezzuto

Taster's Choice

Cinema

"The Sting." Carolina Theatre. Con comedy is itself a con with some pretty moidy material being turned into excellent entertainment by some talented hands. It's too big and tends to drown in overproduction, but it's a sure fire audience pleaser. 1:50, 4:10, 6:30 & 8:50. \$2. Ends Thursday, April 4. Late shows: Friday and Saturday, "The First Circle." Sunday, "Paper Moon." All shows at 11:15. \$1.50.

"The Last Detail." Varsity Theatre. Tale of two sailors taking a third to prison. A marvelously robust and human film, both funny and sad, with an unusual understanding of certain types of emotions. Superlative acting. 1, 3, 5, 7 & 9. \$2. Ends Wednesday. Late show: Friday and Saturday, "Eric Soya's Seventeen." 11:15. \$1.50.

"Busting." Plaza 1. Stars Elliott Gould and Robert Blake. Story of vice cops got bad reviews. 3:05, 5:10, 7:15 and 9:20. \$2. Ends

Thursday

"Summer Wishes, Winter Dreams." Plaza II. Story of a cold woman thawing. Has a few touching moments (mainly due to another superb performance from Joanne Woodward), but the film as a whole is cliched soap opera stuffed with pseudo poetry. 3, 5, 7 & 9. \$2. Ends Thursday.

"The Exorist." Plaza III. William Friedkin brings to this devil film the same slam-bang direction he brought to "The French Connection." Some of it is effective at the moment, but the film as a whole is pure manipulative trash. Disgusting in more ways than one. 2, 4:30, 7 & 9:30. \$3.

Free flicks: Friday, "Fires on the Plain." A searing Japanese film on the horrors of war. Saturday, "Lifeboat." Classic Hitchcock, with Tallulah Bankhead. The entire film takes place on a lifeboat at sea. Sunday, "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid." All films at 6:30 & 9 in the Great Hall.

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