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“WHO IN THE WORLD SHE MIGHT BE”:
A CONTEXTUAL AND STYLISTIC APPROACH TO THE EARLY MUSIC
OF JONI MITCHELL

by

DANIEL SONENBERG

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Music in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts. The City University of New York

2003

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK**Abstract****“WHO IN THE WORLD SHE MIGHT BE”:
A CONTEXTUAL AND STYLISTIC APPROACH TO THE EARLY MUSIC
OF JONI MITCHELL****by****Daniel Sonenberg****Advisor: Professor Ellie Hisama**

Over the course of a career spanning more than three decades, Joni Mitchell (b. 1943) has established herself as a musician of consistent innovation and sophistication. Her work as composer, lyricist, singer, guitarist, pianist, producer and arranger has set a standard that few in the world of pop music have reached, let alone maintained. Indeed at times the nature of Mitchell's work and her proclivity to spurn stylistic boundaries have challenged her very status as a pop artist. Mitchell's artistic ethos, as well as the course of her career, is inextricably connected to the turbulent times during which she achieved, in short order, success as a professional musician and stardom. Her work from this period, 1968-1974, remains the music with which she is to this day most readily identified, due primarily to its continued radio airplay and extensive record sales, excellent craftsmanship, and resonance with both the musical and sociopolitical issues of its era. This dissertation is an effort both to illuminate Mitchell's technical accomplishment, and to uncover the rich web of meaning that lies at the crossroads of the style and contexts of some of her most acclaimed music.

My project considers the early years of Mitchell's career, centered on chapter-length close readings of three songs: "I Had a King" (1968); "The Last Time I Saw Richard" (1971); and "Court and Spark" (1974). An introductory chapter addresses the current state of research on both popular music and Joni Mitchell, and lays forth the precedents and methodology for my study. Each of the three analytical chapters that follow presents a detailed transcription of one song, which is considered both in music-theoretical terms and in the contexts of the sociopolitical and music-industrial upheaval of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and Mitchell's own biography. Specific areas that are explored include Mitchell's distinctive approach to the guitar and its impact on her harmonic language; her musical and ideological indebtedness to folk and rock; the emergence of jazz in her work and its connotative significance; the narrative function of her instrumental arrangements; and the influence of commercial pressures on her words and music.

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1

Introduction

Over the course of a career spanning more than three decades, Joni Mitchell has established herself as a musician of consistent innovation and sophistication. Her work as composer, lyricist, singer, guitarist, pianist, producer and arranger has set a standard that few in the world of pop music have reached, let alone maintained. Indeed at times the nature of Mitchell's work and her proclivity to spurn stylistic boundaries have challenged her very status as a pop artist. Mitchell's artistic ethos, as well as the course of her career, is inextricably connected to the turbulent times during which she achieved, in short order, success as a professional musician and stardom. Her work from this period, 1968-1974, remains the music with which she is to this day most readily identified, due primarily to its continued radio airplay and extensive record sales, excellent craftsmanship, and resonance with both the musical and sociopolitical issues of its era. This dissertation is an effort both to illuminate Mitchell's technical accomplishment, and to uncover the rich web of meaning that lies at the crossroads of the style and contexts of some of her most acclaimed music.

My project considers the early years of Mitchell's career, centered on close readings of three songs: "I Had a King" (1968); "The Last Time I Saw Richard" (1971); and "Court and Spark" (1974). Each analytical chapter presents a detailed transcription, considered both in music-theoretical terms and in terms of its relevant social, political, musical, or music-industrial contexts. My goal is to demonstrate that Mitchell was from the start a profoundly subtle artist, whose work frequently transcended popular music conventions and derived essential layers of meaning from its deep engagement with concerns central to Mitchell's own life and times.

PRINCIPAL BIOGRAPHICAL AND ANALYTICAL SOURCES

Academic writing about Mitchell has been relatively scarce. There are to date no completed dissertations on her work, nor any book-length studies. An article by Lloyd Whitesell, and book chapters by Wilfrid Mellers and Sheila Whiteley published in 1997, 1986, and 2000 respectively, have all concentrated primarily on Mitchell's lyrics, text setting, and singing.¹ Whiteley's approach is notable for its explicitly feminist perspective. Charles Hartman, in a chapter devoted to Mitchell in his book *Jazz Text*, considers her technique and authenticity as a jazz performer on the 1979 album *Mingus*.² More recently, Whitesell, the scholar who has shown the most sustained interest in Mitchell, has done an exhaustive study of her harmonic usage, positing five categories that hold sway throughout her output: modality, polymodality, chromaticism, polytonality, and strict pedal points.³ I will consider the role of Whitesell's five categories in my analyses, particularly in chapter 2, alongside the unique role of Mitchell's alternate guitar tunings in the forging of her harmonic and compositional language.

In the realm of non-academic writing there is no shortage of material on Mitchell. In the last six years two English biographies have appeared, of which the more recent, and more meticulously researched is Karen O'Brien's *Joni Mitchell: Shadows and Light*

¹ Lloyd Whitesell, "A Joni Mitchell Aviary," *Women & Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 1 (1997): 46-54, reprinted in *The Joni Mitchell Companion: Four Decades of Commentary*, ed. Stacy Luftig (New York: Schirmer Books, 2000), 237-250; Wilfrid Mellers, "White Seagull, Black Highwaywoman, Red Squaw: Joni Mitchell," in *Angels of the Night: Popular Female Singers of Our Time* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 141-168; Sheila Whiteley, "The Lonely Road: Joni Mitchell, *Blue* and Female Subjectivity," in *Women and Popular Music: Sexuality, Identity and Subjectivity* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 78-94.

² Charles Hartman, "Joni Mitchell: To Whom It May Concern," in *Jazz Text* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 96-120. Hartman argues for Mitchell's authenticity: "Two factors identify Mitchell's 'Goodbye Pork Pie Hat' with a jazz performance: the structure of the piece, and the 'instrumental' use of the vocal line," 116; Mitchell, *Mingus* (Asylum 505, 1979).

³ Lloyd Whitesell, "Harmonic Palette in Early Joni Mitchell," *Popular Music* 21: 2 (Summer 2002), 173-193.

- *The Definitive Biography*.⁴ I shall use O'Brien's book as my principal biographical source on Mitchell, supplementing it with copious additional material culled from the popular music press. A useful recent compilation of such articles, interviews and reviews is *The Joni Mitchell Companion: Four Decades of Commentary*.⁵

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Mitchell was born to Myrtle and William Anderson on November 7, 1943, in the small town of Fort Macleod, on the Great Plains in western Canada.⁶ Her given name was Roberta Joan Anderson, and her initial, short-lived involvement with music came at the age of seven. An overly strict piano teacher, who rapped her knuckles with a ruler for wrong notes and discouraged playing by ear and improvising, prompted Mitchell to quickly lose interest in formal musical training.⁷ Instead she turned her attention to painting, a pursuit she has maintained to the current day. Her interest in performing folk music coincided with her matriculation at the Alberta College of Art in the fall of 1963. Over the course of her first, and ultimately only year in art school, Mitchell played at local folk clubs with increasing frequency. At the end of the 1963-64 academic year,

⁴Karen O'Brien, *Joni Mitchell: Shadows and Light – the Definitive Biography* (London: Virgin Books, 2001). The other biography, upon which I have not relied, is Brian Hinton, *Joni Mitchell: Both Sides Now* (London: Sanctuary Publishing, 1996).

⁵ Stacy Luftig, ed., *The Joni Mitchell Companion: Four Decades of Commentary* (New York: Schirmer Books, 2000). This collection, however, barely skims the surface of all the interviews with and articles about Mitchell that have appeared over her thirty-five year career. A vaster resource is the searchable database at www.jmdl.com, the website for the Joni Mitchell Discussion List, which contains full-text versions of hundreds of articles, including many record reviews. The archives of the discussion list are also available for the last several years, and provide useful insight into the meanings fans derive from Mitchell's music. Another useful resource is the Joni Mitchell Home Page, www.jonimitchell.com, which contains an extended biography, discography, and bibliography in addition to other features. Both sites have special guitar sections, which feature tablature, or at least tunings and chords for most of Mitchell's guitar-based songs. The accuracy of such musical information is inconsistent.

⁶O'Brien, *Shadows and Light*, 16.

⁷Ibid., 20-21.

Mitchell abandoned Alberta to pursue a career in music amidst the thriving folk scene of Toronto.⁸

While Mitchell initially found it difficult to break into the union-controlled club scene in Canada's largest city, she eventually made headway, and began to establish a reputation as both a songwriter and a singer of considerable talent. In 1965, American folksinger Chuck Mitchell was captivated by her act while on a visit to Toronto, and arranged to meet her. They were married that same year, and Mitchell accompanied the more established performer back to his native Detroit, where he was particularly well connected on the folk circuit. Over the course of their two-year marriage they toured consistently, performing both as a duo and individually. When Joni Mitchell's talent and drawing power came to eclipse that of her husband, it led first to increasing tension between them and eventually to their divorce. During these years Mitchell also enjoyed her first professional credits as a songwriter, as such well-known folk acts as Tom Rush, Buffy St. Marie, Ian and Sylvia, and Dave van Ronk had begun to perform and record her songs.⁹

In 1967 Mitchell moved to New York, once again drawn to a bigger and more competitive music scene, and once again initially found it difficult to gain a foothold. Yet Mitchell's credentials as a songwriter ultimately provided her entrée into the more elite performance locales, and bolstering such gigs with extensive touring she was soon able to support herself exclusively with music.¹⁰ She finally attained a long-desired recording contract with a major label, Warner-Reprise, in 1968, and embarked upon a

⁸ Ibid., 32-40.

⁹ Ibid., 40-53.

¹⁰ Ibid., 56-57.

prolific and profitable career as a recording artist.¹¹ From the time of her first album, *Song to a Seagull*,¹² Mitchell took up residence in the Los Angeles suburb of Laurel Canyon, and to this day divides her time (while not touring) between California and western Canada. From 1968 to 1979 Mitchell released one studio album each year, except for 1973 and 1978, as well as live concert albums in 1974 (*Miles of Aisles*) and 1980 (*Shadows and Light*).¹³ In the 1980s and 1990s her production slowed, although she has continued to release studio albums every several years. Her most recent recordings, *Both Sides Now* (2000) and *Travelogue* (2002), feature reinterpretations of songs from her own catalogue, alongside several jazz standards on the earlier album, lushly reconceived for symphony orchestra.¹⁴ After decades of chain smoking, her voice has been rendered gravelly and considerably lower. While neither album has met with particular critical or popular success, Mitchell's love/hate relationship with the music industry and her repeatedly announced permanent retirements continue to elicit significant attention from the mainstream press.¹⁵ Her significance as one of the dominant figures of the rock era would appear to be very much in tact.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF MITCHELL'S EARLY CAREER

Mitchell's initial interest in music and subsequent early career developed during an era of rapid and dramatic change in both the popular music industry and the American sociopolitical realm. She was an avid rock and roll dancer in high school in the late

¹¹ Ibid., 68-69.

¹² Mitchell, *Song to a Seagull* (Reprise 6293, 1968). This album is also known as *Joni Mitchell*. A full discography is provided on p. 220 of this dissertation.

¹³ Mitchell, *Miles of Aisles* (Asylum (2) 202, 1974); *Shadows and Light* (Asylum (2) 704, 1980).

¹⁴ Mitchell, *Both Sides Now* (Reprise WB 47620, 2000); *Travelogue* (Nonesuch 79817, 2002).

¹⁵ See, for instance, John Rockwell, "Joni Mitchell's Long and Restless Journey," *New York Times*, January 5 2003, section 2, 31; and Mitchell, interview by David Wild, *Rolling Stone* (October 31, 2002), 115-16. Rockwell states that despite having once called Mitchell the "American Schubert," he finds the entirety of *Travelogue* "pretty terrible."

1950s, as original rock and roll acts such as Little Richard, Chuck Berry and Elvis Presley were defining the style.¹⁶ Her first experience performing music came several years later, in the aftermath of the initial rock and roll surge as the popular folk song revival of the late 1950s and early 1960s was reaching its peak.¹⁷ When she quit art school in 1964, the Beatles achieved their first tremendous American success, heralding the arrival of “rock” and redefining the publicly held conception of the popular artist. Unlike fellow folk performers Bob Dylan and Simon and Garfunkel, Mitchell resisted the trend of electrified folk-rock, instead choosing to develop her own idiomatic acoustic style, whose resemblance to folk music in any but the most superficial ways markedly diminished by the time of her first album.

This initial period of artistic development occurred with the growing turbulence of the 1960s, as a culture of resistance to authority, individualism, and lifestyle experimentation gained prominence among the youth of America, finding its most direct expression in the defiant sound of rock.¹⁸ As I shall discuss in chapter 2, Mitchell’s music was philosophically, if not stylistically, indebted to the rise of rock and its apparent disdain for social mores and conventional behavior. From the outset of her career, both her music and lyrics emphasized non-conformity in ways that I shall explore in the three analytical chapters.

Another way in which the rise of rock had a particularly strong influence on Mitchell’s career was in its restructuring effect on the popular music industry. Mitchell

¹⁶ O’Brien, *Shadows and Light*, 29-30.

¹⁷ On the folk revival, see Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000) and Robert Cantwell, *When We Were Good: The Folk Revival* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

¹⁸ On the relationship of rock music to youth in the 1960s and early 1970s, and the relationship between music and youth throughout the century, see Simon Frith, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock ‘n’ Roll* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), esp. 181-234.

recorded *Song to a Seagull* in 1968, a year after the Beatles released *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Heart's Club Band*, whose record-breaking sales demonstrated to an industry fixated on the chart-topping singles of "bubblegum acts" that the long-playing record was a viable commercial product, and that artistic ambition was not necessarily anathema to market success.¹⁹ The formation in 1967 of "freestyle" underground radio stations, which, in stereo, on the FM band, broadcast an eclectic blend of album tracks that were unsuited to the narrow singles format of Top 40 AM radio, gave rock a significant platform on which to flourish, and reduced the demand on rock artists to attain instant stardom.²⁰ As I shall discuss in greater detail in chapter 3, some record companies were quicker than others in grasping the extent to which their industry had restructured itself. Mitchell was particularly fortunate to have been signed by Warner-Reprise, a label that by 1968 had come to understand the necessity of allowing its artists creative freedom, and providing a nurturing and patient environment for career growth.²¹

1968, in addition to being the juncture at which Mitchell embarked upon her recording career, was a momentously eventful year – a veritable turning point for the world. Political upheaval, social unrest, the escalation of the Vietnam war, and the catastrophic assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy served to dull the optimism and spirit of communal endeavor that had previously informed the era's social movements. In the face of the apparent hopelessness of the world situation, and the

¹⁹ The Beatles, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (Capitol 2653, 1967). On *Sgt. Pepper's* impact on the rising profitability of records in the late 1960s, see Jon Landau, "Rock 1970: It's Too Late to Stop Now," *Rolling Stone* (December 2, 1970), 46. On the fixation of certain record companies on "bubblegum" music, see Chapple and Garofalo, *Rock 'n' Roll Is Here to Pay*, esp. 177.

²⁰ On the rise of FM radio see *ibid.*, 98-122; Simon Frith, *Sound Effects*, 122; and Jim Ladd, *Radio Waves: Life and Revolution on the FM Dial* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).

²¹ On the increased time for career growth LP records engendered, see Chapple and Garofalo, *Rock 'n' Roll Is Here to Pay*, 179-85. For a comparison of the contrasting policies of Warner-Reprise and their primary competition, RCA Records, see *ibid.*, 201-15. I will discuss the significance of Warner-Reprise in Mitchell's career in greater detail in chapter 3.

inconsequentiality of political activism, many on the left turned inward, seeking personal rather than societal betterment.²² The acceleration of this trend in the 1970s would have significant consequences for Mitchell. The shift in emphasis from the community to the individual was reflected in public taste, and in the realm of popular music led to a renewed interest in the solo artist for the first time since the folk revival of the previous decade.²³ Additionally, Mitchell's penchant for self-revelatory lyrics and a performance style that emphasized emotional defenselessness resonated with a range of self-actualization movements that achieved widespread popularity in the 1970s, imbuing her music with particular relevance. All of these developments will be pursued in greater detail in chapter 3.

MITCHELL'S STYLISTIC JOURNEY

After initiating her recording career as an acoustic guitar-based singer-songwriter with *Song to a Seagull* in 1968, Mitchell rapidly expanded the tools with which she expressed her uncompromisingly original and ever-developing musical language. Beginning with her third album, *Ladies of the Canyon* (1970), she adopted the piano as a secondary performance and composition instrument, and also began to write increasingly complex instrumental and vocal arrangements. With *Blue* (1971), her fourth album, Mitchell added the dulcimer to her armamentarium, and with her searching, confessional lyrics and emotionally charged performances, made a signal contribution to the then burgeoning singer-songwriter movement. That album also contained the first significant

²² These developments are discussed in greater detail in chapter 3. See also Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), esp. 1-22 and 78-101.

²³ See Landau, "Rock 1970: It's Too Late to Stop Now," 43-46.

seeds of Mitchell's incorporation of jazz, which would characterize the development of her style for much of the remainder of the decade.²⁴

While Mitchell usually performed most of her own backing vocal harmonies, her growing inclination towards richer textures necessitated first the engagement of a range of studio musicians, and then, beginning with her 1974 album *Court and Spark*, the employment of a full band.²⁵ Her interaction with these musicians – many of whom were experienced jazz players – considerably broadened both her stylistic perspective and her commercial prospects. Although lacking a formal music education, Mitchell had been interested in jazz since her high school days, and its influence was subtly betrayed on several of her early recordings. On songs such as “For Free,” from *Ladies of the Canyon*, and “The Last Time I Saw Richard,” from *Blue*, Mitchell employed elements of jazz as found objects, juxtaposing them with her predominant stylistic language often for symbolic purposes. Her initial collaboration with an ensemble of real jazz pedigree on *Court and Spark* – Tom Scott and the L.A. Express – did not, in fact, result in jazz, but rather a hybrid mixture of folk, pop and jazz that was particularly conducive to AM radio airplay in 1974. *Court and Spark* sold over two million copies and was Mitchell's biggest commercial success to date, yet also set her on the decidedly uncommercial trajectory she would pursue over the next five years.²⁶ After marking herself as a talented jazz dilettante on *Court and Spark* with her cover version of Annie Ross's 1952 *vocalese* song “Twisted,”²⁷ Mitchell evolved into the fully realized avant-garde jazz singer and

²⁴ *Ladies of the Canyon* (Reprise 6376, 1970); *Blue* (Reprise 2038, 1971).

²⁵ Mitchell, *Court and Spark* (Asylum 1001, 1974).

²⁶ Sales information for Mitchell's albums comes from the Recording Industry Association of America's web site, www.riaa.com.

²⁷ The term “vocalese” refers to the superimposition of a vocal part and lyrics over a pre-existing jazz instrumental solo. The melody for “Twisted” originated as a tenor saxophone solo by Wardell Gray, to which Annie Ross subsequently composed and performed lyrics. Ross was later a member, along

composer in evidence four albums later on *Mingus* (1979) – her collaboration with the ailing jazz bassist and composer Charles Mingus.

Mitchell's subsequent work from the 1980s to the present, while no less meticulously crafted, has marked her return from the pop world's fringe. Mining the discoveries she made over her initial eleven-year period of stylistic exploration, and presenting various elements thereof in combination, she has produced critically acclaimed albums that draw upon her folk, pop, and jazz heritages. While she has not again achieved the market success of her peak years in the mid-1970s, the mid- to late-1990s brought a string of awards and accolades from both within and without the popular music industry.²⁸ Additionally Mitchell has been included in lists of the "100 best guitarists ever" compiled separately by *Q* and *Mojo* magazines and Guitar.com – in each case alongside no more than three other women.²⁹ I will address her innovative approach to the guitar in chapter 2.

ANALYTICAL APPROACH

Precedents

Over the course of the past two decades, since the founding of both the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM) and the English journal *Popular Music* in 1981, a growing number of musicologists have turned their

with Dave Lambert and Jon Hendricks, of the jazz trio Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross, who popularized vocalese in the late 1950s, and who were additionally a significant influence on Mitchell. See Hartman, "To Whom It May Concern," 118-120; and O'Brien, *Shadows and Light*, 30-31.

²⁸ These included Billboard magazine's Century Award; Canada's Governor General's Performing Arts Award; a Lifetime Achievement Award by the National Academy of Songwriters; induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame; Sweden's Polar Music Prize; and the ASCAP Founders Award. See O'Brien, *Shadows and Light*, 250-53.

²⁹ *Q*'s list is cited in O'Brien, *Shadows and Light*, 252; *Mojo*, June, 1996; Guitar.com's list is located at: www.guitar.com/g2kfeatures/viewfeature.asp?featureID=12.

attention to the serious study of pop.³⁰ In that time, two central and interrelated questions regarding the most fruitful approach to such study have emerged. First, what is the proper balance between consideration of the pop *text* – the oft-mentioned “music itself” – and the pop *context* – the social and historical conditions that impact and are impacted by its creation? And second, to what extent are the music-analytical tools devised for the study of Western art music applicable to the study of popular music?

In answer to the first question, John Covach has echoed many popular musicologists’ lament that context has received considerably more attention than text in the academic literature on popular music:

...popular music studies have been dominated by cultural critics and sociologists, many of whom do not possess the specialized skills necessary to deal with the musical ‘texts’ in the ways that musicologists do. These scholars tend to be concerned with the effects of musics on listeners, and on the ways in which musics can have various kinds of significance within cultures and subcultures; and they treat the music, in the words of John Shepherd, as a kind of ‘inscrutable black box.’³¹

The response of some musicologists to this perceived inequity, including Covach, has been to claim for certain kinds of popular music a place alongside the classical canon.

³⁰ Before this time, “popular musicologists” met with considerable resistance. Charles Hamm paints a particularly grim picture of musicology’s attitude towards popular music in the early 1970s in “Rock and the Facts of Life,” in *Putting Popular Music in its Place* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), esp. 41–43. Other testaments to musicology’s avoidance of pop include John Covach, “Popular Music, Unpopular Musicology,” in *Rethinking Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 452–470; Susan McClary and Robert Walser, “Start Making Sense! Musicology Wrestles with Rock,” in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), 277–292; Susan McClary, “Terminal Prestige: The Case of Avant-Garde Music Composition,” in *Keeping Score: Music, Disciplinary, Culture*, ed. David Schwarz, Anahid Kassabian, and Lawrence Siegel (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 57–81; and Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1990), esp. chapter 4, 103–126. In contrast, Allan Moore declared in 1996 that “[t]heorizing popular music is the activity of the decade.” Moore, review of *Interpreting Popular Music*, by David Brackett, *Music and Letters* 77:4 (November 1996), 658. The term “popular musicology” is adopted for the sake of convenience, and refers to the study of popular music from within the discipline of musicology, rather than to musicological efforts made from within popular culture.

³¹ John Covach, “Popular Music, Unpopular Musicology,” in *Rethinking Music*, 454–55. The Shepherd quote is from *Music as Social Text* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 206. Peter Winkler has also used this terminology in describing the problem. See Winkler, “Writing Ghost Notes: The Poetics and Politics of Transcription,” in *Keeping Score*, 170.

and – in answer to the second question – to analyze the music accordingly. Walter Everett, also representative of this approach, has generated an extensive body of analytical work, much of it on the music of the Beatles, and much relying on Schenkerian analysis and the priority of pitch relationships.³² Everett “distrusts scholars’ claims that the social aspects of popular music – rather than its own intrinsic relationships – are its principal issues.”³³ His analytical creed is succinctly expressed in the following statement:

I believe that purely musical effects – nearly always connected in some way to matters of pitch relationships – contribute to any composer’s or listener’s appreciation, regardless of training or superficial awareness. If the masses believe they are attracted only to rhythm or loud volume and ‘can’t hear’ the pitch or have no conscious understanding of functional tonal relations, I say they are merely unaware of why, for instance, they become more excited by expanded dominant seventh retransitions enhanced by added uncontrolled dissonance than they do in the face of less tonally valent alternations of weak III and VI chords.³⁴

Everett is a sensitive analyst, and I agree with his claim that pitch relationships in music of sophisticated harmonic conception, such as that by the Beatles, or for that matter, Mitchell, play a significant role in the music’s overall effect, and as such are worthy of scrutiny. However, as David Brackett has argued, care must be taken to avoid

³² See Walter Everett, “Fantastic Remembrance in John Lennon’s ‘Strawberry Fields Forever’ and ‘Julia,’” *Musical Quarterly* 72 (1986), 360-85; *The Beatles as Musicians: Revolver Through the Anthology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); *The Beatles as Musicians: The Quarry Men Through Rubber Soul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); and “Swallowed by a Song: Paul Simon’s Crisis of Chromaticism,” in *Understanding Rock: Essays in Musical Analysis*, ed. John Covach and Graeme M. Boone (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 113-153. For other work undertaken from a similar analytical perspective, see Peter Kaminsky, “The Popular Album as Song Cycle: Paul Simon’s ‘Still Crazy After All These Years,’” *College Music Symposium* 32 (1992), 38-54; Robert Gauldin, “Beethoven, Tristan, and The Beatles,” *College Music Symposium* 30:1 (Spring 1990), 142-152; Steven Porter, *Rhythm and Harmony in the Music of the Beatles* (Ph.D. dissertation, City University of New York, 1979); and Wilfrid Mellers, *A Darker Shade of Pale: A Backdrop to Bob Dylan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

³³ Everett, “Confessions from Blueberry Hell, or, Pitch Can Be a Sticky Substance,” in *Expression in Pop-Rock Music*, ed. Walter Everett (New York: Garland, 2000), 337, n. 2. Everett actually attributes this distrust to John Covach, but goes on to say that he (Everett) “could not agree more.”

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 269-70.

superimposing on popular music the inherent value system of an analytical approach designed for art music:

Insisting on an art music framework for hearing popular music leads to the tendency of terms such as 'simple', 'complex', 'normal' and so forth to reinforce an aesthetic hierarchy in which musical processes that are quite common in popular music are read as idiosyncratic.³⁵

Allan Moore further notes that reliance on the analytical devices of art music "leave[s] untouched those very factors where rock can be at its most interesting (and complex and profound): timbre, texture, sound manipulation, performance practice, and so on."³⁶ Moore's book, *Rock, The Primary Text*, is devoted to theorizing such factors, but Moore has also demonstrated a keen interest in rock harmony, both here and in two earlier articles.³⁷ He argues that harmonic patterns are very important in some rock songs, but not in others: that, despite musicological sentiment to the contrary, rock employs a wealth of diverse harmonic formulae; and that the harmonies in such formulae are often non-functional in the traditional tonal sense, and are best approached analytically with a modal system. Modal analysis enables a common rock progression like VII-I to be normalized (as Mixolydian VII-I), whereas it would be viewed as aberrant in the major mode.³⁸

Moore acknowledges the possible relevance to rock of insights suggested by a system like Schenkerian analysis – "a method which is not drawn from (and is hence

³⁵ Brackett, Review of *Understanding Rock*, ed. John Covach and Graeme M. Boone, and *Expression in Pop Rock Music*, ed. Walter Everett, *Popular Music* 20:2 (May 2001), 281.

³⁶ Allan Moore, *Rock, the Primary Text: Developing a Musicology of Rock*, 2nd ed. (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2001), 19.

³⁷ See *ibid.*, esp. 52-55. Also, Moore, "The So-Called 'Flattened Seventh' in Rock," *Popular Music* 14:2 (1995), 185-201, and Moore, "Patterns of Harmony," *Popular Music* 11 (1992), 73-106.

³⁸ Moore, *Rock, the Primary Text*, 52-55. On modal harmony in rock see also Alf Björnberg, "On Aeolian Harmony in Contemporary Popular Music," paper presented to the Third International Conference of IASPM, Montreal, 1985; and, most relevant to the current discussion, Whitesell, "Harmonic Palette in Early Joni Mitchell." I shall discuss Whitesell's modal analytical strategies in chapters 2 and 3 below.

irrelevant to the inhabitants of) the culture in which these musical practices originate” – but criticizes Everett’s “wholesale adoption of such a methodology.”³⁹ The modification of Schenkerian analysis to accommodate rock’s modal tendencies has also been suggested by Richard Middleton, and has been put into practice by Lori Burns.⁴⁰ Although this line of thought does not particularly influence my project, I shall employ several reductions that are loosely based on Schenkerian technique in Chapter 3, in order to make a specific point about Mitchell’s treatment of the vocal melody in “The Last Time I Saw Richard.”

Complementing their interest in details of technical construction with an acknowledgment of popular music’s entanglement with various mediatory forces, some musicologists have pursued an approach that both balances consideration of text and context, and denies a thorough distinction between the two. In his 1995 book *Interpreting Popular Music*, Brackett concerns himself with the specific ways in which a song’s context, including the biography of its performer, the style it inhabits, and its historical milieu, intersects with its actual recorded sonorities – which he represents via transcription and spectrum photos – to generate a network of associative meaning. An organizing principle in his approach is that

there is not necessarily one way of interpreting popular music, but that different types of popular music use different types of rhetoric, call for different sorts of interpretation, refer to different arguments about words and voices, about musical complexity and familiarity, and draw upon different senses of history and tradition.⁴¹

³⁹ Moore, *Rock, the Primary Text*, 62 n. 21.

⁴⁰ Middleton, *Studying Popular Music*, 190; Lori Burns “Harmonic and Voice-Leading Strategies in Toni Amos’s ‘Crucify,’” in *Expression in Pop-Rock Music*, 214-246; and Burns and Mélisse Lafrance, *Disruptive Divas: Feminism, Identity & Popular Music* (New York: Routledge, 2002). Moore himself employs a modified Schenkerian approach in *The Beatles, Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁴¹ David Brackett, *Interpreting Popular Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995; reprint, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 31 (page citations are to the reprint edition). In its concern

My analyses in this dissertation attempt a similar flexibility of interpretive technique.

Like Brackett, Moore has vigorously argued for the necessity of tailoring an analytical approach to a given style. He has also concerned himself with meaning in popular music, arguing that while the meaning of individual songs can never be fixed, the meaning of individual styles can be. A particularly important locus of meaning thus becomes “the friction between a song and the style that it is engaged in constituting.”⁴²

This notion is suggestive in the case of an artist like Mitchell, whose career has been defined by a journey through a range of styles (folk, singer-songwriter, rock, jazz) to which she never adhered unproblematically. Each of the analytical chapters to follow will explore Mitchell’s juxtaposition of stylistically diverse musical vocabularies, as well her deliberate exploitation of the associative and connotative potential these styles contain.

Transcriptions

As the three analytical chapters in this dissertation make extensive reference to the three full transcriptions that I have prepared (Appendices B, C and D), it is important to acknowledge both the pros and cons of this procedure at the outset. As Peter Winkler has observed:

Notation enables us to transcend the evanescence of music. Its effect is to neutralize time—to *kill* time. When we write music down, we represent musical sound by means of a sequence of visual symbols that we apprehend independently of the temporal stream. Thus we can focus on a particular musical event for as long as we want, scan instantaneously back and forth in time, or make side-by-side comparisons of temporally distant moments. Through notation we can

with the possibility of affective and associative meanings. Brackett’s work is anticipated by that of Philip Tagg, whose 1979 doctoral thesis, *KOJAK: 50 Seconds of Television Music: Toward the Analysis of Affect in Popular Music* (Göteborg: Studies from the Department of Musicology, 1979), was an early milestone of popular musicology.

⁴² Moore, *Rock, the Primary Text*, 195.

escape the inexorable flow of time and comprehend the totality of a piece of music in an instant.⁴³

While the advantages of such an “atemporal” encounter with music for the sake of analysis may be self-evident from this statement, a significant disadvantage is implied: the actual real-time *experience* of music is ignored.⁴⁴ Additionally, significant features of recorded popular music are often impossible to render visually. While analyses of both rock and Western art music often make recourse to notation, only the former generally employ (or require) transcriptions. As Moore observes, this is because

[t]he primary medium of transmission of music throughout the European art tradition is and always has been stave notation. The primary medium of transmission of rock, since at least mid-1950s rock ‘n’ roll, has been the recording.⁴⁵

Thus, although when employed for an analysis, a Western art music score (or fragment thereof) switches from a “prescription” to a “description,” its original role as the former makes it an ideal conveyance of the values considered important in that musical tradition.⁴⁶ These values include pitches within the tempered scale, rhythms conceived against a metric grid, loudness, tempo, timbre within the realm of standard Western orchestral instruments, and various kinds of large-scale structure. They do not usually include gradations of pitch smaller than a semitone, free rhythms, or individual

⁴³ Winkler, “Writing Ghost Notes,” 172.

⁴⁴ The notation of which Winkler speaks, and which I employ here, is “descriptive” – designed to describe or “translate” an already-existing sonic entity (such as a recorded pop song) – as opposed to “prescriptive” – designed as instructions to a performer or ensemble. For a study of the “descriptive-prescriptive” dichotomy see Charles Seeger, “Prescriptive and Descriptive Music Writing,” in *Studies in Musicology 1935-1975* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 168-81.

⁴⁵ Moore, *Rock: The Primary Text*, 32.

⁴⁶ It is, then, an “emic” rather than “etic” account of the music. For more on this dichotomy, see Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Twenty-nine Issues and Concepts* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), esp. 140-41; Middleton, *Studying Popular Music*, esp. 175-77; and Moore, *Rock: The Primary Text*, 26-30.

alterations to standard timbres.⁴⁷ Western notation can, in fact, accommodate these musical values – which are often held important by popular music – but in so doing, it shows signs of strain.⁴⁸ Additionally, some of pop music's recorded musical sounds are frequently irretrievably “lost in the mix,” impossible to precisely distinguish from their neighboring sonorities.

In full awareness of these drawbacks, I have embraced transcription as a necessary component to the close readings essential to this project. My transcriptions are intended to be purely “descriptive,” and attempt to render as nearly as possible the exact sounds heard on the recordings. Particularly in the case of the vocal lines, this has at times led to the use of extremely complex rhythms. Such complexities are not necessarily reflective of the *music*'s degree of complexity, but rather of a kind of rhythmic flexibility between melody and rhythm section that is a common feature of some popular music and most jazz.⁴⁹ I have additionally attempted to compensate for the

⁴⁷ I am considering notation here as the combination of staff notation and the conventional terminology, usually in Italian, associated with it. While Western art music does sometimes call for alterations to an instrument's timbre, these alterations – such as *sul ponticello* – still come from a limited number of generic effects, the specificity of which are usually not further defined. If we read *sul ponticello* under a violin part in a score, we are given a fairly narrow range of sounds to imagine. Compare this to the term “distorted” for electric guitar. This barely helps to narrow down the array of possible sounds described, which are determined by tone, degree of overdrive, type and make of amplifier (solid state or tube, Marshall or Fender), make, model and style of guitar (Fender Telecaster or Gibson L5), and the recording techniques involved (close-miked, direct into the sound board, both combined). For a simpler example, consider the range of sounds specified by “piano” (the instrument) compared to that specified by “electric guitar.”

⁴⁸ Winkler demonstrates this problem with his transcription of Aretha Franklin's “I Never Loved a Man.” His desire to capture as precisely as possible the details of Franklin's vocal performance prompts him to employ a variety of non-standard symbols and extremely complex rhythms, and ultimately renders his transcription difficult to read. See “Writing Ghost Notes,” 176-179. The problematic applicability of transcription to various repertoires of popular music is precisely the subject of Winkler's essay, to which I am indebted for my approach to and thinking about transcription. Similar issues have concerned ethnomusicologists for decades. See Bruno Nettl, “I Can't Say a Thing Until I've Seen the Score,” in *The Study of Ethnomusicology*, 65-81; Nazir A. Jairazbhoy, “The ‘Objective’ and Subjective View in Music Transcriptions,” *Ethnomusicology* 21:2 (1977), 263-73; and Pandora Hopkins, “The Purposes of Transcription,” *Ethnomusicology* 10:3 (1966), 310-317.

⁴⁹ Of course this rhythmic flexibility is, in its own way, a kind of musical complexity. It has a corollary in the world of contemporary concert music, where some composers employ ultra-precise and complex rhythms in order to achieve an improvisatory and flexible metrical feeling.

transcriptions' inability to convey every significant nuance of the recorded music with specific verbal description in the prose analysis. Finally, it is my hope that the transcriptions and musical examples drawn from them will be scrutinized in close conjunction with the recordings for which they are but incomplete surrogates. To facilitate such activity, I have provided timings at regular intervals in all of the transcriptions.

SUMMARY OF ANALYTICAL CHAPTERS

A central position that I adopt in this dissertation is that Mitchell's music, both in its skillful and sensitive construction, and in its engagement with its various contexts, rewards careful and thorough analysis. For this reason, each analytical chapter culminates in a close reading of a single song, for which I establish a contextual backdrop in the first part of the chapter. To understand a piece of music or a work of art in all of its contexts is probably beyond the realm of possibility, and I do not assert that my analyses will cover every music-theoretical or historical facet of the chosen songs. However, by selecting three songs of significantly varying technical construction and stylistic implications, equally distributed over the six-year period that is my focus, and by approaching the questions of context and musical analysis differently in each chapter, I hope to offer a well-rounded and multi-dimensional picture of Mitchell's early career and its manifold significance. Thus I have chosen, as a title for this project, to paraphrase a line from Mitchell's song "Rainy Night House" (1970). I intend for my multi-pronged

approach to Mitchell's work and career to go some way towards illustrating, at least in regard to the time period in question, "Who In The World She Might Be."⁵⁰

Consistent with Brackett's argument cited above that "there is not necessarily one way of interpreting popular music" and that "different types of popular music use different types of rhetoric, call for different sorts of interpretation....and draw upon different senses of history and tradition." I shall allow my approach to both the contextualization and analysis of each song to be dictated by the relevant characteristics of the song itself. Thus chapter 2, which concerns "I Had a King," the first song on Mitchell's first album, begins with a consideration of Mitchell's relationship to the popular folk song revival and the subsequent rise of rock and folk-rock in both philosophical and technical terms. Since the song – like most of the album – features solo acoustic guitar accompaniment, I pay particular attention to Mitchell's innovative composition and performance techniques on that instrument, arguing that her creative use of numerous alternate tunings distinguished her harmonic language from that of her folk and rock contemporaries. After supporting this assertion with analysis of guitar-based music of Bob Dylan, James Taylor, and Paul Simon, I consider the specific harmonic implications of Mitchell's tunings on *Song to a Seagull*. My analysis of "I Had a King" follows, and explores the manifestation of those implications, as well as the ways in which Mitchell's lyrics, harmonic idiom and singing style combine to establish as the song's subtext Mitchell's statement of independence from the folk community and her own past.

⁵⁰ Mitchell, "Rainy Night House," *For The Roses* (Reprise 6376, 1970). The lines of the song are: "You are a refugee From a wealthy family You gave up all the golden factories To see, who in the world you might be." For a discussion of their significance, see pp. 114-115 below.

The focus of chapter 3 is “The Last Time I Saw Richard,” the final track on one of Mitchell’s most acclaimed and popular albums, *Blue*. As this song was recorded at a time when Mitchell’s career was gaining considerable momentum, due in many ways to some of the sociopolitical and music-industrial changes outlined above, and as the song itself functions as a commentary on the plight of idealism from the late 1960s to early 1970s, I begin the chapter with an extended discussion of the evolution in the sociopolitical climate and music industry during that time period. In this account, I pay particular attention to the role this evolution had on Mitchell’s developing career. My analytical discussion begins with a consideration of the compositional ramifications of Mitchell’s technique at the piano – the sole accompaniment instrument on “Richard” – and proceeds to my close reading of the song. I argue that “Richard” adopts stylistic features of jazz, including harmony and especially a jazz-like structural approach to vocal melody, in part to project the narrator’s own resistance to the death of the 1960s dream. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of a live version of “Richard” from 1974, in which Mitchell stripped away much of the song’s stylistic ambiguity, revealing her own awareness of the depth of its jazz potential.

The final analytical chapter is built upon an examination of the title track of *Court and Spark*. That album featured Mitchell’s first collaboration with a full band, and as such, enabled her to juxtapose her own persona – or as I will argue, multiple personae – against that (or those) of the band in especially meaningful ways. The chapter’s principle concern is Mitchell’s self-referential engagement in “Court and Spark” of the various musical and lyrical themes she had developed over the course of the five albums that preceded *Court and Spark*. Thus I establish a contextual backdrop by pursuing the

unfolding, over this period, of three such recurring themes: “non-conformity,” which is the most significant; “independence vs. love” – a subset of the first theme; and “purity vs. corruption.” My close reading of the song then considers the way Mitchell uses her new collaborative situation to explore these themes with unprecedented subtlety. I argue that in her sophisticated arrangement of “Court and Spark,” Mitchell establishes a dichotomy between her own instrumental work and that of the band that dramatizes the narrative of the song’s lyrics, while at the same time projecting a subtextual commentary on her own deepening entanglement with the popular music industry. In the process I make reference to many of the contextual and analytical observations set forth in the earlier chapters.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

I am hopeful that the whole of this dissertation is greater than the sum of its parts. That is to say, I intend for my three analytical chapters to illuminate not just the three chronologically isolated songs around which they are organized, but also the broad range of stylistic characteristics, the course of artistic and commercial development, and ultimately the full historical significance of Joni Mitchell in her early period. The observations I make about Mitchell’s technique as a guitarist, singer, pianist, composer, lyricist, arranger and collaborator, as well as her stylistic debt to folk, rock, jazz and art music, combine to form a detailed portrait of Mitchell the musical artist – and a window of understanding not only into her other work from the six-year period of my study, but into her subsequent work as well. Similarly, my situating of Mitchell’s work against the contextual backdrops of the popular folk song revival, the sociopolitical turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s, and the evolution of the music industry from the late 1950s to the early

1970s, projects a thorough rendering of Mitchell the historical figure, with relevance not only to the period of my study but extending forward to the current day. It is my effort to uncover the intricate connections in Mitchell's work between the two spheres just described, text and context, in musically detailed close readings, that will constitute my most significant contribution to the nascent research on Mitchell in particular, and popular music in general.

2

“I Had a King”: Mitchell’s Roots in Folk and Rock

INTRODUCTION

From almost the very start of Mitchell’s career as a songwriter, she set about establishing for herself a unique compositional and performance idiom. Coming of age during a period when large-scale transformations in the music industry and popular taste occurred in rapid succession – the late 1950s and early 1960s – Mitchell was exposed to an ever-evolving variety of musical influences. Some of these phenomena would prove to be passing trends, while others lay the groundwork for the monumental developments of the mid- and late-1960s, particularly the development of rock. Mitchell’s ability to navigate these changes, adopting what she needed and ignoring or discarding the rest, played a signal role in her growth as a creative artist and professional musician. This independence of spirit is reflected in a comment she made years later in a 1976 interview: “...I seldom finish a book. I read it till I come to a point of inspiration and then work from that point into my own work.”¹ In similar fashion, Mitchell took what she needed from the popular folk song revival, Bob Dylan, rock, and female folksingers such as Joan Baez and Judy Collins in forging not only her distinctly personal musical style, but also her complex artistic ethos.

In this chapter I shall consider Mitchell’s indebtedness to these various influences, as well as the points at which she parts ways with each of them. The analytical segment concerns “I Had a King,” the first song on Mitchell’s 1968 debut album, *Song to a Seagull*. With this song, as with much of Mitchell’s first several

¹ Joni Mitchell, interview by Stewart Brand, *The CoEvolution Quarterly* (Summer 1976). Reprinted in *The Joni Mitchell Companion*, 16.

albums, her acoustic guitar accompaniment connects her work superficially to folk music, in association with which she had first gained experience as a performer earlier in the decade. Ironically, it was Mitchell's unusual technique on the guitar, both as a composer and performer, that most distinguished her music from the folk tradition, as well as from the folk-rock and rock movements which to some extent grew out of it. In the following discussion I shall consider Mitchell's place in the development from folk to rock over the course of the 1960s, both in ideological and musical terms. After providing some basic historical background, I shall engage in an in-depth consideration of the harmonic and textural implications of Mitchell's approach to the guitar. I shall assert that Mitchell's reliance on alternate guitar tunings sharply delineated her work from the more traditional composition of her contemporaries, and support this assertion with brief analyses of songs by Bob Dylan, Paul Simon, and James Taylor. My close reading of "I Had a King" follows, and focuses on the specific manifestation of these distinctions, in conjunction with Mitchell's lyrics and singing style. My analysis will demonstrate that an important subtext of the song is Mitchell's own statement of independence from elements of her musical and personal history, and that the song serves as a harbinger of the decidedly unconventional path her subsequent career would follow.

HISTORICAL AND STYLISTIC BACKGROUND: FOLK, FOLK-ROCK AND ROCK

Mitchell began performing as the folk revival – which first gained a foothold on popular culture when the Kingston Trio's recording of "Tom Dooley" became a number 1 single in 1958 – was nearing its peak. In the summer of 1963, immediately before leaving for the Alberta College of Art in Calgary, she worked at a coffeehouse in her hometown of Saskatoon. There she was exposed to a "parade of earnest young folkies."

and eventually tried her hand at performing, beginning with several stints at the weekly open mike.² She accompanied herself first on ukulele, then on guitar. Once the school year began, Mitchell got a steady gig at the Depression, a popular Calgary coffeehouse. She also gradually began to play folk clubs in nearby Edmonton, Vancouver, and Winnipeg. Her repertoire consisted of “traditional folk songs and Kingston Trio standards.”³ At the end of the academic year, in summer 1964, Mitchell left Calgary for Toronto, lured by its burgeoning folk café scene and the nearby Mariposa folk festival. On her train voyage there, she wrote her first song, “Day After Day.”⁴

Mitchell’s arrival in Toronto coincided with a number of events that were reshaping both the folk and pop music landscapes. Bob Dylan, initially heralded by folk revivalists as a savior, had begun to anger staunch traditionalists among their numbers. Beginning with his second album, *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* (1963), he concentrated on original, rather than traditional songs, and gradually moved away from community-minded lyrics of political protest.⁵ Dylan’s infamous electric performance at the Newport Folk Festival in the summer of 1965 went even further, infuriating his one-time mentor

² O’Brien, *Shadows and Light*, 32. Unless otherwise indicated, biographical information concerning Mitchell’s early involvement with folk is from O’Brien, 32-40.

³ Ibid., 33.

⁴ Ibid., 36.

⁵ Bob Dylan, *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* (Columbia 8786, 1963). However, as Benjamin Filene has observed, many of Dylan’s original songs borrowed melodies from several traditions of American roots music. See Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, 208-09. The folk community’s despairing response to Dylan’s early evolution is concisely captured in Paul Nelson and Jon Pankake’s review of *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* for *Little Sandy Review*, a low-budget folk magazine from Dylan’s home state of Minnesota: “Dylan bases everything here almost 100 percent on his own personality; there is hardly any traditional material, and most of the original material is not particularly folk-derived. It is pure Bob Dylan (Bob Dylan’s dream, as it were), with its foundations in nothing that isn’t constantly shifting, searching, and changing.” See Paul Nelson and Jon Pankake, “Flat Tire” in *Little Sandy Review* (June, 1963), reprinted in Carl Benson, ed., *The Bob Dylan Companion: Four Decades of Commentary* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1998), 20-23. It is interesting that Filene’s observations cited above in this note and on page 29, made with the benefit of hindsight, directly contradict this complaint.

Pete Seeger with its lyric-obscuring volume.⁶ While it is tempting to see Dylan as “having personally terminated the popular folksong revival”⁷ with this performance, he was not alone in bringing its demise. The Beatles’ arrival in America in 1964 revitalized a stagnant pop music scene with both their driving electric sound and witty, charismatic demeanor.⁸ Like Dylan and like the black R&B acts that were their inspiration, the Beatles wrote their own songs, redefining the role of the mainstream pop musician with their overwhelming success. Finally, the Byrds’ electrified covers of songs by Dylan (“Mr. Tambourine Man”) and Seeger (“Turn Turn Turn”), and Simon and Garfunkel’s rock-like “Sounds of Silence,” joined Dylan’s “Like a Rolling Stone” to signal the age of folk-rock on American hit radio.⁹

As Simon Frith has argued, the transition from folk to folk-rock involved more than the mere addition of electric and percussive sounds to the music’s surface: it signified an ideological shift.¹⁰ The perceived value of authenticity, a central criterion of folk music, remained integral to folk-rock, and by the mid-1960s became the hallmark which distinguished “rock,” in all its myriad incarnations, from “pop.” However, the

⁶ See Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, esp. 212, for a detailed consideration of Dylan’s Newport performance, Seeger’s reaction, and the myth that has come to enshroud the event.

⁷ Cantwell, *When We Were Good*, 1.

⁸ On the lull in rock from the late 1950s to the early 1960s (the identical time period of folk revival’s greatest popularity), see Chapple and Garofalo, *Rock ‘n’ Roll Is Here to Pay*, 49; Samuel A. Floyd Jr., *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 182; and Walter Rimler, *Not Fade Away: A Comparison of Jazz Age with Rock Era Pop Song Composers* (Mississippi: Pierian Press, 1984), 68.

⁹ The first three of these songs reached number 1 on Billboard’s Hot 100 charts on 6/26/65, 12/4/65 and 1/1/66. “Like a Rolling Stone” reached number 2 on 9/4/65. All chart data in this dissertation come from the following four research books by Joel Whitburn: *Billboard Top 10 Singles Charts, 1955-2000* (Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin: Record Research Inc., 2001); *Billboard Top 10 Album Charts, 1963-1998* (Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin: Record Research Inc., 1999); *Billboard Top Pop Singles, 1955-1999* (Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin: Record Research Inc., 2000); and *The Billboard Book of Top 40 Albums* (New York: Billboard Publications, 1987).

¹⁰ See Simon Frith, “The Magic That Can Set You Free”: The Ideology of Folk and the Myth of the Rock Community,” *Popular Music* 1 (1981), 159-68; and Frith, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock ‘n’ Roll* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), esp. 48-52.

definition of authenticity itself changed. Revivalist folk music claimed authenticity by representing the shared political concerns of a community: by a direct and simple presentation that sought to eradicate distinctions between performer and audience (hence Pete Seeger's championing of the sing-along¹¹); and by its disdain for artifice of any kind. Essential to the authentic effect of folk music was the illusion that anyone could do it, and with his sandpaper voice, spoken inflection, and seemingly simple approach to guitar and harmonica, Dylan created this illusion expertly. While his turn from traditional to original songs offended some purists, others, most prominently Seeger, celebrated his work for infusing new life into the folk tradition.¹²

It was the eventual shift in emphasis in Dylan's original songs from community-mindedness to self-exploration that alienated the folk revivalists, while at the same time laying the groundwork for a rock conception of authenticity. Communal feeling, solidarity and affecting social change were now obviated by personal honesty, but as Frith writes:

...the emphasis on truth remained – truth-to-self. 'The authentic folk singer', wrote Alan Lomax in a 1959 issue of *Sing Out!*, has 'to *experience* the feelings that lie behind his art', and it was this notion of authenticity – truth to experience rather than to class or organization – that the 1960s folk performers retained as they became rock singer-songwriters.¹³

The change in ideology concerned not only suitable subject matter for lyrics, but appropriate musical techniques as well. Frith notes that "[t]he criteria of sincerity began to shift from raw signs to marks of artifice."¹⁴ Thus, elements that had been antithetical to folk music – amplification, drums, instrumental virtuosity, distortion, and screaming

¹¹ Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, 197.

¹² Ibid., 208-09. Filene's final chapter, "Performing the Folk," 183-232, subjects the relationship of Seeger and Dylan to careful scrutiny.

¹³ Frith, "The Magic That Can Set You Free," 163-64.

¹⁴ Ibid., 163.

vocals – came in fact to represent the rock performers’ depth of honest feeling, as well as their need to transcend conventional means of expression.

In addition to electrification, Dylan’s new approach to lyrical craft, which cast aside folk directness and simplicity in favor of experimental literary devices inspired by beat poetry, had a lasting influence on such luminous 1960s songwriters as John Lennon and Paul Simon, and was pivotal in forming Mitchell’s compositional worldview.¹⁵ Significantly it was in Dylan’s 1965 song “Positively 4th Street,” which David Hajdu characterizes as his “harshesht and most lucid attack on the folk community,”¹⁶ that Mitchell claims to have first understood the song form’s full potential:

When I heard that—‘You’ve got a lot of nerve to say you are my friend’—I thought, now that’s poetry; now we’re talking. That direct, confronting speech, commingled with imagery, was what was lacking for me.¹⁷

Yet if Mitchell followed Dylan down the path of literate, expressive lyric writing, she resisted his folk-rock sound, preferring to buck the developing trend with her acoustic self-accompaniment. She was thus pigeonholed for several years as a folksinger, and had trouble procuring performance gigs or a record contract.¹⁸ Although Mitchell’s softer sound may have lent some credence to the folk categorization, in many ways her work was less aligned with folk than was Dylan’s electric music. As Benjamin Filene observes:

¹⁵ On the influence of beat poetry on Dylan, see Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, 211-12. For Dylan’s influence on Lennon, see Jon Fitzgerald, “When the Brill Building Met Lennon-McCartney: Continuity and Change in the Early Evolution of the Mainstream Pop Song,” *Popular Music and Society* 19 (1995): 74. For Dylan’s influence on Simon, see Paul Cowan, “Paul Simon: The Odysseus of Urban Melancholy,” in *The Paul Simon Companion: Four Decades of Commentary*, ed. Stacey Luftig (New York: Schirmer, 1997), 111.

¹⁶ Bob Dylan, “Positively 4th Street,” (Columbia 43389, 1965). Rereleased on *Bob Dylan’s Greatest Hits* (Columbia KCL 2263/KCS 9463, 1967). David Hajdu, *Positively 4th Street: The Lives and Times of Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Mimi Baez Farina, and Richard Farina* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 278.

¹⁷ Mitchell quoted in Jeffrey Pepper Rogers, “Setting the Stage: The Vocal and Lyrical Craft of Joni Mitchell,” in *The Joni Mitchell Companion*, 256.

¹⁸ See William Ruhlman, “Joni Mitchell: From Blue to Indigo,” in *The Joni Mitchell Companion*, 23-4.

Although Dylan's style had changed dramatically, he remained fundamentally committed to drawing on American roots music to produce vibrant new songs grounded firmly in tradition.¹⁹

Mitchell, on the contrary, dispensed with tradition almost entirely once she turned her attention to songwriting. While using Dylan's new creed of self-discovery as a springboard to her own deeply confessional poetic style, she jettisoned his, and in turn the folk revivalists', conventional approach to the guitar. As this instrument was the principal composition and performance tool of both revivalist folk music and rock, Mitchell's innovations had profound stylistic consequences. They enabled her to invoke the rule-breaking, individualist ideology of rock without plugging in, and established for her a harmonic and textural niche quite separate from Dylan, the rockers, or singer-songwriters such as James Taylor and Paul Simon. In the following section I shall focus on the guitar-based compositional practices of some of Mitchell's important contemporaries, in order to more fully understand the context of her own innovations.

TECHNICAL BACKGROUND: THE GUITAR IN FOLK AND ROCK

Even after going electric, Dylan's harmonic vocabulary, as well as that of the folk rockers inspired by him, retained a dependence on the open chords of standard guitar tuning. As Allan Moore has observed,

The [guitar] fretboard...is highly differentiated with respect to chord shapes. The only major chords available in open position are those based on C, G, D, A and E, and the different disposition of pitches within each of these shapes gives each chord a definite spacing characteristic.²⁰

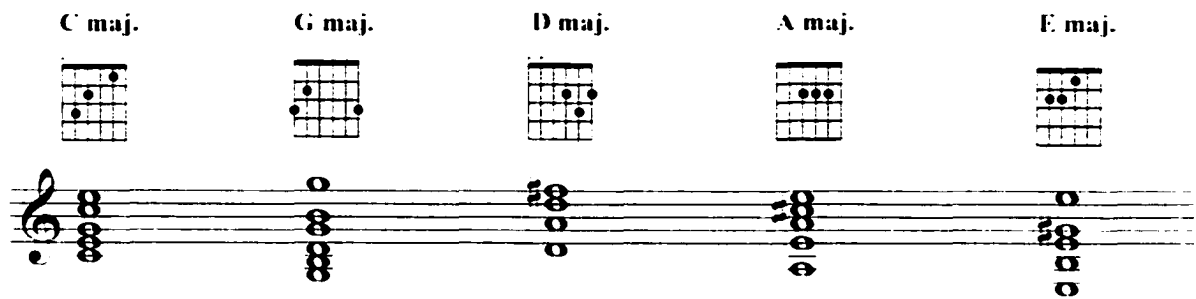
Example 2-1 demonstrates these chords, using both fret-box and standard notation.²¹

¹⁹ Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, 215.

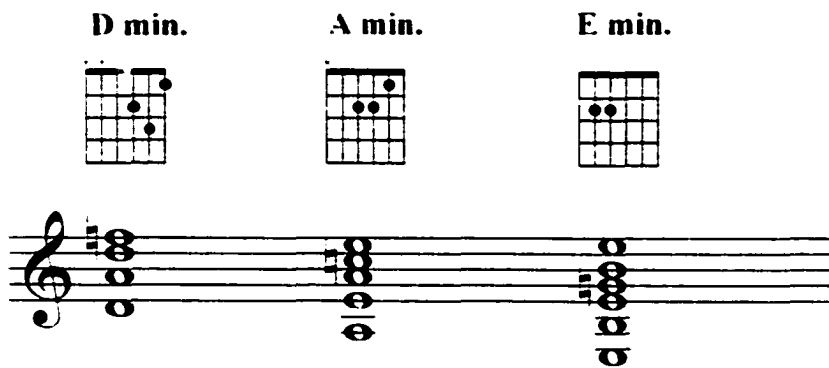
²⁰ Moore, *Rock, the Primary Text*, 59. Open voicings refer to chords that have a minimum of one open string.

²¹ This is a slightly altered version of Moore's example 2.16, *ibid.* The guitar is a transposing instrument that sounds one octave lower than written. The fret-boxes, which are a standard notation device for

Example 2-1: Open Major Chords in Standard Tuning EADGBE



Example 2-2: Open Minor Chords in Standard Tuning EADGBE



Of these major chords, only D, E, and A are easily and commonly transformed to minor (Example 2-2), while C and G minor are routinely played as barre chords.²²

guitarists, visually represent the neck of the guitar turned sideways. The bold line thus represents the nut at the top of the neck (here), the positioning of a capo, or a specifically designated fret higher on the neck. (A capo is a small device that is affixed to the neck of a fretted instrument to transpose the pitch of the open strings upward.) On the guitar, each fret is one semitone. Thus, the designation "capo 7" refers both to the placement of the device, and the interval of transposition (seventh fret seven semitones). The vertical lines represent the guitar's six strings, and the horizontal lines represent frets. The black dots indicate the positioning of the player's fingers, while open circles above the bold line indicate open strings and Xs indicate strings that are not sounded. I have presented all the chords in root position, whereas Moore puts the lowest possible chord tone in the bass, so that C, D, and A are all presented in inversion. I believe my presentation more accurately represents standard rock and folk usage. (Although in the case of a tonic-dominant bass pattern, common to folk, the 2nd inversions of C, D, and A would occur as a product of arpeggiation.)

²² Barre chords are played by placing the index finger across all six strings, shortening the neck as if with a temporary capo, while the remaining fingers form open chords (most often with the A or E fingerings).

Table 2-1 indicates the standard open chord alterations commonly employed. I limit the group to those chords in which a contiguous series of four or more strings can be played, and indicate the number of strings for each chord.

Table 2-1: Open Chord Possibilities in Standard Guitar Tuning

Root	Major	Minor	Major 7	Minor 7	Dominant 7
C	5	4*	5	No	5
G	6	4*	6*	No	6
D	4	4	4	4	4
A	5	5	5	5	5
E	6	6	6*	6	6
B	No	No	No	No	5
F	No	No	6	No	No

* indicates voicings that are uncommon, due either to poor voice disposition or difficulty of fingering.²¹

While rock guitarists have tended to prefer the limited resonance of barre chords when playing with distortion (sometimes choosing even to omit the chord third and play a “power chord”), the fuller sound of open voicings has been routinely favored in acoustic or non-distorted electric settings. One byproduct of this tendency is that in the switch from folk to folk-rock, traditional patterns of harmony, voice leading, and even texture were maintained. While the open voicings were not adhered to unfailingly (barre chords such as F and B make frequent appearances in the keys of C and E respectively, and less standard open chords also appear), they tended to form a norm against which deviations were introduced to provide variety. Textural and timbral characteristics of the standard voicings also became part of the lingua franca of guitar-based composition. The D major chord, for instance, in its common four-string voicing, is a thinner, brighter sonority than

²¹ Countless other possible voicings are in fact possible, and routinely utilized by jazz guitarists. I have limited my focus on “first position” chords, which are most commonly employed by folk and rock guitarists.

the six-string G major chord. Of course these relationships are maintained in transposition via capo.²⁴

MITCHELL'S GUITAR CONTEMPORARIES

To examine the importance of guitar-based harmonic practice in the music of Mitchell's contemporaries, I will now turn to representative works by Dylan, Simon, and Taylor. Dylan's "Positively 4th Street," which, as we have seen, had a pivotal influence on Mitchell, is written in straight verse form, based upon a single repeating harmonic progression featuring solely standard open chords: G Am C G G D C Em7 D. The chaotic texture of the recorded performance, however, conceals the sound of strummed rhythm guitar. Electric organ, slightly overdriven²⁵ electric guitar, and honky-tonk piano freely drift between chordal accompaniment and lead embellishment, while drums, tambourine, and electric bass provide a steady rhythmic underpinning. Occasionally a track of clean electric rhythm guitar breaks through the texture, betraying the means of the song's original conception. In "All Along the Watchtower" (1967) a similar adherence to strict verse form is maintained, and the even simpler repeated chord progression C[♯]m B A B is obtained via capo transposition of Am G F G.²⁶ Here the strumming of the standard open Am and G and barre F voicings are clearly audible on acoustic guitar, while extended harmonica solos generate textural interest over a simple bass and drums foundation. Both songs illustrate the coexistence in Dylan's work of stylistic connections to rock (electric instruments, improvised blues-based solos, drums) and folk (simple verse form, standard open chord voicings). Indeed, almost any song

²⁴ For a definition of "capo" see note 21 above.

²⁵ An "overdriven" guitar sound is distorted by means of its audio signal being pushed above the capacity of the amplifier or speaker through which it is played.

²⁶ Bob Dylan, "All Along the Watchtower," *John Wesley Harding* (Columbia CL 2804 CS 9604, 1967).

from Dylan's entire post-1964 oeuvre could serve to illustrate these overlapping alignments.

"All Along the Watchtower" appeared on Dylan's album *John Wesley Harding*, released in the final week of 1967. At the end of a two-year period of "baroque, psychedelic excess"²⁷ in rock, Dylan's return to the basic texture of acoustic guitar, bass, and drums helped to foster a renewed simplicity in public taste.²⁸ Simon and Garfunkel, whose output never delved beyond the realm of folk rock into psychedelia, achieved their greatest success in 1968, with the album *Bookends* and the soundtrack to the film *The Graduate* sharing the top two positions in the Billboard album charts for nine weeks.²⁹ Paul Simon's songwriting featured clever, literate lyrics in the vein of Dylan coupled with a sophisticated approach to harmony, which nonetheless remained centered around the standard open chords. The guitar part for the first thirteen measures of "At the Zoo," from *Bookends* (Example 2-3), exemplifies this point. What initially purports to be a tonic major 7 in A is reconceived, when G $\sharp$ falls to G $\natural$ on the guitar's highest string (m.3), as A7, which then serves as V of V in G major. A7 leads to D7 (m.5), which alternates with D6 as the stopped note C is pulled off to the open B string, creating an idiosyncratic, weak dominant. Throughout the first six measures a traditional folk fingerpicking pattern is employed.

²⁷ Anthony DeCurtis, "The Band is Gone, the Waltz Plays On," *The New York Times*, April 7, 2002, section 2, 1.

²⁸ According to Walter Rimler, the influence of Dylan's new direction, which constituted his return to public musical life after a near-fatal motorcycle accident, was monumental: "It was not a new sound but it was an unexpected one and, given Dylan's expert songwriting and his novel use of lyrics as parables, it single-handedly ended pop psychedelia." Walter Rimler, *Not Fade Away: A Comparison of Jazz Age with Rock Era Pop Song Composers* (Mississippi: Pierian Press, 1984), 64. DeCurtis, in "The Band is Gone," argues for the importance of the Band's debut album, "Music from Big Pink," in reversing the trend.

²⁹ Simon and Garfunkel, *Bookends* (Columbia KCS 9529, 1968) and *The Graduate* (Columbia OS 3180, 1968).

Example 2-3: Guitar Part for Simon and Garfunkel's "At the Zoo"

The musical score for the guitar part of Simon and Garfunkel's "At the Zoo" is presented in three staves. The first staff (measures 1-4) features chords AM7 and A7. The second staff (measures 5-8) features chords D7, D6, D7, D6, G, and Em. The third staff (measures 9-10) features chords G and Em, marked "strummed chords - start of Chorus" and "f".

The short verse ends uncertainly as G, once attained (m.7), descends immediately to E minor (m. 8), as if the harmony refuses to support the singer's affirmation, "I do believe it's true," with a strong cadence. The sentiment *and* the progression are both confirmed in the rollicking chorus (m.10), where G and Em alternate as loud strummed chords, ultimately accompanied by full band, and then move on to a resolute D dominant that finally and firmly establishes the key of G major (not shown in the example). The band's entrance reinforces the natural fullness of the two six-string chords, G and Em, and provides a contrast to the jazzier, thinner chords in the quiet, ponderous verse. Here, then, flexible adherence to the traditional open chord voicings does not preclude originality, but acts nonetheless as a compositional determinant and a link to standard gestures of guitar-based songwriting.

James Taylor recorded his eponymous first album in England in 1968, on the Beatles' Apple Record label.³⁰ Taylor and Mitchell, with their focus on acoustic guitar, and their probing, self-revelatory lyrics, were two of the earliest exponents of the singer-songwriter style, which achieved its greatest popularity in the early 1970s. Yet if Mitchell's debut album, *Song to a Seagull*, in its stark underproduction, reflected the return to simplicity wrought by Dylan and Simon and Garfunkel, Taylor's debut – authorized and overseen by the Beatles themselves, and recorded at the same time and place as their sessions for the *White Album*³¹ – readily betrayed the lingering influence of pop psychedelia.³² Indeed *James Taylor*, with its lush and sometimes dissonant interludes for string quartet and harpsichord, occasional orchestral accompaniment, Beatles-inspired (and performed) backing vocals, and guest appearance by Paul McCartney on bass, shares many of the production values of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.³³ The latter album had been released less than a year earlier, and had maintained a continued presence on both the British and U'S sales charts after holding the number one position on each for months.³⁴ Taylor's album, however, did not sell well, and several of its songs became popular only later, after he had achieved fame and rerecorded them in simpler arrangements. In the songs' original versions, Taylor's bluesy, folk-style guitar playing and nasal, unaffected voice often seemed at odds with

³⁰ *James Taylor*, APCOR 3, 1968. Rereleased on CD, Capitol CDP 7 97577 2, 1991.

³¹ *The White Album* is the popular (and almost universally employed) nickname for *The Beatles* (Apple 101, 1968).

³² For the circumstances surrounding the recording of the album *James Taylor*, see Timothy White, *Long Ago and Far Away: James Taylor, His Life and Music* (London: Omnibus Press, 2001), 134–140.

³³ McCartney plays on one track, "Carolina in My Mind," on which both he and George Harrison also sing backing vocals. This recording, with its layered, reverberant harmonies and string arrangements, differs substantially from the simpler, more well-known version released on *James Taylor's Greatest Hits*, Warner 2979 (1976). The Beatles, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, Capitol 2653, 1967.

³⁴ For British chart figures on *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, see Paul Gambaccini, Tim Rice and Jonathan Rice, *The Guinness Book of British Hit Albums*, 7th ed. (Enfield, England: Guinness, 1996), 58.

the ornate, contrapuntal instrumental settings and multi-layered, processed vocal harmonies.

Like Simon's, Taylor's approach to guitar-based composition features occasional jazzy, idiosyncratic chords, which are thrown into relief by the prevalence of standard open voicings. Example 2-4 shows the opening guitar riff of "Something in the Way She Moves," the only song on *James Taylor* arranged for unaccompanied guitar and voice (prefaced by a thirty-five-second quasi-baroque harpsichord introduction). Here, with the capo on the third fret, Taylor alternates fingering a standard A voicing and an un-folklike E minor 9 voicing, obtained by an efficient slide up the neck. The sounding progression is C Gm9, and this pattern recurs throughout the song in the verses. The Gm9 chord serves as a kind of emblem in the verse – the song's harmonic stamp of originality.

Example 2-4: Intro to James Taylor's "Something in the Way She Moves"³⁴

The image displays a musical score for the guitar intro of "Something in the Way She Moves" by James Taylor. The score is written in 4/4 time and includes a capo on the 3rd fret. The guitar part is shown on a single staff with a treble clef. The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, with a consistent rhythmic pattern. Above the staff, the chords A and Em9 are indicated, alternating every two measures. The A chord is shown as a standard open voicing (x02211) and the Em9 chord is shown as a non-standard voicing (x02211). The riff is marked with a double bar line at the end of each four-measure phrase.

The chord progression, along with the accompanying lyrics, is given in Figure 2-1.

³⁴ For the sake of simplicity, and in order to note Taylor's reliance on standard open voicings, the musical examples and correlating discussion present the song in its untransposed (un-capoed) version.

Figure 2-1: Harmonic and Formal Summary for the Verse of James Taylor – “Something in the Way She Moves”

Intro: A Em⁹ A Em⁹

Verse:

Phrase 1

Line 1: A Em⁹ A Em D G A

*“There’s Something in the way she moves
or looks my way or calls my name”*

Line 2: Em G C D

*“That seems to leave this troubled world
behind.”*

Phrase 2

Line 3: A Em⁹ A Em D G A

*“And if I’m feeling down and blue
or troubled by some foolish game”*

Line 4: Em G C A

*“She always seems to make me change
my mind.”*

It should be noted that the Em⁹ voicing is completely distinct from the Em voicing, which is the same as that shown above in Example 2-2. All of the other chords in the verse occur in the voicings shown in Example 2-1 above. Taylor, a skillful guitarist, peppers his playing with bass runs and suspensions. The latter are formed with open strings, and then resolve to chord tones as the strings are stopped.

Harmonically, the chord progression is best understood by adopting the modal conception of rock harmony advocated by Moore.³⁶ In this light, the verse resides primarily in A Mixolydian, with a momentary veer towards A Dorian in line 2 (C D is Dorian III IV) and an instance of fleeting modal borrowing in line 4 (C A is III I). Formally, the verse clearly outlines a half-close/close periodic structure, with a plagal cadence between the antecedent (lines 1 and 2) and consequent (lines 3 and 4) phrases.

³⁶ See Moore, “The So-Called ‘Flattened Seventh’ in Rock,” *Popular Music* 14:2 (1995), 185-201; *Rock The Primary Text*, esp. 52-55, and “Patterns of Harmony,” *Popular Music* 11 (1992), 73-106. For other examples of the modal analysis of rock, see note 38 of chapter 1 (p. 13).

Moore discusses the prevalence in rock harmony of the ,VII-I cadential figure.³⁷ and his observation may help to explain the presence of the Dorian turn here. Already in line 1, G has led cadentially to A; the C chord in line 2 may thus be considered analogous to an applied dominant, which leads to the plagal half cadence on D. Yet this functionality is dispensed with in the corresponding portion of the consequent phrase, as C leads directly back to A. Indeed, once this happens, some version of three standard voicings, D, G, and C, as well as the Em9, have led to the tonic A. This harmonic layout suggests that the excursion to the Dorian mode results from a compositional approach that treats the standard open voicings as a nearly interchangeable chordal vocabulary.³⁸

Yet an equally plausible, and not wholly contradictory explanation for Taylor's polymodal harmonic style lies in his familial lineage and musical heritage. As Moore writes, "[t]he Mixolydian/Dorian nature of much English traditional song, and its influence on 'folk rock' is widely accepted."³⁹ In his 2001 biography of Taylor, Timothy White traces the Taylor family history back to Scotland in the seventeenth century, noting the recurrence of various family themes, such as love of the sea and alcoholism, throughout the centuries, as well as Taylor's reliance on "song-crafting customs of

³⁷ Moore, "The So-Called Flattened Seventh," 191.

³⁸ "Something in the way she moves" is by no means the only one of Taylor's famous songs to arrive at polymodality through a reliance on open voicings. "Carolina In My Mind," from the same album, begins with a diatonic chorus in the key of F major that makes use of every open voicing except for C (sounding E, with the capo on the third fret). The missing C voicing then occurs as the second chord of the verse, giving it a pronounced Mixolydian sound (the C voicing, sounding E, is ,VII of the D voicing, which sounds F). "Fire and Rain," from *Sweet Baby James* (Warner Bros. 1843, 1970), Taylor's hugely successful follow-up to *James Taylor*, features a verse which resides primarily in C Mixolydian (again, the capo is on the 3rd fret, so the voicings are those of A Mixolydian), with an occasional Ionian inflection as the seventh degree is raised to create a major V chord. The V leads not to the I, however, but right back to Mixolydian via the major ,VII chord, which then leads cadentially to I. Here again, the chord progression is the product of a traversal through the standard voicings: A, Em7, D, E, and G maj 7 (no C voicing is used in the song). The chorus progression (setting the words "I've seen fire and I've seen rain," etc.) features a thrice repeated IV ii V I progression (Ionian) before the fourth and concluding line reinvokes ,VII (not cadentially, however) and establishes the Mixolydian mode as central.

³⁹ Moore, "The So-Called Flattened Seventh," 190.

Scottish-Irish derivation.”⁴⁰ Far from a harmonic aberration, then, Taylor’s polymodal approach, alongside the inclination towards open voicings that engenders it, stems from a multifaceted connection to traditions of guitar-based music.

The preceding discussion of aspects of the mid- to late-1960s compositional practices of Bob Dylan, Paul Simon and James Taylor provides a contextual backdrop for stylistic consideration of Mitchell’s early recorded music. It is to such consideration that I now turn. Unlike the albums discussed above, nine of the ten songs on *Song to a Seagull*, feature solely acoustic guitar and voice.⁴¹ Mitchell’s ability to go forward with this seeming throwback to the early 1960s folk sound, despite the skepticism of her record label (Warner Reprise), owed much to the intervention of David Crosby and her manager Elliot Roberts. Crosby, already then famous as a former member of the Byrds, served as the album’s producer, and used his clout to win for Mitchell a degree of independence that would have significant ramifications for her subsequent career. As Mitchell later recalled:

David put me into the game at a certain level and helped me keep control of my work. In those days I resembled a folk singer to the untrained ear...what David and Elliot [Roberts] did was to make me look like the new movement. The record company was going to ‘folk rock’ me up and David thought that would be a tragedy, that my music should be recorded the way I wrote it. He appreciated it the way it was and since he had been in the premier folk rock group, he could go to the record company with some authority and say, ‘I’m going to produce her’, and the trick was that he was not going to ‘produce’ me at all!⁴²

Thus while both Mitchell and Taylor began their recording careers under the auspices of famous rock stars, the results could not have been more different. While the Beatles worked with producer Peter Asher and arranger Richard Hewson at recasting Taylor in

⁴⁰ White, *Long Ago and Far Away*, 4.

⁴¹ The exception is “Night in the City,” on which Steven Stills plays electric bass and Mitchell overdubs a track of honky-tonk piano. Mitchell sings her own backing vocals on several tracks.

⁴² Quoted in O’Brien, *Shadows and Light*, 72-73.

their own image. Crosby preserved as paramount Mitchell's individual identity. After *Song to a Seagull*, Mitchell would serve as her own producer, a role she had all but nominally assumed from the start. She would also play many of the instruments, design the album covers, write most of the arrangements, sing most of the backing vocals, and compose the words and music for her albums. This degree of self-sufficiency, shared by none of the artists considered above, goes some way towards resolving the problem of authorship – often vexing in popular music studies – in discussions of Mitchell's work. Since, particularly on her earliest albums, Mitchell was in charge of every aspect of her music's realization, authorial intent and the validity of Mitchell's work as *art* seem to be justifiable areas of inquiry. The most obvious place to begin such inquiry is with an examination of Mitchell's guitar innovations.

MITCHELL AND THE GUITAR

From the start, Mitchell's approach to composing was fundamentally influenced by her unusual relationship with the guitar. Having suffered from polio as a child, she was afflicted with a weak left hand, and was thus unable to finger complex chords, or move with agility between harmonies. She was similarly frustrated in her attempts, while learning guitar from Pete Seeger's instructional record, *The Folksinger's Guitar Guide*, to master conventional right-hand finger picking techniques.⁴³ Rather than allowing her

⁴³ In an interview with Jeffrey Pepper Rogers, Mitchell incorrectly recalls the title of Seeger's record as "How to Play Folk-Style Guitar," and specifies the right-hand technique she was unable to master as that developed by the Seeger family housekeeper, folksinger Elizabeth Cotten. See Rogers, "My Secret Place: The Guitar Odyssey of Joni Mitchell," in *The Joni Mitchell Companion*, 220. In fact, the record, which was accompanied by a 22-page instructional manual, was *The Folksinger's Guitar Guide*, Folkways Records FP354 (1956), and no mention of Cotten occurs on it or in the accompanying book. The record does, however, provide fascinating insight into Mitchell's development. Far from advocating any one particular technique, Seeger emphasizes the importance of developing an individual guitar style. He presents not only standard folk picking patterns such as Woody Guthrie's "Church Lick," but flamenco and rumba patterns as well. In a list of suggested listening at the end of the manual, he mentions recordings not only by traditional folk guitarists such as Merle Travis and Leadbelly, but also those by Andre Segovia

physical shortcomings to confine her to a musically simple idiom. Mitchell found several innovative ways to circumvent her difficulties. The most important of these solutions is her reliance on alternative guitar tunings. As Mitchell put it, "...I craved chordal movement that I couldn't get out of standard tuning without an extremely articulate left hand."⁴⁴ While she initially contented herself with the several common open tunings that were "kicking around the coffeehouses,"⁴⁵ she had already begun to stray towards less charted territories by the time she cut her first album. Table 2-2 lists the tunings for the songs of *Song to a Seagull*, which can be divided into two groups. The first group of songs, numbers 3, 4, 5, 8, and 10, use open D (DADF#AD) or open G tunings (DGDGBD).⁴⁶ The tunings for the second group, numbers 1, 2, 6, 7 and 9, are more unusual, and reveal Mitchell's proclivity to explore not only the tonal, but also the timbral possibilities of alternate tunings. Of these, all feature two adjacent strings related by unison or step (1, 2, 7, 9) and/or strings tuned significantly below their natural pitch level (2, 6, 7, 9).

and Carlos Montoya. And, perhaps most interesting in connection with Mitchell, he encourages the beginning guitarist to experiment with alternate tunings. One of the tunings he presents, open G: DGDGBD, is used by Mitchell often in her early career, and twice on *Song to a Seagull* (see Table 2-2 on p. 42). It thus seems possible that Seeger's album was a more pivotal influence than Mitchell has acknowledged. I am grateful to Jim McCarthy for alerting me to the existence of this record. Filene has noted that Seeger, far from being a folk purist, had an "extremely flexible definition of 'folk music,'" and did not scorn the artifice or elite qualities in classical music. He was, on the contrary, interested in the cross-fertilization of folk and classical musics (among other types). See Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, 194-196. Again, this seems interesting in light of Mitchell, who has repeatedly aligned her early work with classical, as opposed to folk styles. For instance, in 1998 she said "I came into the game looking like a folksinger, but I was really playing classical art songs... Those weren't like the chords that folkies played." Quoted in Neil Strauss, "The Hissing of a Living Legend," *New York Times Magazine* (October 4, 1998), reprinted in *The Joni Mitchell Companion*, 214.

⁴⁴ Ruhlman, "From Blue to Indigo," 23. Standard, "Spanish" guitar tuning, from the lowest to highest string, is E A D G B E.

⁴⁵ Mitchell quoted in Jody Denberg, "Taming Joni Mitchell – Joni's Jazz," in *The Joni Mitchell Companion*, 203. Mitchell claims that Eric Anderson first showed her alternative tunings, but see note 43 above on Pete Seeger's influence.

⁴⁶ Information on tuning comes from the Joni Mitchell Homepage (www.jonimitchell.com), the Joni Mitchell Discussion List web page (www.jmdl.com), and Mitchell, *Hits* songbook (Warner Brothers Publications, 1997), and is further corroborated by my own listening and analysis.

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Table 2-2: Tunings for *Song to a Seagull*

No fill = "open D" or "open G" tuning		Gray fill = unusual alternate tuning	
#	Song Title	Tuning	Tuning w/Capo
1	I Had a King	DADEAD Capo 7	AEABEA
2	Michael From Mountains	FFCGAC	
3	Night in the City	DADF#AD Capo 5	GDGBDG
4	Marcie	DGDGBD	
5	Nathan LaFraneer	DGDGBD	
6	Sisotowbell Lane	CGDFCE Capo 2	DAEGDF#
7	The Downreader	DGDDAD	
8	The Pirate of Penance	DADF#AD	
9	Song to a Seagull	CGCGCE	
10	Cactus Tree	DADF#AD Capo 5	GDGBDG

The low C of "Sisotowbell Lane," for instance, has a dark, buzzing quality, while the low unison Fs of "Michael from Mountains," or the high unison Cs of "Song to a Seagull" create the equivalent of orchestral doublings. The harmonic implications of the tunings are significant. Far from accenting a conventional chordal vocabulary with occasional personal touches, Mitchell must to some extent reinvent her tonal language with each new tuning. As she describes the process:

You're twiddling and you find the tuning. Now the left hand has to learn where the chords are, because it's a whole new ballpark, right? So you're groping around, looking for where the chords are, using very simple shapes. Put it in a tuning and you've got four chords immediately – open.

⁴⁶ Information on tuning comes from the Joni Mitchell Homepage (www.jonimitchell.com), the Joni Mitchell Discussion List web page (www.jmdl.com), and Mitchell, *Hits* songbook (Warner Brothers Publications, 1997), and is further corroborated by my own listening and analysis.

POETRY AND HARMONY IN "I HAD A KING"

Figure 2-2: Lyrics to "I Had a King"

Verse 1:

I had a king
In a tenement castle.
Lately he's taken
To painting the pastel
walls brown
He's taken the curtains
down:
He's swept with
The broom of contempt
And the rooms
Have an empty ring:
He's cleaned with the
tears
Of an actor who fears
For the laughter's sting.

Chorus:

I can't go back there
anymore.
You know my keys won't
Fit the door:
You know my thoughts
Don't fit the man.
They never can.
They never can.

Verse 2:

I had a king
Dressed in drip-dry and
paisley.
Lately he's taken to
saying
I'm crazy and blind.
He lives in another time.
Ladies in gingham
Still blush when he sings
them
Of wars and wine.
But I, in my leather and
lace,
I can never
Become that kind.

Chorus

Verse 3:

I had a king
In a salt-rusted carriage
Who carried me off
To his country for
marriage
Too soon.
Beware of the power of
moons.
There's no one to blame.
No, there's no one to
name
As a traitor here.
The queen's in the groove
And the king's on the
road
Till the end of the year.

Chorus

Outro:

They never can.
They never can.

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According to Mitchell, “I Had a King” chronicles the demise of her marriage to American folksinger Chuck Mitchell.⁴⁸ Using quasi-medieval symbolic imagery, the narrator portrays herself in the first person as a queen who has turned her back on the tired ways of a cynical, old-fashioned king and claimed her freedom. An overall perusal of the transcription (Appendix B), which includes fretbox notation for the first verse and chorus, allows for several cursory observations. The song’s standard verse-chorus form is arranged as follows:

Intro: mm. 1-4	Verse 2: mm. 32-48	Verse 3: mm. 59-75
Verse 1: mm. 5-21	Chorus 2: mm. 49-58	Chorus 3: mm. 76-85
Chorus 1: mm. 22-31		Outro: mm. 86-93

Throughout the song, Mitchell makes maximum use of the guitar’s resonance. Her chords all feature plentiful open strings, and all six strings are consistently sounded throughout the first ten measures of the verse. A chord featuring all of the open strings occurs in the ninth and tenth measures (and corresponding position in subsequent verses) and as the final chord of the song (see example 2-6 below for the first of these occurrences). Additionally, smaller all-open chords occur in the second half of the verse (e.g., mm. 13, 16, 17). Mitchell’s voice remains in its lowest register for the first section of the verse, and ventures considerably higher in the second. In the chorus she repeatedly traverses from the first to the second of these registral areas.

A closer examination of the opening measures reveals Mitchell’s compositional economy. By means of a simple right-hand fingering that slides from frets 3-5 down to 1-3, Mitchell alternates between Aadd4⁴⁹ in mm. 1-2 and Am9 in mm. 3-4. Each chord

⁴⁸ See Karl Dallas, “Joni: The Seagull from Saskatoon,” in *The Joni Mitchell Companion*, 8.

⁴⁹ I intentionally label the chord Aadd4 and not Asus4, because the suspension and resolution (D and C♯) sound simultaneously.

unfolds in linear fashion, with a melodic motive – first A-D-C $\sharp$ A-D-C $\sharp$, then G-C-B G-C-B – brought to the forefront in a middle voice (Example 2-5). The repetitive motive, which foreshadows the vocal melody, invokes the stalemated marriage that the narrator will describe, and the tired routines that she has resolved to leave behind. It should be noted that with the exception of the final E's in mm. 2 and 4, all notes are struck on separate strings and allowed to ring through. The final Es result from the release of the stopped note A, and contribute to a weak dominant turn motivating the next (tonic) chord.

Example 2-5: "I Had a King," mm. 1-4
Tuning DAD EAD (capo AEABEA)



Whitesell has rightly noted the polymodal nature of this song, with its shifts between A Ionian and Aeolian in the first part of the verse, and its turn towards A Dorian after m. 13.⁵⁰ As Moore has repeatedly argued, and as we have already seen above, modal mixture (beyond classical minor/major borrowings) is actually quite common in rock harmony. The opposition of major and minor tonics *is* something of a trademark for Mitchell, but, as I shall argue below, the pivotal idiosyncrasy of her early harmonic language, while certainly complemented by this feature, is largely determined by her use of the guitar.

Mitchell sings the first two lines of text over a repetition of the introductory guitar pattern. Here the major/minor tonic opposition has its corollary in the lyrics. The first line, "I had a king in a tenement castle," with its simultaneously positive and tarnished

⁵⁰ Whitesell, "Harmonic Palette in Early Joni Mitchell," 180.

imagery, is supported by the A chord, made dissonant by the presence of D. The second line, supported by Am9, reveals the king's dark side. In verse one he's "painting the pastel walls brown," and the pivotal, revelatory word, "brown" (and in subsequent verses "blind," and "[too] soon") is sung on a low A set to the all-open chord (example 2-6). The voice's added dynamic emphasis and resonance, the lyrical significance, the guitar's switch from linear to blocked presentation and its higher degree of resonance, and the musical line's status as the completion of an unconventional antecedent/consequent period, all serve to mark the moment as cadential.

Example 2-6: The "All-open chord" – A Cadence on the Word "brown," mm. 7-9

The image shows a musical score for a song. The top staff is the vocal line, and the bottom staff is the guitar line. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The lyrics are: "Late-ly he's tak-en to paint-ing the pas-tel walls brown". The vocal line ends on a low A note. The guitar line features a series of chords, including an all-open chord (A) at the end of the phrase "brown".

While in a conventional tonal analysis, the initial ten measures of music could be said to vacillate between three variants of the tonic A chord, Mitchell's treatment of the all-open chord, both in the verses, and as the resolutely strummed final chord of the song, suggests that *it* is the true tonic sonority.⁵¹ The chord is Asus2 (AEABEA), and its unresolved, suspended quality reflects the frustration of the lyrics, while at the same time undermining their resolve with a sense of ambivalence. It also normalizes suspensions as

⁵¹ This approach is not confined to "I Had a King", but recurs throughout Mitchell's output. On *Song to a Scagull*, "Sisotowbell Lane," "Cactus Tree," and "Nathan LaFraneer" all end with all-open chords, and every song with the exception of "Night in the City" exploits the all-open sonority at some point.

permanent stand-ins for chord thirds, a defining characteristic of the song's harmony.⁵²

This often leads to a harmonic ambiguity that directly contradicts the following generalization by Moore:

Rock Practice maintains a strong tendency to treat harmonies as indivisible units. Listeners are, therefore, in an either/or situation: at every moment, we are hearing either one or another nameable harmony.⁵³

While this statement is certainly valid for the songs by Dylan, Simon, and Taylor discussed above, it is not true for "I Had a King." I have already addressed the implied dominant at the end of the second and fourth measures of the opening guitar pattern. This leads to particular ambiguity in the case of the Am9 chord, which already contains all the notes of the minor i and minor v triads. In the second section of the verse, the blurring between tonic and dominant becomes more pronounced. In mm. 13-16, the A pedal is replaced by an E pedal, which is sounded in the second half of each measure. The first notes of each measure outline a middle voice descent from B to E – the defining fifth of the dominant (example 2-7). The progression is then repeated from mm. 17-21, with a delay in m. 20 (discussed below). On a more local level, each measure except m. 15 vacillates between A and E harmonies, although the distinctions tend to be unclear due to the frequent absence of chord thirds. The A appears as a sus2 chord in m. 13 (with C briefly occurring in the voice) and a sus4 in m. 14, while the E is a sus4 in mm. 13 and 16, and a quartal harmony in ms. 14 (E4: EAD), where the vocal line briefly supplies what never appears in the guitar part during this section: a third for the E harmony. Since

⁵² "I Had a King" is not the only song on *Song to a Seagull* that normalizes suspensions in this way. The all-open chord of "Sisotowbell Lane," which plays a similar cadential role as the song's final sonority, is Dadd2add4 (DAEGDF#). The all-open chord for "Michael From Mountains" is Fadd2 (FFCGAC), and for the Dawntreader it is Dsus4 (DGDDAD). In the latter two examples the all-open chord is articulated, but not as the last chord of the song.

⁵³ Moore, *Rock: The Primary Text*, 53.

Asus2 and Asus4 are simply inversions of Esus4 and E4, a complete distinction between the chords is undermined.

Example 2-7: "I Had a King," mm. 13-16

The image displays a musical score for measures 13-16 of the song "I Had a King." It consists of four staves. The top staff is the vocal line, with lyrics: "swept with The broom of con - tempt And the rooms have an emp -". The second staff shows guitar chords: Asus2 (with a note "Middle voice descent from B down to E"), Esus4, Asus4, and E4. The third staff continues the vocal line with lyrics: "ty - ring He's". The bottom staff shows guitar chords: Am7/G, Am/E, and Esus4. A horizontal line separates the second and third staves, with the label "E Pedal" below it. The measure numbers 13, 15, and 16 are indicated at the beginning of their respective staves.

Mitchell's use of quartal structures in "I Had a King," as Whitesell has noted, is particularly obvious in the second section of the verse: those chords built on E in measures 14 and 18, and F# in mm. 16 and 20-21.⁵⁴ Yet while the quartal quality of these chords is an aural reality, the chords are not necessarily without tonal functionality, and may be heard in several alternate, and not mutually exclusive ways given their context.⁵⁵ The E harmony may be heard as either a suspended dominant 7th chord (or an Em7add4 in m. 14, if the vocal G# is factored in – see example 2-7) or possibly an

⁵⁴ Whitesell, "Harmonic Palette in Early Joni Mitchell," 180.

⁵⁵ Mitchell has a proclivity for quartal sonorities in both functional and non-functional contexts. See my analysis of "The Last Time I Saw Richard" in chapter three.

extension of the A harmony at the beginning of mm. 14 and 18 over the E pedal tone.

Regarding the chords on F♯, the first possibility is that the F♯s are accented passing tones from G♯ in m. 15 (and 19) to E in m. 16 (and 20) – a metrically displaced resolution of the fifth descent begun in m. 13 (and 17). The chord atop the dissonant note is thus simply Asus2 – the tonic all-open sonority (example 2-8).

Example 2-8: Voice Leading Explanation of Quartal Harmony, mm. 19-21

19

Am7 G Am F Asus2 F#sus4

accented passing tone

The second possible explanation for the F♯ harmony is that it is in fact B7sus4 F♯, an applied dominant to the suspended, and metrically weak E chord which follows it (Example 2-9). This latter explanation is tenable particularly because suspended fourths routinely replace chord thirds throughout the song.

Example 2-9: Quartal Harmony as Applied Dominant, mm. 19-21

19

Am7 G Am E B7sus4 F# (V of) E#sus4

The insufficiency of both labelings suggests the inadequacy of the standard tonal lexicon for describing Mitchell's usage. Whitesell is right to call attention to the harmony, as it is particularly jarring in mm. 20-21, where its repetition breaks free of the prevailing metric scheme. Again, the narrator's impatience and desire to break free of her relationship are invoked.

The momentary resolution to Esus4 on the fourth beat of m. 21 provides a quick, weak dominant preparation for the chorus, where for the one time in the song a suspended fourth is resolved in conventional fashion to the tonic's major third. This happens when the guitar's D5 in m. 22, the suspended fourth of the A harmony, is first transferred to D6 in m. 23, the highest note the guitar plays, and then resolved to C#6 on the same string (example 2-10).⁵⁶ The ascent from D5 to D6 and subsequent fall to C#6 forms a countermelody to the vocal line, "I can't go back there anymore." As the narrator most forcibly asserts her independence, a persistently ambiguous harmony achieves its one resolution (which is repeated in mm. 25 and 27). Yet it is not an entirely firm one, as the bass moves from A in m. 22, to E in m. 23, and the song's only pure tonic major triad thus occurs in second inversion. Furthermore, the chord third disappears almost as soon as it is sounded, when the stopped string is released and C#6 falls to A6.

Example 2-10: Resolution of the Suspended 4th in the Chorus, mm. 22-23

a tempo

I can't go back there an - y - more

suspended 4th is transferred up one octave and then resolved

Asus4 A E A E no 3rd

⁵⁶ I am referring to the notated pitches, which sound one octave lower.

It should be clear that Mitchell does not employ an arbitrary or conventional finger picking or strumming pattern on the guitar, but plucks each note or combination of notes deliberately. Only thus can she bring to the foreground inner melodic motives such as those in mm. 1-4, the opposing fifth descent pedal tone in mm. 13-16 and 17-21, and the guitar's countermelody in the chorus. Similarly, harmonic ambiguities such as the major-minor and tonic-dominant oppositions, and their dramatic resolution in the chorus, are by no means accidents of any kind of conventional folk or rock technique. Mellers' appraisal of "Sisotowbell Lane," from the same album, seems particularly relevant here:

...as a whole the song is a subtle artefact: neither, like Jean Ritchie's 'None but one', a genuine folk tune metamorphosed into art nor, like Dolly Parton's 'Applejack', an artful exploitation of country-music convention, but an original *work of art*...⁵⁷

This convincing argument for Mitchell's work as art rests in large part on her deliberate eschewal of traditional compositional and performance techniques in her crafting of a thoroughly personal musical language.

VOCAL REGISTER AND RESONANCE IN "I HAD A KING"

If Mitchell's innovative approaches to the guitar and harmony served to distance her stylistically from folk rock and the work of other emerging singer-songwriters, her singing correspondingly distinguished her from popular folksingers such as Judy Collins and Joan Baez. The emergence of Mitchell's unique vocal style, characterized by the skillful alternation of rich alto and breathy soprano registers, was coincident with her turn to songwriting in the mid-1960s. Mitchell discovered both to be essential points of differentiation. As she observed in a 1966 interview with Temple University Radio:

⁵⁷ Mellers, "White Seagull, Black Highwaywoman," 143.

In the beginning I had a soprano voice so everyone compared me to Baez. I'd written a couple of songs but I just decided that the only way that I was going to be able to differentiate myself from any other of the singers was to have original material. Every time I'd find a song, I'd find out afterwards that Judy Collins or Joan Baez or somebody had recorded it. So with my new material, I thought I was fairly safe and then I discovered some lower register [vocal] tones that I didn't know I could use before.⁵⁸

Although her initial discovery of those tones frightened her, as she thought they had come at the expense of her high register, eventually “the two came together of themselves.”⁵⁹ Yet as Mellers observes, in “I Had a King,” “Joni employs her two voices – folkily treble and jazzily dark – as though they *hadn't* ‘come together’, and her undulations between them equivocate between dream and reality.”⁶⁰

There is, to be sure, a stark contrast in not only the register but also the timbral quality of Mitchell's voice in the second half of each verse (e.g., mm. 13-20). Her tone is ethereal, almost mockingly sweet, in marked distinction to the lower sections of the verses and the choruses, where it is rich, replete with overtones.⁶¹ Yet I propose a more biographically grounded reading than Mellers' equation of the two voices with “dream” and “reality.” The lyrics in this section (henceforth section B) in verses one and two comprise the narrator's (presumably Mitchell's) critique of her ex-king (presumably Chuck Mitchell) on artistic and intellectual grounds. The references to the historical Chuck Mitchell, the older, more experienced folksinger whom Mitchell met and married in 1965 and then accompanied to Detroit, are specific.⁶² In section B of both verses one and two, Mitchell casts Chuck as a relic – an emotionally limited performer acting out

⁵⁸ Quoted in O'Brien, *Shadows and Light*, 48-49.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Mellers, “White Seagull, Black Highwaywoman,” 143.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁶¹ In *Interpreting Popular Music*, Brackett employs photos of frequency spectra as a more scientific alternative to verbal description of the human voice. I agree, however, with Allan Moore's contention that the result is imprecise and even confusing due to the technology's lack of sophistication to date. See Moore, review of *Interpreting Popular Music*, 658.

⁶² See O'Brien, *Shadows and Light*, 52.

tried and true, but tired, folksinger routines. The image of “an actor who fears for the laughter’s sting” is presented as a contrast to Mitchell herself – not an actor, but an honest soul searcher, unafraid of the potential humiliation afforded by public self-revelation. In verse two Chuck’s shallowness is more sharply depicted. The notion that he “lives in another time” is supported by the fact that “ladies in gingham,” most probably a reference to hippies or folk puritans, “still blush when he sings them of wars and wine.” Chuck is thus an old-style troubadour, relying not on personal, but on conventional, dated material to make women swoon. Mitchell asserts her sophistication and complexity by linking herself with finer, contrasting fabrics – leather and lace – and avows that she “can never become that kind.” It is left unclear whether she means to refer to Chuck’s swooning fans or Chuck himself, but it is the composite – her husband and the folk community at large – that she has outgrown. Both are repudiated aurally through mockery, by Mitchell’s coupling of her folk-soprano voice and a pentatonic melody to set these lines (mm. 16-21 and 40-47 - example 2-11 shows the first of these segments).

Example 2-11

A: Mitchell’s Pentatonic Melody, mm. 16-19



B: Pentatonic Scale⁶³



⁶³ Although this collection is not the anhemitonic pentatonic scale that is perhaps most often associated with folk music, its close relation to the diatonic scale and absence of a strong leading tone projects a similar quality.

Yet Mitchell's differences with Chuck extend beyond mere artistic or professional disparity, and the stakes of this song, and of her freedom, are higher. Although she makes a gesture towards equity in the third verse when she sings that "there's no one to blame" and "there's no one to name," it is Chuck's cruelty that endows "I Had a King" with its overriding seriousness. In "painting the pastel walls brown" and taking "the curtains down," (verse 1) he has deprived her of light and beauty. He tells Mitchell she's "crazy and blind" (verse 2), and is most damningly accused, in the third verse, of carrying her "off to his country for marriage too soon." And if Chuck is a cruel king, he is also inept as a material provider. His "tenement castle," "drip-dry" attire and "salt-rusted carriage" all firmly ground him in the base world of bohemian struggle that Mitchell – certainly by the time of *Song to a Seagull* – had abandoned. These sad, angry and scornful accusations imbue Mitchell's lower register singing with an intensity that wavers between desperation and strength.

As I have discussed above, Mitchell clearly viewed the discovery of her low range as liberating and empowering, while disparaging the days when she "used to be a breathy little soprano."⁴ In "I Had a King," her lower, more resonant voice seems to evoke her independence, or her struggle for its attainment, and her high voice, even if mocking, her constricted marital life. The melody of the chorus ascends from the lower register to the base of the higher one, A5, but avoids the ethereal vocal tone of the verse's section B (see example 2-10). The three ascending affirmations of the chorus: "I can't go back there anymore; You know my keys won't fit the door; You know my thoughts don't fit the

⁴ Quoted in Mellers, "White Seagull, Black Highwaywoman," 143. Ellie Hisama has written about Joan Armatrading's use of contrasting registers to represent traditional gender dichotomies (such as the mapping of high/low onto neediness/strength). See "Voice, Race, and Sexuality in the Music of Joan Armatrading," in *Audible Traces: Gender, Identity, and Music*, ed. Elaine Barkin and Lydia Hamessley (Zurich: Carciofoli Verlagshaus, 1999), 115-132.

man.” (first in mm. 22-27) which also feature the dramatic suspension resolutions discussed above, thus sound triumphant. But they lead to a return of the opening, ambivalent guitar pattern – this time with the chord order reversed: Am9 - Aadd4 – setting the narrator’s repeated statement “they never can.” (mm. 28-31). The resolve of the chorus, and of this line, is somewhat undermined by the setting, as the dissonant 4th is restored to the major tonic harmony (mm. 30-31), and Mitchell’s voice hovers somewhere between the two extremes of resonance and register employed in the song (example 2-12). At the end of the third and final chorus, “They never can” is repeated two additional times (mm. 86 and 88). The final time, the melody refrains from ascending to A5, as it always has previously, and peaks instead on E4 (example 2-13).

Example 2-12: “They never can,” mm. 28-31

Example 2-12 shows the musical score for measures 28-31. The top staff is the vocal line, and the bottom staff is the guitar accompaniment. The lyrics are "They ne-ver can" and "They never can". The guitar accompaniment features a complex, dissonant pattern with many beamed sixteenth notes. The chords are labeled as Am9 and Aadd4.

Example 2-13 : The Last Line of “I Had a King,” mm. 88-93

Example 2-13 shows the musical score for measures 88-93. The top staff is the vocal line, and the bottom staff is the guitar accompaniment. The lyrics are "They ne-ver ca" and "n". The guitar accompaniment features a complex, dissonant pattern with many beamed sixteenth notes. The tempo markings "vib" and "rit" are present above the staff.

Here Mitchell sings with more resonance than at any other point in the song. The fullness and conviction of her voice are confirmed by the resolute strumming of the all-open chord in m. 93. Yet of course, this chord, with its never-to-resolve B, maintains its power to belie the certainty of the final line, “they never can,” even as it projects a tonic-like finality.

CONCLUSION

In the preceding discussion of “I Had a King” I have focused primarily on two technical factors that distinguish Mitchell’s work from standard folk and folk-rock practice: her use of alternately tuned guitar as a compositional determinant, and her use of contrasting vocal registers and resonance-levels. Focusing on these two central elements of Mitchell’s early style has enabled me to demonstrate that even in purely acoustic settings, Mitchell is deeply concerned with timbral and textural nuance, and that her harmonic language, far from the product of a reliance on standard open guitar chords, is both fresh, and rich with ambiguity. These technical traits alone yield the possibility of subtle, and even plural interpretation of Mitchell’s songs on both syntactic and connotative levels. They also serve to distinguish her from both singer-songwriters such as James Taylor, whose career developed concurrently with hers, and those established stars who, in the late 1960s, were refashioning themselves as part of the new singer-songwriter movement. The latter included Paul Simon, John Lennon, and Carole King, all of whom had found tremendous success in the popular music scene of the 1960s and were now turning to the more adult, self-revelatory, and arguably even selfish confessionalism that seemed the logical outgrowth of Dylan’s turn toward self-discovery. Mitchell, marked from the outset with the stamp of honest individuality and, at least in

the earliest years of her career, a seeming disregard for the aesthetic demands of AM radio airplay, was in many ways a standard-bearer for the singer-songwriter ethos. While the limited success of *Song to a Seagull*, which reached only number 189 on the Billboard album sales charts,⁶⁵ did little to suggest a prolonged, fruitful recording career, both the music industry and the American cultural and political landscapes were realigning themselves in ways that would be particularly conducive to Mitchell's artistic growth and commercial viability.

⁶⁵ O'Brien, *Shadows and Light*, 326.

3

“The Last Time I Saw Richard”: Mitchell’s Rise to Stardom and Early Incorporation of Jazz

INTRODUCTION

The individualism and non-conformity Mitchell expressed in her music from the very outset of her career established her in many ways as a product of her times. Her lyrics, approach to the guitar, and vocal delivery, as well as the independence she was able to maintain as a creative artist in the notoriously constrictive popular music industry, gave her work particular relevance to its historical moment. Her unique blend of solo artistry, resistance to social orthodoxies, self-examination, and the desire for personal growth resonated with the turbulent changes that were transforming both American culture and the American counterculture in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Ironically, it was Mitchell’s prioritization of independence and inner probing that put her in lockstep with prevailing popular lifestyle trends, and endowed her music with the requisite cultural relevance for her to achieve pop stardom with alacrity. By the time of her 1971 album *Blue*, Mitchell had grown from a perceived folk revival holdover at the fringe of the pop music establishment into a household name – among the foremost exponents of the singer-songwriter phenomenon which reached its zenith in the early 1970s.

As I discussed in chapter 2, Mitchell’s musical non-conformity was in large part nurtured by her record label, Warner-Reprise, which afforded her considerable creative flexibility from the time of her first album. The fact that it did owed equal parts to David Crosby’s intervention in that initial project, and to changes in the music industry that reflected the concurrent evolution in the American socio-political domain. Mitchell’s virtually unrestricted creative license enabled her to expand her musical language, which

she did by incorporating, in rapid succession, piano composition and performance, elaborate through-composed arrangements for larger ensembles, and increasingly pronounced jazz inflections. Her decade-long approach to a full scale embrace of jazz, like the creative independence that helped spawn it, played a role both in the growing commercial success Mitchell enjoyed through the 1974 jazz-pop oriented album *Court and Spark*, and in the progressive decline of her record sales that began immediately thereafter and continued through the 1979 full-scale experimental jazz album *Mingus* and beyond.

In this chapter I will examine in its full context one of Mitchell's earliest recordings to engage jazz on a deep level, "The Last Time I Saw Richard," from *Blue* (1971). Her interest in jazz actually extends a good deal further back than this song, predating even her involvement with the popular folk song revival. As a budding record collector in high school, she had traded her own artwork for Miles Davis albums.¹ She was so moved upon hearing Lambert Hendricks and Ross's 1961 album *The Hottest New Group in Jazz* in the early 1960s, that she learned to sing every song on it.² In the late 1960s and early 1970s superficial sound elements of jazz, such as the preponderance of brass instruments and extended harmonies, came to have an increasing presence on AM radio. The combination of French horn and major seventh chords so dominated the Top 40 by the early 1970s that today it serves as a kind of sonic landmark that instantly recalls the era.³ Yet Mitchell's initial embrace of jazz was not in response to this trend, but

¹ O'Brien, *Shadows and Light*, 30.

² Leonard Feather, "Joni Mitchell Makes Mingus Sing," in *The Joni Mitchell Companion*, 91. Lambert, Hendricks and Ross, *The Hottest New Group in Jazz*, reissue (Sony C2K64933, 1996).

³ Consider, for instance, The Carpenters' "Close to You" (A&M 1183, 1970) on the album *Close to You* (A&M 4271, 1970) and Bread's "Make it with You" (Elektra 45686, 1970) on the album *On The Waters* (Elektra 74076, 1970).

inspired rather by its potential connotative significance. On her 1970 album *Ladies of the Canyon* she uses jazz as a found object in the song “For Free,” which describes the star narrator’s fleeting encounter with a street clarinetist. Strains of clarinet improvisation by session man Paul Horn enter as the song fades, and establish jazz as an ideal of purity, presented as a contrast to the narrator’s ambition for “fortune” and “velvet curtain calls.”⁴ In “The Last Time I Saw Richard,” Mitchell adopts jazz vocal phrasing as a means of expressing resistance, independence and parody. The song, which details the narrator’s encounter with the title character – presumably an ex-lover – functions on two levels: as a personal narrative of failed relationships and aspirations, and as an allegory of the frustrated idealism of the late 1960s. Mitchell’s subtle but deeply ingrained use of jazz performance and composition techniques in “Richard” enables her to distinguish both her in-song persona – the narrator – and herself from the cynical abandonment of enlightened countercultural values enacted by Richard, her foil.

“The Last Time I Saw Richard,” containing as it does the seeds of the gradual but radical stylistic transformation Mitchell would undergo over the course of the 1970s, and grounded as it is, both musically and lyrically, in the socio-political and economic contexts of Mitchell’s early career, provides particularly fertile material for scrutiny. In the discussion that follows, I will first examine the historical background of both American culture and the popular music industry as it pertains to Mitchell’s evolution from the time of *Song to a Seagull* (1968) to *Blue* (1971). Thereafter, I will present a contextually informed and stylistically sensitive close reading of “The Last Time I Saw Richard,” with particular emphasis on the emergence and significance of jazz in Mitchell’s musical language.

⁴ Mitchell, “For Free,” *Ladies of the Canyon* (Reprise 6376, 1970).

POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE LATE 1960S AND EARLY 1970S

The year in which Mitchell embarked upon her recording career, 1968, in many ways marked a cultural turning point for the Western world. As Bruce Schulman writes in his history of American culture in the 1970s:

If one date delineated the end of the Sixties and the beginning of the Seventies, it was the year 1968. It struck many observers, then and now, as a revolutionary moment. Nineteen sixty-eight marked simultaneously an *annus mirabilis* and an *annus horribilis*, a year of miracles and a year of horrors.⁵

To enumerate the cataclysmic events that shook both Europe and the United States in that single year risks cliché. Yet since 1968 is particularly significant in the context of my analysis as both the inauguration date of Mitchell's career and the date invoked by Mitchell in the very first line of "The Last Time I Saw Richard," a brief survey is appropriate. From student uprisings at the Sorbonne in Paris and Columbia University in New York, to the Soviet crushing of the Prague Spring, to the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, violent upheaval characterized the time. Escalation of the war in Vietnam and the election of Richard Nixon elicited protest and despair amongst a significant portion of America's youth, while the Civil Rights movement adopted a new militancy in the aftermath of King's murder.⁶ That same year, the New York Radical Women (NYRW) organized a disruption of the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City, New Jersey, thus inaugurating the movement known first as "women's liberation," and later as Second Wave feminism.⁷ In Chicago, massive demonstrations,

⁵ Schulman, *The Seventies*, 1.

⁶ Ibid., 1-8.

⁷ Debra Michals, "From 'Consciousness Expansion' to 'Consciousness Raising': Feminism and the Countercultural Politics of the Self," in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s*, ed. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (New York: Routledge, 2002), 41.

protests, and police-civilian conflicts disrupted the Democratic National Convention and were broadcast on national television.⁸

In the two years that immediately followed 1968, a string of pivotal events foretold the death of the idealism of the 1960s. In August of 1969, Charles Manson and his so-called “family” viciously murdered the actress Sharon Tate and three of her Los Angeles houseguests, in a crime apparently motivated in part by Manson’s interpretation of the Beatles’ *White Album*.⁹ In December of the same year, during a free concert given by the Rolling Stones at the Altamont Speedway in California, Hell’s Angels – hired by the Stones as security for the event – stabbed black audience member Meredith Hunter to death. In May of 1970, National Guardsmen opened fire on student protesters at Kent State University in Ohio, killing four. Three months later, Mitchell performed at the Isle of Wight music festival off the Southern coast of England. Promoted as an English corollary to 1969’s legendary Woodstock festival, the event was characterized by angry throngs of non-paying fans rattling the perimeter fences and intimidating performers and festival organizers alike.¹⁰ The spirit of peaceful coexistence and communal goals present only a year earlier in Bethel, New York, seemed now to have dissipated.

While the exact date is subject to debate, a new gloom descended upon young Americans and the political left during these years. Political historian and columnist Jules Witcover writes of 1968 as the precise moment “when for so many the dream of a

⁸ Schulman, *The Seventies*, 12-13.

⁹ Joan Didion specifically links the Manson murder with the end of an era: “Many people I know in Los Angeles believe that the Sixties ended abruptly on August 9, 1969, ended at the exact moment when word of the murders on Cielo Drive traveled like brushfire through the community, and in a sense this is true.” Joan Didion, *The White Album* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1979), 47. The definitive popular text on the Manson murders is Vincent Bugliosi and Curt Gentry, *Helter Skelter: The True Story of the Manson Murders* (New York: Norton, 1974).

¹⁰ Mitchell’s experience at the Isle of Wight Festival is documented in O’Brien, 116-120. Murray Lerner’s *Message To Love: The Isle of Wight Festival, The Movie*, is a documentary about the event featuring extensive concert footage (Castle Music Pictures, 1997).

nobler, optimistic America died, and the reality of a skeptical conservative America began to fill the void.”¹¹ For Joan Didion, that time came in 1969 with the Manson murders.¹² For Paul Simon, the date was still later:

My feeling is it bottomed out about 1971. People were so angry by 1971 that the ones who still had their wits about them and had talent and had enough energy and drive to do something, started working.¹³

The pessimism these statements describe ensued in the face of the crushing losses suffered by the various activist movements in the late 1960s, and prompted a shift in emphasis from political to personal revolution. From the psychedelic drug to the feminist movements, self-discovery came to be regarded as the surest way to countermand the strictures of a rigid society. Already in the mid 1960s, Timothy Leary famously coined the slogan “Turn On, Tune In, Drop Out” to promote the consciousness expanding properties of LSD as a path to the prioritized true self.¹⁴ Second Wave feminism adopted “The Personal is Political” as its motto, and its early activists Anne Forer, Kathie Sarachild and Carol Hanisch endorsed “Consciousness Raising” [CR] as a prerequisite to political action.¹⁵ According to Debra Michals,

CR worked by enabling the individual within a group setting to uncover her authentic self, the person—or the essence of the person—beneath the programming that dictated what a woman “should” be and the socially sanctioned roles available to her.¹⁶

¹¹ Jules Witcover, *The Year The Dream Died* (New York: Warner Books, 1997), xiv.

¹² Didion, *The White Album*, 47.

¹³ Paul Simon quoted in Bruce Pollock, “Paul Simon: Survivor From the Sixties,” in *The Paul Simon Companion*, 123.

¹⁴ See David Farber, “The Intoxicated State/Illegal Nation: Drugs in the Sixties Counterculture” in *Imagine: Nation*, 32.

¹⁵ Michals, “From ‘Consciousness Expansion’,” 44.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

CR soon extended beyond fringe or activist movements, and played a role in what Schulman has termed a “consciousness revolution.”¹⁷ Self-actualization regimens such as those offered by the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California, Warner Erhard’s est, Transcendental Meditation (TM), the New Age movement, and even evangelical Christianity – which emphasized “the individual’s experience of grace” – achieved widespread popularity by the early 1970s.¹⁸ Disenchantment with the prevailing political system and the desire for self-actualization also prompted the rise of the commune movement in the mid 1960s, which flourished until the late 1970s.¹⁹ Affiliating themselves with various causes, including “back to the land,” creative freedom, Christianity and Eastern spirituality, communitards sought to divorce themselves from the socioeconomic mainstream and turn inward, creating self-sufficient micro-societies.

THE EVOLVING MUSIC INDUSTRY IN THE LATE 1960S

The late 1960s were equally transformative in the popular music industry. The Beatles, who had already reenergized a stagnant pop scene with their 1964 arrival in America, instigated significant reorganization of the industry with the release of *Sgt. Pepper Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* in 1967. *Sgt. Pepper* made a claim for the rock album as an extended unified *artwork*. Since no track on *Sgt. Pepper* was released as a single, radio DJs were forced to integrate album cuts into their singles-oriented programming.²⁰ The album’s release on June 1, 1967 followed by less than two months the formation of the first progressive FM rock station in America. Tom Donahue, formerly an experienced AM radio DJ, launched KMPX in San Francisco on April 7.

¹⁷ Schulman, *The Seventies*, 96.

¹⁸ See *Ibid.*, 78-101.

¹⁹ See Timothy Miller, “The Sixties-Era Communes,” in *Imagine Nation*, 327-51.

²⁰ Chapple and Garafolo, *Rock’n’ Roll*, 110.

1967, in order to embrace “the best of today’s rock and roll, folk, traditional and city blues, raga, electronic music, and some jazz and classical selections.”²¹ The resulting format, known alternately as “freestyle” and “underground” radio and imbued with countercultural passion, caught on and spread quickly throughout the country.²² The nearly simultaneous advent of FM rock radio and *Sgt. Pepper* was an important component in the ideological split between rock and pop. As Simon Frith notes:

By the late 1960s musicians on both sides of the Atlantic were distinguishing rock as art from rock as entertainment: rock was a complex musical form: it could not be constrained by the pop tradition of singles, package tours, and reproduced hits. Pop meant groups put together, like the Monkees, to satisfy a fad, anonymous players bought—their personalities and all—to meet a need....Rock, by contrast, was a means of self-expression: it could not be subordinated to any market.²³

With the added exposure afforded them by FM radio, albums very quickly began to account for a larger proportion of popular music revenue than singles. According to Steve Chapple and Reebee Garofalo, “[b]y 1969, 80 percent of the sales dollar was in LPs.”²⁴

The major record companies responded to these musical and economic developments in different ways. In their political history of the music industry, *Rock ‘n’ Roll is Here to Pay*, Chapple and Garofalo undertake a comparison of two of the largest labels: RCA and Warner-Reprise. RCA, the older of the two, is portrayed as a short-sighted media giant who, despite having reaped enormous fortunes from the signings of Elvis Presley in 1956 and Jefferson Airplane in 1965, were very late in grasping the extent of change in the industry and the staying power of rock. According to Chapple

²¹ Ibid., 109.

²² Ibid., 110.

²³ Frith, *Sound Effects*, 73.

²⁴ Chapple and Garofalo, *Rock ‘n’ Roll*, 76.

and Garofalo. RCA remained committed to the singles model, hoping to extract immediate mega-hits from short-lived “bubblegum acts.” Warner-Reprise, on the contrary, is depicted as a savvier company, with a deeper understanding of the new rock music and its surrounding culture. More interested in signing true talent than creating fads from an executive’s office, Warner-Reprise considered the long-term potential of the acts it signed, and allowed them time to grow into that potential.²⁵ The fact that the latter company signed Mitchell after the former had refused her a contract thus had a significant impact on her early career.²⁶

While *Song To A Seagull* only reached number 189 on the Billboard album chart in 1968, Mitchell’s subsequent releases showed marked improvement. *Clouds* (1969) and *Ladies of the Canyon* (1970) reached numbers 27 and 15 respectively. *Clouds* garnered a Grammy award for best folk performance,²⁷ and *Ladies of the Canyon* was certified a Gold Record by the Recording Industry Association of America on December 23, 1970.²⁸ Mitchell’s trend of increasing commercial viability conformed exactly to Warner-Reprise’s blueprint for new artists. According to Chapple and Garofalo, “in the career plan of... Warner-Reprise, a first album is expected to sell around 50,000 copies, the second 150,000, and the third enough to go Gold.”²⁹ If the artist failed to reach these goals, the price exacted was artistic freedom. As an instructive example, Chapple and Garofalo present the case of Bonnie Raitt, whose recording career began three years after Mitchell’s, in 1971:

²⁵ See Chapple and Garofalo, *Rock ‘n’ Roll*, 201-215.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 211.

²⁷ The Grammy information is from O’Brien, *Shadows and Light*, 108.

²⁸ Gold records are those certified by the Recording Industry Association of America to have sold at least 500,000 copies. Certification data and history are available on the RIAA’s website, www.riaa.com.

²⁹ Chapple and Garofalo, *Rock ‘n’ Roll*, 287.

Until recently, Raitt has enjoyed complete control over her production—"I pick the studio, the producer, the musicians, and the material." On her first three LPs she used nonsession musicians and a production style geared to capture the electricity of her live performances....She did alright with the first two but when her third, *Takin' My Time*, showed no increase, Warners [sic] insisted that she use a "track record" producer and studio musicians on *Streetlights*, her fourth album. The result was Jerry Ragavoy, the Hit Factory in Manhattan, and plenty of strings and horns in the background. It is most definitely a studio album. It is even a good studio album, but it is not Bonnie Raitt. The songs lack the vitality of live material. Warner hoped that with its slick production *Streetlights* would boost Bonnie Raitt to that next plateau. The price she paid was a partial loss of control over her own image, and less input in the production process.³⁰

As I discussed in chapter 2, this degree of overproduction and loss of control is precisely the treatment that Mitchell was able to avoid at the start of her career with the help of David Crosby. That she was able to maintain her autonomy was symbiotically linked to the steady rise in sales of her first six albums: each situation was arguably responsible for the other. Yet Mitchell's success in finding a growing audience owed also to the rapidly evolving sociopolitical climate, which proved as beneficial to her as it was detrimental to some of the major rock acts of the 1960s.

Whether by coincidence or in response to the growing visibility of the various movements emphasizing the individual discussed above, the next decade saw the demise of rock groups that had dominated the 1960s and the simultaneous reemergence of the solo artist as a serious force. By far the most visible and important of the band break-ups was that of the Beatles, who officially separated in April of 1970. Their growth as a cohesive unit seemed to have climaxed with *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, and the albums that followed gave evidence of the emerging independence of each constituent member. By the late 1960s the Lennon-McCartney songwriting partnership existed in

³⁰ Ibid.

name only, and each of the Beatles began pursuing solo projects.³¹ After having already served as a significant example of the self-discovery trend with their much publicized experiments with LSD and Indian mysticism, each of the three songwriting Beatles released starkly personal solo albums in 1970. George Harrison's *All Things Must Pass* gave evidence of his continuing commitment to Eastern spiritualism, while Lennon's *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band* featured starkly underproduced songs that in their hurt, angry, and frightened tones betrayed his involvement with primal scream therapy.³² The original packaging of Paul McCartney's *McCartney* included a self-interview, in which he expressed his "personal differences, business differences, [and] musical differences" with the Beatles, thus establishing for himself a discrete identity.³³ Other acts to disband in 1970 at the height of their popularity and critical acclaim included Crosby Stills Nash and Young, and Simon and Garfunkel. In each case, the individual personalities and abilities of the groups' members seemed to expand beyond the confines of collective work. As the first generation of rock artists were approaching their thirties, having endured a tumultuous decade, a newly attained maturity seemed to necessitate individual endeavors. Rock critic John Landau, writing at the end of 1970, noted the revival of the solo artist, "a concept that had all but been abandoned with the decline of the folk revival of the early Sixties," and optimistically evaluated the trend:

The elimination in many instances of the banks of amplifiers and the breaking of the group bond returns the accent to a single person's feelings and thoughts. In many ways it allows for a fair greater range of emotional expression. The soloists are without a doubt the new *auteurs* of popular music.³⁴

³¹ For a detailed historical and analytical account of the Beatles' emergence as individual artists in the late 1960s see Everett, *The Beatles As Musicians: Revolver through the Anthology*, 149-270.

³² George Harrison, *All Things Must Pass* (Apple 639 [3]). John Lennon, *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band* (Apple 3372).

³³ Paul McCartney, *McCartney* (Apple 3363, 1970).

³⁴ John Landau, "Rock 1970: It's Too Late to Stop Now," 44.

Although Landau included in this group such electric rockers as Eric Clapton and Rod Stewart, the above description most clearly delineates the predominantly acoustic work of singer-songwriters such as Van Morrison, James Taylor, Carole King and Mitchell.

HISTORICAL SUMMATION

A confluence of events, then, imbued Mitchell's early work with both its particular social relevance and commercial viability, and enabled it to develop as it did. The simultaneous rise of the album and FM radio relaxed the imperative of producing a hit single for career sustenance. Mitchell had in fact penned several songs that were hits for other artists, including "Both Sides Now" for Judy Collins,³⁸ but her early proclivity to feature predominantly solo instrumental accompaniment limited her prospects on AM radio.³⁹ Warner-Reprise's progressive approach to artist development gave Mitchell the freedom to experiment and grow, both as a musician and a person. This combined sense of personal and musical exploration and non-conformity, which as we shall see below remained palpable in Mitchell's recorded work, resonated with the various self-discovery movements that prompted Tom Wolfe to famously label the 1970s the "Me Decade."⁴⁰ The rise of the solo artist and decline of some of the major bands of the 1960s, and the corresponding interest on the part of many solo performers in the self-revelatory expression of personal feelings, repositioned Mitchell's subject matter of choice from the fringe it occupied in 1968 to the mainstream by 1971.

³⁸ Judy Collins, "Both Sides Now" (Elektra 45639, 1968) reached number 8 on Billboard's Hot 100 on November 9, 1968. Collins additionally had a number 68 hit with Mitchell's "Chelsea Morning" (Elektra 45649, 1969).

³⁹ Carole King and James Taylor, for instance, two artists clearly associated with the singer-songwriter movement, achieved number 1 hits only on songs that were recorded with a full band. King's "It's Too Late" (Ode 66015, 1971) reached number 1 on June 19, 1971, and remained there for five weeks. Taylor's recording of King's "You've Got a Friend" (Warner 7498, 1971) reached number 1 on July 31, 1971.

⁴⁰ Tom Wolfe, "The Me Decade and the Third Great Awakening," in *The Purple Decades* (New York: Berkley Books, 1983), 265-96.

Finally, although Mitchell has on numerous occasions distanced herself from the feminist cause,³⁸ her rise to fame alongside such varied and significant female performers as Aretha Franklin, Janis Joplin, Laura Nyro, Carly Simon, Carole King and Diana Ross, and the repeated prioritization in her songs of individual needs over the demands of a traditional domestic relationship, establish her very career as both a product of and contributor to the advances made by Second Wave feminism. It must here be acknowledged that Mitchell's physical attributes – her long blond hair, high cheekbones, blue eyes, and waif-like physique – conformed both to traditional American ideals of beauty as well as the particularly repressive values of the counterculture in this regard. As Sheila Whiteley has observed, “both the lifestyle and the musical ethos of the period undermined the role of women, positioning them as either romanticized fantasy figures, subservient earth mothers or easy lays.”³⁹ If Mitchell was able to derive a benefit from her perceived resemblance to these images, she also suffered considerable pain for it. In one particular instance Warner-Reprise, attempting to cement its counterculture credentials, ran a series of ultra hip, ultra sexist advertisements for Mitchell's album *Clouds*. One ad proclaimed, “Joni Mitchell is 90 Percent Virgin,” alluding to Mitchell's having sold only ten percent as many albums as Judy Collins – thus retaining most of her commercial “virginity.” This ad and others like it would prompt Mitchell to leave Warner-Reprise for the Asylum label in 1972.⁴⁰

³⁸ See for instance Crowe, “Interview with Joni Mitchell,” 52, and O'Brien, *Shadows and Light*, 245.

³⁹ Sheila Whiteley, “Wonderful World, Beautiful People: The 1960s Counter Culture and its Ideological Relationship to Women,” in *Women and Popular Music: Sexuality, Identity and Subjectivity* (London: Routledge, 2000), 23.

⁴⁰ Chapple and Garofalo, *Rock 'n' Roll*, 207-08.

ANALYSIS OF "THE LAST TIME I SAW RICHARD"

Karen O'Brien has described Mitchell's fourth album, *Blue*, as "the incandescent moment [of her career] against which all others are compared."⁴¹ She elaborates that

Blue is the Joni Mitchell album most likely to appear on those 'Top Ten', 'Top 100', 'all-time favourite', 'classic album' lists....It's the album most often cited as her seminal work, the benchmark for all that came before and after. More than a quarter of a century after it was recorded, people are still making value judgments about her music and referring back to *Blue*, and never quite allowing her to step out of the shadow of that album.⁴²

Released in June of 1971, a year marked as the apex of the singer-songwriter phenomenon by the overwhelming success of Carole King's *Tapestry*,⁴³ *Blue* is a starkly personal and idiosyncratic album. Of its ten songs, nine are first-person narratives. The only exception, "Little Green," was written in 1967, and deals somewhat cryptically with the child Mitchell gave up for adoption the previous year.⁴⁴ On *Blue*, Mitchell repeatedly invokes specific names, places and situations, potentially undermining the universal applicability of her songs. From her experiences in Greece, to her love of her two homelands, California and Canada, to her own demanding, impetuous nature and her overarching resistance to conventional norms, the subject matter of *Blue* seems first and foremost to be Mitchell herself as a complex and unusual individual. *Blue* invites its listeners to live vicariously through its protagonist, rather than benefit from her general pronouncements. Her pain, as well as her pleasure, is depicted in visceral, real-time enactment, as opposed to detached description. The final song on *Blue*, "The Last Time I

⁴¹ O'Brien, *Shadows and Light*, 122.

⁴² Ibid., 132.

⁴³ After King's initial solo album, *Writer*, failed to chart the previous year, *Tapestry* reached the number 1 position on June 19, 1971, and remained there for fifteen weeks, becoming the best selling album ever up until that time. James Taylor's *Mud Slide Slim and the Blue Horizon*, a follow-up to his successful *Sweet Baby James*, spent four weeks in the number two position under *Tapestry*, bolstered by its King-authored single, "You've Got a Friend."

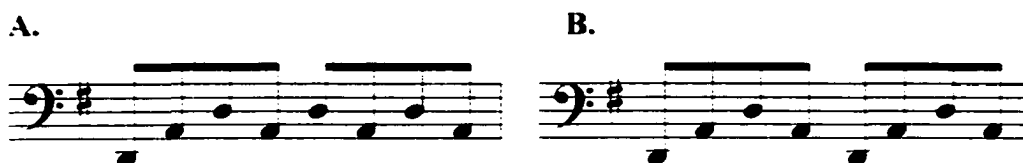
⁴⁴ O'Brien, *Shadows and Light*, 128-29.

"Saw Richard." exemplifies these characteristics as much as any other on the album, and – in purely musical terms – contains substantial stylistic allusions to Mitchell's past, present and future.

MITCHELL AND THE PIANO

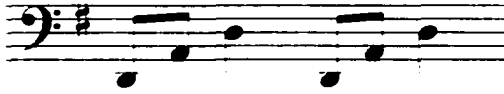
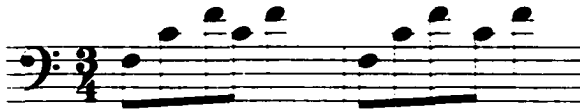
Mitchell adopted the piano as a secondary composition and performance tool beginning with her third album, *Ladies of the Canyon*. Piano is the main or sole accompaniment on six of the twelve songs on that album, and on four of the ten songs on *Blue*, including "The Last Time I Saw Richard." Within the confines of a somewhat limited technique Mitchell plays with confidence, and is able to suffuse her accompaniments with nuance and variety. Her principal limitation may stem from the same difficulty that initially led her to alternate tunings on the guitar, namely a left hand incapable of quick, intricate changes of position. On the guitar she was able to forge a complex chordal vocabulary while limiting herself to two or three chord fingerings per song. On the piano, however, where alternate tuning is obviously impractical, a basic left-hand pattern of root-fifth-octave emerged as the foundation of Mitchell's technique. This insures block-like movement between chords, an avoidance of inversions, and a general uniformity of rhythmic propulsion in Mitchell's piano songs. The usual ostinato figure, common variants of which are shown in example 3-1, lends itself to duple meter, although Mitchell has at times adapted it for triple meter, as in example 3-2.

Example 3-1: Basic Root-Fifth-Octave Ostinato Patterns



Example 3-1 (continued)

C.

**Example 3-2: Root-Fifth-Octave Ostinato in Triple Meter**
"For Free," mm. 1-2

Occasionally Mitchell extends beyond the confines of root-fifth-octave, incorporating thirds or seconds, usually to motivate chord changes.

Example 3-3: Thirds and Neighbors Added to Root-Fifth-Octave Ostinato
"The Last Time I Saw Richard," Intro., mm. 13-14

Reliance on this basic pattern might simply be understood as the province of a guitarist at a strange instrument.⁴⁵ Yet whether its ubiquity in Mitchell's early piano work results from the weakness of her polio-damaged left hand or from her lack of classical training on the instrument – and in all likelihood it results from both – this primitive aspect of her technique does not prevent her from simultaneously using the piano to sophisticated and subtle ends. I will support this assertion in the following analytical discussion of the piano introduction to "The Last Time I Saw Richard."

⁴⁵ I am grateful to Philip Rupprecht for suggesting this notion to me.

STYLISTIC AMBIGUITY IN THE INTRODUCTION TO "THE LAST TIME I SAW RICHARD"

The twenty-six-measure prelude that introduces *Blue*'s final song was Mitchell's longest piano introduction up until that time, the precedent for which had been set with the slightly shorter introduction to "Rainy Night House" on *Ladies of the Canyon*.⁴⁶ The introduction, which is presented as part of the full transcription of "Richard" in appendix C (mm. 1-26) and in annotated form in examples 3-4 and 3-5 below, reflects the personal and stylistic searching that characterize both *Blue* and "Richard."

Formally it consists of three eight-bar phrases, A (mm. 1-8) A (mm. 9-16) B (mm. 17-24), followed by a two-bar false return of the A section at m. 25 that yields immediately to the verse. While the B section foreshadows the harmonic progression of the B section in the verses (e.g. mm. 42-46), the A section is distinct from any other part of the song. From the outset, both the sense of key and harmonic functionality are problematized.

Example 3-4 is an annotated transcription of the first complete A section and the beginning of its repeat. The opening harmony poses an interpretative question: does the seventh of the D chord – C – suggest G (both the key and the chord), or does it simply define a blues-influenced style?⁴⁷ The question, which is not immediately answered, captures in microcosm a central issue in Mitchell's stylistic development to this point, namely her conflicting allegiances to jazz, classical, and pop vocabularies. The very inclusion of a decidedly "composed" introduction in A-A-B form, combined with the

⁴⁶ See Whitesell, "Harmonic Palette in Early Joni Mitchell," 180-81, for an excellent discussion of the piano introduction to "Rainy Night House."

⁴⁷ As Allan Moore notes, the interpretation of the dominant seventh chord in rock and pop music requires stylistic competence: "In a standard rock blues, such as Led Zeppelin's 'Since I've been loving you', the appearance of dominant seventh chords helps to define the style, but they have no greater intrinsic meaning. However, in a standard pop song such as Phil Collins's 'Don't let him steal your heart away', the appearance of 17 heralds IV, exactly as it might within European common-practice tonality." Moore, *Rock The Primary Text*, 196.

foursquare, un-swinglike rhythmic feeling established by the running eighths of the bass, counters the notion that "Richard" represents for Mitchell a significant stylistic step towards jazz. Yet as we will see below, there are factors at work in this song, particularly Mitchell's treatment of the vocal melody, that make such a notion plausible. In the introduction, harmonic practices more typical of rock, blues and jazz are freely interchanged with common-practice techniques, lending the passage a feeling of stylistic groping analogous to both the music's search for a stable key and the song's protagonists' search for fulfillment.

Example 3-4 "The Last Time I Saw Richard" Intro, mm. 1-11

Section A *"blues 'th' or dominant function"* *C-C' = cross-relation* *imitates E minor*

G² V⁷
D I iii

4

D IV ii⁷ I V⁷sus4

suspended 4th - resolved here

Section A

8

chord - th is elaborated and resolves here

D G² V⁷
I

The seventh of the initial D chord, C, is not resolved in functional manner initially, but moves via an incomplete neighbor, G, to A, the chord fifth, which is reached in m. 2. The next harmony, F $\sharp$ minor, can be heard to retroactively establish D as I. Yet the lack of smooth voice leading, the inclusion of the passing tone G $\sharp$ (m.3), and the C-C $\sharp$ cross-relation between m.1 and m. 3 suggest the sudden juxtaposition of the *key* F $\sharp$ minor, as if the music had simply been ratcheted up a major third. The subsequent move in m. 5 to the chord G, however, reconfirms the feeling of D, since I-iii-IV is a common rock progression,⁴⁸ and leads into a conventional ii V I cadence, with a momentary pass through I in m. 7. Unlike the earlier seventh of D, G, the seventh of the A harmony, is sustained through mm. 7 and 8, before receiving a common-practice type delayed resolution in m. 10, when it finally falls to F $\sharp$. Meanwhile, the suspended fourth of the A harmony, D, which is registrally isolated in mm. 7 and 8, reinterprets the C $\sharp$ of m. 9 as a delayed resolution of the suspension. Of course the dominant sound of the C atop the D harmony remains, invoking both the spirit of G and the blues yet again.

The key of G is also implied at the beginning of the B section (m. 17), but the G harmony – ostensibly I – is entirely unprepared, following as it does from the A7 in mm. 15-16, whose 7th is this time left unresolved (see example 3-5).⁴⁹ Indeed, since G is never fully established by a conventional cadential progression, and since it yields to the V of D in m. 23, its presence is felt as fleeting at best. The cycle of fifths progression that forms the first half of section B: G-C-F, recurs where the verse's section A is elided into section B, mm. 42-46 (for verse 1).

⁴⁸ For numerous examples of songs which use the I-iii-IV progression, see Moore, "Patterns of Harmony," *Popular Music* 11:2 (1992), 90-91. Of course, I-iii-IV is also a conventional common practice progression.

⁴⁹ The G chord might alternately be considered IV in the key of D. As such, it would represent a blues-like retreat from the V7 chord that precedes it.

Example 3-5: "The Last Time I Saw Richard," Intro and Beginning of Verse, mm. 16-28

7th is left unresolved

16

G² I

IV

leading tone but no 7th

20

G (Mix)²VII

I

D²(VII of)

delayed resolution of 7th

24

D I

G V7

C functions as a 7th, and resolves

mf

27

The last time I saw Ri - chard was De - troit in six - ty - eight

here

p

30

G I

In both cases, the F harmony leads directly back to G, recalling the ,VII cadential quality of rock previously discussed in Chapter 2. By the same logic, the G chord then functions as an applied dominant, ,VII of V in D. Whereas the earlier A7 chords had a suspended

fourth in place of a third, here the leading tone is present but the seventh is omitted. The leading tone, C $\sharp$, which is belatedly resolved to D at the end of m. 26, gives added weight to the D harmony that arrives on m. 25. That harmony, which also receives dynamic emphasis, thus feels like the start of something, either a fourth eight-bar phrase to conclude a traditional AABA 32-bar song form, or the beginning of a verse. This time, however, the D finally proves to be a dominant, and the two-bar false return of section A leads surprisingly to the verse in G.⁵⁰ The stylistic function of the C $\sharp$, after it resolves in m. 27 to B, is thus reconstrued as the chord's functional seventh after all, although its bluesy quality cannot be retroactively erased.

The introduction may on one level be interpreted as a structural pick-up to the song – a prolongation, to borrow Schenkerian terminology, of the initial dominant harmony, with tantalizing allusions to the key of G that go unfulfilled until the verse. At the same time the stylistic ambiguity engendered by the seemingly non-functional “blues” seventh combines with other jazz inflections to form a significant subtext to the passage. Throughout the introduction Mitchell alludes to quartal structures while staying within the bounds of triadic harmony. Example 3-6 shows two such instances.

⁵⁰ The surprise is not due to the resolution of D7 to G, but to the breaking of patterns established already in the introduction. The first pattern is the non-resolution of D7 to F $\sharp$ minor, and the second pattern is the formal division into eight-bar phrases. The verse might alternately be understood to begin at measure 25, with the return of the two-measure D7 figure that begins the entire song and buttons each structural section. Yet the long-forestalled resolution to G, once it finally occurs, sounds significant enough to my ears to denote the start of a new section (and override the eight-bar pattern that has held sway up until this point).

Example 3-6 Allusions to Quartal Harmony in “The Last Time I Saw Richard”

A. mm. 5, 13, 14



B. m. 20



In example 3-6A, the quartal chord follows a descending major third, while in example 3-6B the initial fourth is filled in by a minor second (the E functions as a seventh over the F harmony). In both cases, the final note of the perfect fourth chord is an incomplete lower neighbor that resolves upward to a constituent of the controlling triadic harmony. Yet the sound of the fourths, particularly in example 3-6B where the G is accented via syncopation, is unmistakable, and is a defining characteristic of the introduction's harmony (other examples may be found in mm. 6, 17-18, and 21-22).

The juxtaposition of these surface sound elements of blues and jazz with the introduction's romantic expansiveness,⁵¹ its rhapsodic forward momentum and emotionally wrenching harmonic turns – here I think particularly of the F# minor harmonies in mm. 3-4 and 11-12 – form a loose analogue to the emotional poles addressed by the song's lyrics: cool cynicism and frustration on the one hand, and soaring romantic faith on the other. Simultaneously, the coexistence of stylistic features from blues, jazz, rock, and classical musics mark “Richard” as a significant moment in the narrative of Mitchell's career – a stylistic crossroads with important clues about her future.

⁵¹ Whitesell describes the introduction to “Rainy Night House” as “Schumanesque in its expansiveness” – this designation seems apt for “The Last Time I Saw Richard” as well. See Whitesell, “Harmonic Palette,” 180.

"THE LAST TIME I SAW RICHARD": POETIC ANALYSIS

Figure 3-1: Lyrics to "The Last Time I Saw Richard"

verse 1:

The last time I saw Richard was Detroit in '68,
and he told me all romantics meet the same fate someday
cynical and drunk and boring someone in
some dark cafe
You laugh, he said you think you're immune
go look at your eyes
they're full of moon
You like roses and kisses and pretty men to tell you
all those pretty lies, pretty lies
When you gonna realize, they're only pretty lies
Only pretty lies, just pretty lies.

verse 2:

He put a quarter in the Wurlitzer, and he pushed
three buttons and the thing began to whirr
And a bar maid came by in fishnet stockings
and a bow-tie
and she said "Drink up now it's gettin' on time to close."
"Richard, you haven't really changed," I said
it's just that now you're romanticizing some pain
that's in your head
You got tombs in your eyes, but the songs
you punched are dreaming.
Listen they talk of love so sweet.
When you gonna get yourself back on your feet?
Oh love can be so sweet, Love so sweet.

verse 3:

Richard got married to a figure skater,
and he bought her a dishwasher and a coffee percolator
and he drinks at home now most nights with the T.V. on
and all the house lights left up bright.
I'm gonna blow this damn candle out.
I don't want Nobody comin' over to my table
I got nothing to talk to anybody about
All good dreamers pass this way some day
Hidin' behind bottles in dark cafes
dark cafes
Only a dark cocoon before I get my gorgeous wings
And fly away
Only a phase, these dark cafe days.

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The lyrics to “Richard,” reproduced as figure 3-1, constitute both a lament over the failed relationships and unrealized goals of the 1960s, and a declaration of defiance in the face of a generation’s shifting emphasis from idealistic to materialistic ambition. The first two verses detail the narrator’s recollection of an encounter with Richard, an ex-lover who is never explicitly identified as such. The reminiscence is abandoned in the third verse, as Richard’s story is brought up to date. The narrator then concludes with an anguished present-tense outburst, which yields to a hint of hopefulness for the future.

References in the very first line to Detroit and ’68 suggest the obvious biographical connections between this narrator and Mitchell herself, and establish “Richard” as a likely sequel to “I Had a King.” Mitchell had lived with Chuck Mitchell in Detroit for the duration of their two-year marriage, 1965-67. By 1968, however, Mitchell had already left him and was achieving growing professional success, first in New York, then L.A. Here, the aftermath of the relationship described in the earlier song is revisited from the vantage of several years. The invocation of 1968 additionally recalls the dramatic unfolding of sociopolitical events that year, and the resulting inward turn that paved the way for the “Me” 1970s. Two different manifestations of that directional change are depicted in “Richard.”

The characters in “Richard” label one another “romantics,” but they do not define that word in the same way. For Richard, a romantic is someone who naively idealizes love, who longs to hear and believe the “pretty lies” of “pretty men.” The narrator sees Richard’s cynicism itself as romanticism – a glorified self-pity, but one also tinged with the dreams of “love so sweet” that are betrayed by his jukebox selections. When “a bar maid...in fishnet stockings and a bow-tie” – an emblem of the dark cafes of Richard’s

prophecy – breaks up their exchange, the interlocutors' future is foreshadowed. But Richard forsakes the cycle of late nights in bars for material comfort and domesticity. The improbable rhyme which begins the third verse, "Richard got married to a figure skater / And he bought her a dishwasher and a coffee percolator," with its seemingly forced compliance to poetic form, pokes fun at Richard's conformity to the suburban American dream. Although Richard has achieved these status-signifying possessions, the trophy wife, the luxury appliances, nonetheless "he drinks at home most nights with the TV on and all the house lights left up bright." Already in "A Case of You," which directly precedes "Richard" on *Blue*, Mitchell has used the image of "blue TV screen light" to evoke the crushing loneliness of a failing relationship. In "Richard," the title character has sought refuge from the darkness of the cafes in his palace of synthetic light, but the ending of his story is no brighter. It is *he* who drinks alone at home, not *they*, and the important pronoun signifies Richard's failure to forestall the lonely fate of which he warned. His abandonment of romantic ideals and accompanying turn toward materialism may be understood to represent the desertion of the countercultural dream on the part of his (and Mitchell's) generation. Mitchell's narrator holds herself up as a contrast – someone for whom the dream is still alive, despite the pain its maintenance has wrought. Before Mitchell tends to the dream, however, she conveys the pain with visceral clarity.

During the recording of *Blue* in 1971, Mitchell, despite having achieved considerable success in her career, was at an emotional low point. As she herself acknowledged, "I was at my most defenseless during the making of *Blue*....I guess you could say I broke down but continued to work."⁵² The degree of emotional rawness and

⁵² O'Brien, *Shadows and Light*, 125.

vulnerability that has so often been attributed to this album.⁵³ manifests itself most expressly in the second half of “Richard’s” final verse, where the story catches up to the narrator’s present and sees her fulfilling Richard’s bleak vision. All romantics *do* wind up cynical and drunk and boring someone in some dark café, and the narrator lives this out before our ears with her sulky outburst: “I’m going to blow this damn candle out; I don’t want nobody coming over to my table I got nothing to talk to anybody about.” Yet ultimately she denies Richard’s prophecy, contrasting her “dark café days,” which are “only a phase” – a rite of passage for “all good dreamers” – to Richard’s final destination of unhappiness. Her steadfast grip on the romantic dream that Richard has abandoned is what will eventually allow her to “spread [her] gorgeous wings and fly away.” While Mitchell chastises Richard’s – and by extension her generation’s – failure to maintain his principles, it remains unclear who will be proved right in the end. We see evidence only of pain on both sides, and have no way of knowing – from the lyrics alone – whether the narrator’s hopeful appraisal of her future prospects will be realized.

POETIC FORM AND TEXT-SETTING

As a song lyric, the text for “Richard” would seem to pose numerous difficulties for a prospective composer. It has metric regularity neither within nor between its individual verses, and its constantly varying line lengths and shifting rhyme scheme resist the strophic treatment that both Mitchell and most of her popular music counterparts preferred in the early 1970s and still do today. As O’Brien observes, “Richard” is

⁵³ For example, Timothy Crouse writes of Mitchell’s work on *Blue*: “She refuses to mask her real face behind imagery, as her fellow autobiographers James Taylor and Cat Stevens do. In portraying herself so starkly, she has risked the ridiculous to achieve the sublime.” Crouse, review of *Blue*, *Rolling Stone* (August 5, 1971), 42.

a song that breaks all of the rules of lyric-writing: there's too much to say and too little time to say it but it works remarkably, becomes more like a spoken-word prose poem than a song.⁵⁴

Read aloud, the lyrics do sound more like spoken language than verse, and perhaps this is most true of the third stanza, where Mitchell evokes the natural speech rhythm of rising fury. But if the words appear on the page like a prose poem, in her performance Mitchell does very little speaking. Only a total of two beats in the entire song are spoken – one in m. 35 (“he said”), the other in m. 68 (“listen”). Otherwise, “Richard” is characterized by the tension between the running eighth notes of the piano’s bass – which establish both a firm pulse and a clearly defined harmonic rhythm – and an ever-changing vocal delivery that resists the rhythmic and harmonic constraints of song while maintaining a resolutely *sung* declamation. If the surface rhythms of the vocal line are determined by the speech-like quality of the text, Mitchell is nonetheless guided by a fundamental conception that is purely musical. In contrast to Wilfrid Mellers’ assertion that the melody to “Richard” is “perhaps appropriately, unmemorable,”⁵⁵ I would argue that the true melody of “Richard” is never actually presented in its pure form, but instead elaborated upon in much the same manner that jazz soloists sometimes embellish the melody of a standard tune almost beyond the point of recognition. To support this assertion I turn now to a comparison of the vocal lines for the three verses of “Richard.”

⁵⁴ O’Brien, *Shadows and Light*, 130.

⁵⁵ Mellers, *Angels of the Night*, 154

Example 3-7: Three Verses of "Richard" – Section A⁵⁶

Bar 1

Verse 1
m. 27
The last time I saw Ri - chard was De-troit in six-ty-eight

Verse 2
m. 54
He put a quart-er in the Wur - litz-er and he

Verse 3
m. 81
Rich-ard got mar-ried to a fig-ure ska-ter and he

Left Hand

Bar 3

V. 1
m. 29
n' he told me all ro - man - ties meet the st - me late

V. 2
m. 56
pushed three but-tons and the thing be-gan to whirl and a

V. 3
m. 83
bought her a dish-wash-er and a cot - tee per - co-lat - or and he drinks

L. H.

⁵⁶ "Bar" numbers in example 3-7 and the correlating discussion refer universally to section A, the eight-bar formal section that recurs three times in the song. Measure numbers, which appear above the treble clef for each verse, refer only to that specific measure verse. For example, the piano plays a G-D-G ostinato in "bar 1," while the vocal part in "m. 27" has a quintuplet in the last two beats.

Example 3-7 (continued)

Bar 5

m. 51 some day cyn-ical and drunk and bor-ing some-one in.

m. 58 bar-maid came by in fish-net stock-ings and a bow tie and she said

m. 85 at ho-me now most nights with the T-V on and all the

Bar 7

m. 53 some dark ca-te

m. 60 Drink up now it's get-ting on time to close

m. 87 house-lights left up bright

Example 3-7 presents the first eight measures of each verse – what I shall label section A – stacked atop one another, together with the left-hand accompaniment for the first verse.⁵⁷ Harmonically the section consists of neighboring motion from G (bars 1-2) to A (bars 3-6) and back to G again (bars 7-8), although the right-hand part (discussed below) does complicate matters slightly. In comparison to an introduction rife with restless

⁵⁷ I have chosen to use the left-hand accompaniment because it is basically the same for section A of all three verses. As such, it provides a standard harmonic underpinning to which the right-hand parts, in their variation, effect subtle shifts of nuance.

chordal movement then, the verse begins in near harmonic stasis. The frenetic activity of the vocal part provides compensation, instantly becoming the auditory focal point.

Although the vocal rhythms for the three verses vary widely – textually determined as they are – closer examination reveals that Mitchell confines herself to the same limited selection of pitches and registral areas for each verse. Furthermore, as I have stated above, the comparison of the three verses suggests the existence of a basic melodic blueprint for each section, a kind of Ur-melody, or “standard” tune that is never presented without embellishment. Example 3-8 is a composite melody and voice leading reduction for section A of the verses, representing my interpretation of the underlying melodic scheme.

Example 3-8: Melody/Voice Leading Reduction for Section A⁵⁸

Before I comment on this outline’s faithfulness to Mitchell’s performance, I shall make several remarks on the melodic scheme itself.⁵⁹ The eight-bar section divides neatly into four two-bar phrases. The neighboring gesture D-E-D in the first phrase, bars 1-2, is

⁵⁸ In this diagram, which is only very loosely based on Schenkerian reductive techniques, those notes that recur in each rendition of section A of the verse are privileged with a stem. Pitches in parentheses occur in two or fewer verses. Adjacent notes that are set off by separate sets of parentheses appear in different verses. Adjacent notes within one set of parentheses occur together when they occur at all. The designations *P* and *N* assign voice-leading functions to those pitches that are not supported by the primary bass note. Repeated notes or pairs of notes are omitted from the diagram, and are discussed below in the body of the chapter. There is no prioritization of rhythmic values among stemmed notes.

⁵⁹ Since I am commenting here purely on the melodic plan of the song, and since the lyrical content of section A in each verse is distinct, I shall momentarily forestall a discussion of specific text-music correspondence.

inverted in the second and third phrases, bars 3-4 and bars 5-6, to A-G-A, and the principal melodic idea of the second and third phrases, B-A-G-A, is a contour inversion of the first phrase's B-D-E-D. The extensive emphasis on neighbor motives in bars 1-6 mirrors the neighboring motion of the supporting harmony in bars 1-8. G-A-G, and emulates the limited vocal range of normal conversation. Yet Mitchell avoids the monotony of speech by creating a registral dichotomy, whereby the first phrase is placed in her alto register and its responses, in the second and third phrases, are in her soprano. The second and third phrases sit almost entirely in the upper register, but are anchored by the low Ds and/or Es at their end, while the final phrase, an answer to the static quality of the first three, connects the disparate registers with a sweeping (to varying degrees, depending on the verse) scalar descent. These analytical observations are rendered visually in example 3-9, an annotated version of example 3-8.

Example 3-9: Annotated Version of Section A Reduction

The dialogic nature of the interchange between phrase 1 and phrases 2 and 3, and the phrases' registral separation evoke both the male and female protagonists of the song (even though a direct character-to-phrase correspondence is absent) and the common jazz call-and-response technique of "trading fours."

While Mitchell's piano introduction, as I have shown, makes allusions to jazz-inflected harmonic practice, it is undoubtedly in her treatment of "Richard's" vocal line that the strongest links to jazz traditions exist. The complexity of the rhythms she employs, their independence from the tightly conceived 4/4 time and running eighth-note bass, the frequent avoidance of downbeat attacks, the allusion to trading fours, and the vocal part's consistent swerving in and out of sync with the harmonic progression, all recall time honored jazz practices. Yet the most deeply rooted connection may be in the conception of the melody as a fixed ideal, existing to be simultaneously reproduced and commented upon. The reduction in example 3-8 (and 3-9) represents my understanding of that fixed ideal, a melodic template against which Mitchell riffs throughout the song.¹⁰⁰ In the performance of a jazz standard, a presumed familiarity with the tune on the part of the audience would be a precondition of such riffing. In the case of "Richard," no such familiarity can exist, and the listener must uncover the basic tune gradually, a thorough composite such as the one I've sketched only fully conceivable after the song has ended. Yet the two situations are not entirely dissimilar. Both provide for an improvisational delivery confined not only by the harmonic progression, but also by the necessity of remaining at least somewhat faithful to the tune. And both provide, in the prospective range of tension between the ideal tune and its real rendition, the possibility for unique expressions of satire and resistance.

¹⁰⁰ This type of riffing, a commonplace in the jazz tradition, is referred to by Henry Louis Gates as "Signifyin(g)," a term that has assumed particular importance in recent discussions of black music. See Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), esp. 123-24. Samuel A. Floyd Jr. defines musical Signifyin(g) as "the transformation of preexisting musical material by trifling with it, teasing it, or censuring it," in *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 7. In a popular music context, David Brackett refers to Signifyin(g) in his discussion of James Brown's "Superbad" in *Interpreting Popular Music*, 108-56.

Consider only the third verse – to be discussed in greater detail below.

Decorative flurries of notes in the equivalent portions of section A and A' illuminate contrasting facets of the narrator's personality: her whimsy ("Richard got married to a figure skater. And he bought her a dishwasher and a coffee percolator" mm.81-84) and her fury ("I'm going to blow this damn candle out/ I don't want nobody coming over to my table/ I got nothing to talk to anybody about" mm. 89-93). This is but one example of how jazz vocal phrasing affords Mitchell the power and flexibility to give voice to "Richard's" complex narrator.

Turning now to a closer inspection of the verses – the three "realizations" of the tune (example 3-7) – we may observe the degree to which each conforms to the reduction in example 3-8. The core melodic idea of the first phrase, B-D-E-D, is sung in each verse, but never in the same way. The first verse begins with the line "The last time I saw Richard was Detroit in sixty-eight and he told me" on the incomplete lower neighbor A ("The"), and vacillates between B and D both before ("last time I saw Richard was Detroit in sixty") and after ("and he told me") the single occurrence of E ("eight") at the end of bar 2 (m. 28). The second verse precedes the initial B with the chord tone G ("He"), and then completes the B-D-E-D gesture with no such vacillation, but with extensive repetition of D on both sides of the E ("put a quarter in the Wurlitzer and he"). The third verse does away with any melodic pick-up, and vacillates between B and D ("skater" and he") only after the initial B-D-E-D ("Richard got married to a figure") occurs. In each case, the pitch E is attacked only once, and used to set an accented syllable ("eight," "Wurl-" and "fig-"). Yet in each verse it occurs at a different time: at the end of bar 2 (m. 28) in the first verse, at the end of bar 1 (m. 54) in the second, and on

the downbeat of bar 2 (m. 82) in the third. Its consistency of treatment plays a role in establishing the fixed melodic profile, while its inconsistency of placement sets up Mitchell's jazz-infused melodic variation technique from the start of each verse. The variation in treatment of the B-D makes the occasional vacillation between the two evoke a relaxed, jazz-inflected tremolo between core pitches of the melody – a decorative, rather than essential feature.

In verses two and three, Mitchell begins the second phrase on the downbeat of bar 3 (m. 56, m. 83) ("pushed [three buttons]" and "bought [her a dishwasher]") coinciding with the change in harmony from G to A. In the first verse, however, the initial phrase extends into the first three beats of bar 3 (m. 29) ("and he told me"), the second phrase beginning with the high B on beat 4 ("all [romantics meet the same fate]"). Mitchell's eschewal of a strict adherence to the bass progression in her vocal delivery is evident at various times in all the verses, and projects a headstrong narrative voice that is both deeply in touch with the emotional content of its tale, and unwilling to confine its description to constraints of time. This lazy correspondence between voice and bass also invokes the non-conformity that is a central theme of "Richard," and perhaps it is the thematic appropriateness of this jazz technique that draws Mitchell to it here. In "Richard," while jazz penetrates deeper to the song's compositional core than in any of Mitchell's earlier songs, it may still be considered something of a found object, employed for its connotations of non-conformity and freedom, and as an atmospheric prop – evocative of the dark cafes, past and present, that are the song's locus.⁶¹

Returning to the first verse, Mitchell's extension of the first phrase ("The last time I saw Richard was Detroit in sixty-eight and he told me") is matched, or even bettered, by

⁶¹ See my discussion of "For Free," p. 60.

the right hand of the piano, which never truly concedes to the bass's A-E dyad. In both the first and second verses, the right hand maintains all or most of the G major triad, yielding an extended harmony interpretable as Am¹¹. The extended tones G and B may be understood either as neighbors to the chord tone A (as indicated in example 3-8), or as suspensions that are only resolved when the bass returns to G (bar 6 of example 3-8). The low Ds in the vocal line that occur alternately or together with the low Es at the ends of phrases 2 and 3 can also be understood in the latter way – a suspension from the Ds of phrase 1. In the second verse, Mitchell emphasizes the chord clash with a bit of word painting, as the Wurlitzer's initial stirring is mimicked by the repeated G major triad in the right hand, attacked on beat three of each measure from mm. 56-59.¹²

Such subtle musical-textual correspondences pervade "Richard," whose seemingly strophic organization is belied at every turn by musical accommodations made to both the rhythm and meaning of the words. Mitchell's refusal to be constrained by a potentially strict form corresponds with her narrator's resistance to mainstream values. In verse one, for instance, the initial note of the second phrase, the neighbor tone B (m. 29), resolves to A through a decorated resolution that first extends upward to the chord third, C: (see example 3-10). The melisma on the word "same" and the confirmation of the A harmony's minor quality imbue the pivotal line, "all romantics meet the same fate" with urgency.

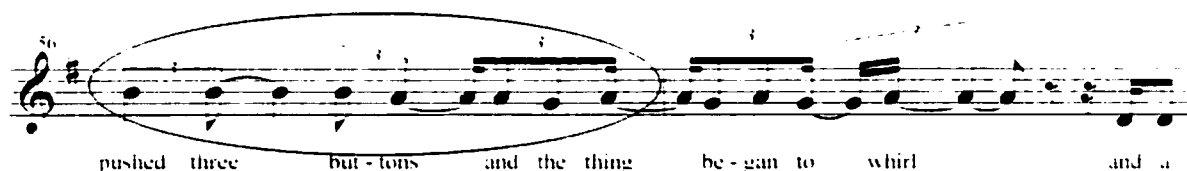
Example 3-10: Expressive Melisma in the Vocal Line, mm. 29-31



¹² This word painting device is repeated later in verse two, where the line "romanticizing some pain that's in your head, you got tunes in your eyes but the songs you punched are dreamin'" – another reference to the jukebox, set to a steady right-hand alternation between D-G-B and E-G-B in mm. 64-67.

At the same point in the second verse, the narrator is concerned with purely descriptive details – Richard’s activation of the jukebox – and Mitchell avoids the upward turn to C entirely (see example 3-11).

Example 3-11: Avoidance of C in Vocal Line, mm. 56-57

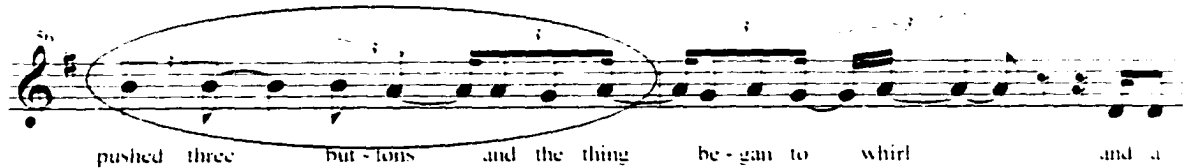


In verse three, she sings the C-B-A melisma not in the second phrase, where Richard’s appliance purchases are described, but in the third, on the word “home,” where his quasi-tragic fate is revealed: “he drinks at home now most nights with the TV on and all the house lights left up bright.”

The piano also makes its commentary on Richard’s materialistic demise, first by adding the pitches A and E to the usually pure G triad in m. 82 on the first syllable of “figure” – yielding a complex, conflicted sonority that depicts Richard’s compromise. In m. 84, at the word “coffee,” the piano plays a complete Am7, whose adamantly sad minor third – absent in the corresponding portions of the previous two verses – is transferred one octave down in m. 86 to initiate an elegiac arc-like run, reminiscent of the introduction’s perfect fourth sonorities (see example 3-12). With these subtle alterations to the piano part – the tonic triad’s exchange of purity for jazzy sophistication, the A chord’s minor third, and the wistful melodic run – Mitchell evokes the distance that separates the third verse from the first two. It is a distance measured not only by passage of time, but also by loss of innocence.

At the same point in the second verse, the narrator is concerned with purely descriptive details – Richard’s activation of the jukebox – and Mitchell avoids the upward turn to C entirely (see example 3-11).

Example 3-11: Avoidance of C in Vocal Line, mm. 56-57



In verse three, she sings the C-B-A melisma not in the second phrase, where Richard’s appliance purchases are described, but in the third, on the word “home,” where his quasi-tragic fate is revealed: “he drinks at home now most nights with the TV on and all the house lights left up bright.”

The piano also makes its commentary on Richard’s materialistic demise, first by adding the pitches A and E to the usually pure G triad in m. 82 on the first syllable of “figure” – yielding a complex, conflicted sonority that depicts Richard’s compromise. In m. 84, at the word “coffee,” the piano plays a complete Am7, whose adamantly sad minor third – absent in the corresponding portions of the previous two verses – is transferred one octave down in m. 86 to initiate an elegiac arc-like run, reminiscent of the introduction’s perfect fourth sonorities (see example 3-12). With these subtle alterations to the piano part – the tonic triad’s exchange of purity for jazzy sophistication, the A chord’s minor third, and the wistful melodic run – Mitchell evokes the distance that separates the third verse from the first two. It is a distance measured not only by passage of time, but also by loss of innocence.

arrives at B on beat 4 of bar 7 (m. 33). The beginning of the line thus anticipates the harmonic shift to G by more than two beats. In verse two, the line “drink up now it’s getting on time to close” begins on the second beat of bar 7 (m. 60), one beat after the change in harmony, and descends to D at the end of the first beat of bar 8 (m. 61). In verse three, the line “all the house lights left up bright” begins in bar 6 (m. 86) on the second half of beat 3, and descends only to G, which it reaches on the second eighth of bar 7 (m.87). The three remaining syllables of the line, “left up bright,” are then set to a repeated G, a variation perhaps prompted by Mitchell’s sensitivity to the text. A descending line setting “lights left up bright” would seem incongruous. With the exception of the third verse, the descending line bridges the two registral areas established in phrases 1-3, separated by the pitch F# – which never occurs in the vocal part.⁶³ With its unidirectional quality the melodic line both counters the prevalent neighboring motion of the previous three phrases, and foreshadows the melodic conception of section B of the verse, which is comprised of a string of descending lines. In section A, the return to the initial register coincides with the return to the initial harmony to give the section a satisfying closure.

After the next eight-measure segment, section A’, which repeats the harmonic layout of section A while subtly altering its underlying melodic scheme, Mitchell returns to the harmonic progression of the introduction’s section B (mm. 17-24) for section B of the verse. Lyrically, this segment contains exhortations about the future – first Richard’s to the narrator (“when you gonna realize they’re only pretty lies?”), then the narrator’s to Richard (“when you gonna get yourself back on your feet?”), and finally the narrator’s to

⁶³ The vocal part’s avoidance of F#, the leading tone of the song’s principal key G major, adds to the tonal ambiguity established from the very start of the introduction.

herself (“only a dark cocoon before I spread my gorgeous wings and fly away”). The accelerated harmonic movement, bolstered by the initial cycle of fifths progression G-C-F, is a contrast to the relatively static section A, and supports a transition from inaction (conversation, narrative description, contemplation, and sulking) to action (facing reality, standing up, flying away). In some ways section B also resembles a chorus. Like the two section A’s, it is divided into four phrases, but unlike in the earlier sections, three of these maintain a relatively high degree of pitch/rhythm invariance. This is particularly true of the beginning of phrase two – which starts on the pitch E, the song’s melodic climax. This moment is as close as “Richard” comes to a melodic and lyrical hook, since in the first two verses the same pitches and rhythms set the words “When you gonna...”

Example 3-13 presents section B of each verse as example 3-7 presented each verse of section A – stacked atop one another. Additionally, example 3-12 indicates the disposition of the four phrases in each verse.

Example 3-13: Three Verses of “Richard” – Section B

The musical score for Example 3-13 shows three verses of the song "Richard" in 4/4 time. Each verse begins with a pick-up bar (Bar 0) and is followed by Bar 1, which is labeled as phrase 1. The lyrics are written below the notes.

Verse 1 (m. 42):
 lies pret... ty lies

Verse 2 (m. 62):
 so sweet love so sweet

Verse 3 (m. 96):
 and dark ca - tes da rk ca - tes

Left Hand

Example 3-13 (continued)

Bar 2 phrase 2

m. 44

V1: When you gon-na re-a-lize they're on-ly pret-ty lies

m. 71 phrase 2

V2: when you gon-na get your-self back on your te

m. 98 phrase 2

V3: on-ly a dark co-con be-fore I get my gor

L.H.

Bar 4 phrase 3

m. 46

V1: on-ly pret-ty lies just

m. 73 phrase 3

V2: et Oh love can be so sweet

m. 100 phrase 3

V3: geous wings and fly a-way on-ly a phase these

L.H.

Example 3-13 (continued)

The musical score for Example 3-13 (continued) consists of four staves. The top three staves are vocal staves labeled V1, V2, and V3, and the bottom staff is a bass line labeled 'B'. The music is in 2/4 time with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). V1 starts at measure 49 with the lyrics 'pret - ty lies'. V2 starts at measure 76 with the lyrics 'love so sweet'. V3 starts at measure 103 with the lyrics 'dark ca fe day'. The bass line is a continuous eighth-note pattern. Phrases 1, 2, 3, and 4 are marked above the staves.

After establishing the melodic lyrical hook with phrases 1 and 2 of the first two verses, Mitchell makes what is perhaps the song's most pointed use of jazz variation technique in verse 3. She first initiates Section B in much the same manner as in the earlier verses, but then extends phrase 2 with a dramatic vacillation between B and C on the first syllable of "gorgeous," that concludes with a scalar descent all the way down to the low B in bar 5 of example 3-13 (m.101). The musical line sets the words "[gor]geous wings and fly away," though far from taking flight, the melody plunges to Mitchell's lowest register. The phrase lasts a full measure longer than in the earlier verses, and pushes phrase 3 – which has an identical pitch and contour disposition as it did in verses 1 and 2 – well behind the change in harmony from F to G at bar 5 of example 3-12 (m. 101). Phrase 3, which lasted eight beats in verse 1, and eleven in verse 2, is condensed to five beats in verse 3, a musical confirmation of its text, "only a phase." Phrase 4 ("these dark cafe days") thus begins at approximately the same point as in the earlier verses.

Example 3-14 is a melody and voice leading reduction of section B, which, like example 3-8, shows my interpretation of the basic melodic scheme against which Mitchell riffs in her performance. The extension of phrase 2 in the third verse is shown parenthetically for reference.

Example 3-14: Melody/Voice Leading Reduction for Section B of the Verses to “Richard”⁶⁴

● = 1 bar

Bar 0 Bars 1-2 Bars 3-4 Bars 5-6 Bars 7-8

phrase 1 phrase 2 - 1st and 2nd verses phrase 3 phrase 4

phrase 2 - 3rd verse

resolves to C in piano part

Because of the chorus-like quality of Section B, with its melodic hook and comparative melodic, rhythmic and even textual consistency, Mitchell's divergence from the "fixed ideal" of example 3-14 in the second phrase of verse 3 is rendered all the more dramatic. The virtuosic vocal technique that yields the precisely executed trill between C and B and subsequent plunge to Mitchell's registral depths serve to confirm the pivotal line's pronouncement. She *will* spread her gorgeous wings and fly away – she's capable of it, and this is demonstrated just as surely as Mitchell's "cynical and drunk" demeanor was earlier in the same verse. Her exclamation in section A': "I'm gonna blow this damn candle out, I don't want nobody coming over to my table I got nothing to talk to anybody about." (mm. 89-93) was set to a flurry of notes that evoked rage while displaying supple vocal dexterity. Amidst all the tightly bunched notes and words

⁶⁴ The reductive conventions used in this example are the same as those used for Example 3-8. See note 58 above (p.87).

Mitchell still manages expressive melismas on “candle” and “my,” and the subtlety of the line recalls a bebop instrumental outburst.

Example 3-15 : Bebop-like Outburst, mm. 89-93

I'm gon-na blow this damn can_dle out I don't want no-bod-y com-ing o-ver to my ta-

92
ble I got no-thing to talk to a - ny - bo - dy a - bout

The extended melisma on “gorgeous” (mm. 99-100) has the effect of all melisma – it highlights the importance while obscuring the comprehensibility of the word. The descending line (through “away” in m. 101) forgoes a literal dramatization of the lyric in favor of making a musical connection. It is simply an improvised elaboration of the descending lines, varying in length, that comprise all the phrases of section B, as well as a nearly direct quotation of the fourth phrase of section A in verse 1. If there is word painting at all, it is not the obvious flying away that is depicted, but the considerably more difficult-to-render “gorgeous.” Again, Mitchell uses her voice as an instrument here, subjugating prosodic concerns to secondary importance. Charles Hartman’s observation about Mitchell’s 1979 album *Mingus* is applicable to “Richard” as well:

Two factors identify Mitchell’s ‘Goodbye Pork Pie Hat’ with a jazz performance: the structure of the piece, and the ‘instrumental’ use of the vocal line.⁶⁵

Such a conflation of vocal and instrumental roles is confirmed (in each verse) at the end of section B, where the vocal line’s sustained suspended 4th. D, is resolved to C♯ only in the piano part. Example 3-16 shows this resolution after the first verse.

⁶⁵ Hartman, “To Whom it May Concern,” 116.

Example 3-16: Resolution of Vocal Line in Piano Part, mm 47-50

The musical score for Example 3-16 shows the resolution of the vocal line in the piano part, measures 47-50. The score is in G major, 4/4 time. The vocal line (V) is on a single staff, and the piano part (Pho) is on two staves (treble and bass). The lyrics "pret-ty lies just pret-ty lies" are written under the vocal line. The piano part features a steady eighth-note bass line in the left hand and chords in the right hand.

The piano outro to "Richard," which along with the last two measures of the third verse is presented as example 3-17, recalls the introduction, and offers a jazz-tinged, questioning conclusion to the song. The right-hand motive that has heretofore heralded the false move to D major in mm 23-24, 50-51 and 77-78, occurs again at the end of the third verse in mm. 106-107, but rather than leading straight to D as it did previously, is developed over a changing bass line, often yielding extended harmonies through the clash of right and left hands. After moving abruptly from A to G in m. 107, the left and right hands combine in m. 110 to project the abrupt juxtaposition of B minor – just as the introduction seemed to move directly to the key of F# minor from D in mm 3 and 11. This time, however, the move to the key of iii seems to be for real. What sounds at first like a return to a I chord in G (again by juxtaposition) in m. 112, is revealed to be an inversion of Em7 by the pitch E on the third beat of that measure. This note also extends the unfailing four eighth-note rhythmic pattern that has prevailed almost tyrannically over the piano's left hand part to five eighth notes, momentarily dislodging the song's metric foundation. This aberration, occurring as it does in "Richard's" antepenultimate measure, perhaps evokes the narrator's success in attaining freedom – spreading her gorgeous wings and flying away.

Example 3-17: End of Third Verse and Piano Outro, mm. 106-114

The musical score for Example 3-17 is presented in two systems. The first system, measures 106-110, is titled 'End of third verse' and 'Outro'. It shows a treble and bass staff in G major. The second system, measures 110-114, continues the piece. It includes labels for various chords: 'V (of D)' at measure 110, 'I (of G)' at measure 111, 'iii (of G) or i (of B minor)' at measure 112, 'iv7 (of B minor)' at measure 113, and 'i? (of B minor)' at measure 114. Chords in the right hand are circled, and the final measure (114) shows a B-F# dyad in the left hand.

The song's final sonority, an A major triad in the right hand over a B-F# dyad in the left, neither reinforces nor confutes this notion, but instead projects uncertainty.⁶⁶ The surprising modulation to B minor is never confirmed by a dominant chord (although the E-F# dyad on the downbeat of m. 113 does constitute half the pitches of F#7), and the absence of a third in what purports to be the new tonic and is the final chord of the song renders its function and significance oblique. The chord, in its jazzy inconclusiveness, reveals more about Mitchell's own musical future than the ultimate fate of her narrator.

CONCLUSION

"The Last Time I Saw Richard" is a statement of resistance to the abandonment of the 1960s countercultural vision, and – in related fashion – a musical expression of non-conformity. It is particularly significant in Mitchell's early output as the first song of

⁶⁶ The chord is a T2 transposition of the G A major sonorities in section A and A' of the verses, and through such elevation, may reinforce the notion that Mitchell's narrator has attained some kind of transcendence. I am grateful to Shaugn O'Donnell for suggesting this idea.

hers on which jazz had a profound impact on both composition and performance. As I have stated in the introduction to this chapter, by the time *Blue* was recorded in 1971, superficial sound elements of jazz already had a pervasive presence on AM radio. Additionally, numerous artists regularly featured on the more rarified airwaves of FM had by this time taken conscious steps to blend jazz with both rock and pop. The most influential attempt at such a synthesis from the jazz world came from Miles Davis, one of the leading figures of 1960s jazz. His two seminal albums, *In a Silent Way* (1969) and *Bitches' Brew* (1970) – which Mitchell would later claim as personal favorites⁸⁷ – featured electric instruments at high volume, open-ended structures grounded by complex ostinato patterns, and multiple percussionists and keyboard players, spawning the genre of jazz-rock fusion that flourished in the 1970s.⁸⁸ Already several years earlier rock bands such as Blood Sweat and Tears and Chicago had borrowed such jazz features as complex brass arrangements, formal structures expanded for improvisation and an emphasis on musical virtuosity. As jazz historian Michael J. Budds has observed, the sound of these groups was characterized by “the combination of a rock rhythm section and a jazz-oriented instrumental section.”⁸⁹ A corollary of this phenomenon was the rise in the late 1960s of such progressive rock groups as Yes, Jethro Tull, Emerson Lake and Palmer, King Crimson, and Genesis, all of whom embraced complexity – of both jazz and classical heritage – in the name of complete *artistic* expression.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Leonard Feather, “Joni Mitchell Makes Mingus Sing,” in *The Joni Mitchell Companion*, 91.

⁸⁸ See Michael J. Budds, *Jazz in the Sixties* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1990), 90-94, and Karl Lippegaus, “Rock Jazz,” in *The Story of Jazz: From New Orleans to Rock Jazz*, ed. Joachim-Ernst Berendt (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 154-71.

⁸⁹ Budds, *Jazz in the Sixties*, 92.

⁹⁰ See John Covach, “Jazz-Rock? Rock-Jazz? Stylistic Crossover in Late-1970s American Progressive Rock,” in *Expression in Pop-Rock Music*, ed. Walter Everett (New York: Garland, 2000), 113-124.

Although Mitchell's use of extended harmonies was firmly established from the time of *Song to a Seagull* – resulting first from alternate tunings on the guitar and then from conflicting right and left hand chords on the piano – she initially resisted overt incorporation of either the AM radio jazz sound or the self-conscious complexity of progressive rock. The early manifestations of jazz in her output – such as that in “Richard” – occurred at a deeper level than the acoustic surface. Mitchell eschewed the French horns and simplistic catapulting between sustained major seventh chords in favor of her native instruments, suspended triads and perfect fourth sonorities, and most importantly, jazz vocal phrasing and melodic structure. The gradual, halting emergence of jazz in her work was not a response to a fleeting, commercial trend, but rather an offshoot of the ongoing search for self-discovery and self-fulfillment that established Mitchell as a product of her times. In “Richard,” the incorporation of jazz enables her to project a wide range of subtly varied expression within the confines of a repeating structure – a defining quality of much jazz improvisation. Her traversal between the emotional poles of plaintive romanticism and fury is given its visceral, real-time quality by her jazz-like flexibility of vocal delivery and melodic conception. This quality, in turn, contributes to the confessional nature of the music – which has been both heralded and decried in Mitchell's output – as the distancing repetition of purely strophic song is cast aside in favor of a more expressive and deeply personal formal approach.

Mitchell's subsequent more directed turn towards jazz in the mid and late 1970s was in large part influenced by her collaboration with a stream of musicians of steadily increasing jazz pedigree. In the mid 1970s she worked with Tom Scott and his jazz-pop-oriented band the L.A. Express. By the end of the decade she was collaborating with

legendary jazz bassist and composer Charles Mingus, as well as jazz-fusion stalwarts Jaco Pastorius and Wayne Shorter. Interestingly, however, while her initial contact with the L.A. Express made her personal stylistic leanings toward jazz more pronounced, the surface light jazz-fusion sound favored by that ensemble actually paved the way for Mitchell's greatest commercial success – the 1974 album *Court and Spark*. When Mitchell toured with the band in 1974, one of the songs on their set-list was “The Last Time I Saw Richard.” A performance of “Richard” from the tour, which is documented on the double live album *Miles of Aisles*,⁷¹ suggests that it was Mitchell – and not her more jazz-qualified ensemble – who came to understand the full jazz potential of the song. From the outset, this version of “Richard” is stripped of many of its non-jazz features. The carefully structured twenty-six measure introduction of the original recording, with all its functional ambiguity and its running eighth-note ostinato, is replaced by a sparsely textured and much shorter improvisatory preface.

Example 3-18 is a transcription of the live introduction. The running eighth notes in the left hand are gone, as is the steadfast adherence to 4/4 time they engendered. In the second and fourth bar, hints at a triple subdivision of the beat imply an underlying swing feel – a feeling confirmed by Mitchell's vocal rhythm in the verses. With the exception of mm. 2-3, a pedal tone E is maintained in the bass, shifting the emphasis from the almost jarring harmonic changes of the original – and a correspondingly “classical” conception – to the lackadaisical figuration in the right hand. That figuration contains copious unresolved suspensions and fourths, as well as ambiguity between the pitches G $\sharp$ and G $\natural$.

⁷¹ Joni Mitchell, *Miles of Aisles* (Asylum (2) 202, 1974).

Example 3-18 “Richard” Live – Intro

As a whole the introduction feels like an off-the-cuff extemporization, rather than a carefully planned section of structural significance. In the verse that follows, the piano maintains its sparseness, poking in with supporting chords – which are more consistently jazzy than in the original – at irregular intervals, much as a comping jazz pianist would. The transposition from the original key of G down to E gives Mitchell’s voice a huskier, jazzier and less innocent quality than in the original. It also accommodates the shrinking of her high range due to excessive cigarette smoking – a phenomenon that would continue throughout her career.

Ironically, it is with the entrance of the LA Express in section B of the verses that the jazz feeling dissipates. The straight 4/4 beat of the drums and quicker tempo prompts Mitchell to streamline her vocal delivery, emphasizing downbeats and metric regularity, unlike in the original recorded version. Mitchell would only succeed in completely shaking free of such steady rhythmic underpinning in ensemble work on *Mingus*, which

was four years in her future. Her stylistic journey towards jazz was still very much in progress.

Far from thrusting her into the orbit of artistic inaccessibility, Mitchell's collaboration with Tom Scott and the LA Express actually facilitated her embrace of a more marketable, AM-friendly sound. And just as Mitchell's sociopolitical conception of the world and her place in it deeply affected both her lyrics and music in "Richard," the evolution, or even revolution of her position in the popular music industry brought about by this new collaboration would inform Mitchell's work to its structural core. This development is a central concern of the next chapter, whose focus is the title track of *Court and Spark*.

4

“Court and Spark”: Self-Referential Expression at Mitchell’s Commercial Peak

INTRODUCTION

If, as I have argued in chapter 3, Mitchell’s songwriting and performance practice were informed by the sociopolitical climate of her times, her music – particularly after her career had developed for several years – was also frequently characterized by multiple layers of self-reference. On the most basic level, the degree of connection between Mitchell’s lyrics and her biography has been a long-standing point of speculation among fans, and has prompted the frequent conflation on the part of popular music journalists, and even scholars, between the persona or personae projected in her recordings and the actual historical Joni Mitchell. For example, in his review of *Blue* for *Rolling Stone*, Timothy Crouse writes, “Her primary purpose is to create something meaningful out of the random moments of pain and pleasure in her life.”¹ Sheila Whiteley, writing in a more scholarly context, observes:

It was obvious from her first albums, *Songs to a Seagull* [sic], *Clouds* and *Ladies of the Canyon* that Mitchell...had an ability to draw on her personal experience and then translate this into a musical idiom.²

Mitchell herself has acknowledged her own conscious role in the creation of a public persona infused with real aspects of her personality. In a 1996 radio interview conducted by another popular music star, Morrissey, she stated:

... people were kind of shocked at the intimacy and the revelation of [*Blue*]. And it was peculiar in the pop arena at that time because you were supposed to be bigger than life and portraying yourself bigger than life....I remember having this thought: Well, if they’re going to worship me – because it had sort of begun –

¹ Timothy Crouse, review of *Blue*, *Rolling Stone* (August 5, 1971), 42.

² Whiteley, “The Lonely Road,” 79.

they should know who they're worshipping.... I didn't want a deception and I also didn't want the inequity of being on a pedestal. So I wanted to create a persona that was actual, that was really who I was, you know, so that if I had any insight – because I took this job very responsibly – to pass on since I had a public voice I felt I better be presenting something nourishing and useful.³

Mitchell's penchant for self-reference, however, extends into far more sophisticated realms than mere verbal allusions to her own true feelings and experiences. In her lyrics, a certain thematic and metaphoric consistency, established from the time of her very first album, provides Mitchell with a rich symbolic vocabulary, upon which she draws repeatedly in her songs, defining an ever more intricate value system. Thus does she make reference not only to the trivial and not-so-trivial details of her day-to-day existence, but also to the tenets of a philosophy founded in her earliest music.

As Mitchell's success in the popular music marketplace dramatically increased in the early 1970s, her misgivings about the manipulative record industry and her complicity in the star system spawned an even more complex adoption of self-reference. Not only were subjects such as the music industry and stardom explored in her lyrics, they often were significantly mined in her music as well, and in the interaction of those two domains. In fully assessing this development, it is important to transcend a tendency of writers on popular music, described by Allan Moore, to locate a song's persona exclusively in its lyrics or vocal part:

It is perhaps because of music's persistent ineffability and resistance to enquiries that attempt to refer it to 'the outside world' that many commentators write as if it is merely a pleasant backdrop to the lyrics, and concentrate either on interpretation of the lyrics themselves or on the persona embodied in the human voice. After all, this voice is the primary link between the artist and the listener, being the instrument shared by both.⁴

³ Joni Mitchell, interview by Morrissey, Reprise Records, October 18, 1996. Reprinted at the Joni Mitchell Discussion List web site, <http://www.jmdl.com/articles/view.cfm?id=678>.

⁴ Moore, *Rock, The Primary Text*, 185.

In the case of Mitchell, it is also essential to heed the notions expressed by David Brackett that even a single song may contain within it a “multiplicity of voices,” and that “the author ‘inside the text’ may inscribe the author ‘outside the text’ as one of the text’s voices.”⁵ The multi-instrumentalist Mitchell, in fact, at times exploits the potential for more than one “author inside the text” to inscribe the single, yet considerably variegated author outside of it. As she began, in the mid-1970s, to work first with an increasing number of guest musicians and ultimately, beginning with 1974’s *Court and Spark*, with a full band, her own instrumental work, juxtaposed with that of an ensemble, attained new self-referential power. Mitchell’s personal performance styles on acoustic guitar and piano, which have been discussed in chapters 2 and 3 respectively, enabled her to express *her own* presence amidst a sea of instrumental interlopers, and in the process to subtly allude both to the history of her career and to the ideas and ideologies expressed along its path.

The commingling of Mitchell’s varied types of self-reference, from autobiographical allusions in her lyrics, to the maintenance and development of consistent poetic themes, to the interjection of Mitchell, “the author outside the text,” through her skillful manipulation of her various instrumental and vocal identities, reached a kind of peak with *Court and Spark*, which is to date her most commercially successful album. Mitchell’s ambiguous relationships with the popular music industry, and with her accompanying band, Tom Scott and the LA Express, as well as a pained awareness of her own ongoing spiritual and professional evolution, are subtexts that alternately mirror, confute, and overwhelm the album’s more explicit issues. At the same time, on *Court and Spark* Mitchell frequently invokes many of the poetic themes that had served to unify

⁵ Brackett, *Interpreting Popular Music*, 16.

the songs of her previous five albums. From a purely musical standpoint, *Court and Spark* constitutes a synthesis of the major styles Mitchell had explored up until its creation: folk, pop and jazz. As such, it forms an important step not only in Mitchell's development as a commercial force, but as an artist.

The following discussion is divided into two main parts: a consideration of three recurring poetic themes that run through Mitchell's output prior to *Court and Spark*, and a close reading of the album's first song, the title track. The themes, "independence vs. love," "non-conformity," and "purity vs. corruption," all play a significant role in "Court and Spark," and I consider them here in order to establish a contextual backdrop – much as my discussion of Mitchell's external world was intended to contextualize my analysis of "The Last Time I Saw Richard" in chapter 3.¹ In my analysis of "Court and Spark," I shall argue that Mitchell's skillful blend of musical sophistication and multi-layered self-reference combine to imbue the song with an elaborate network of potential meaning, and a richness of expressive nuance not often attributed to popular music.

¹ Whitesell similarly notes that Mitchell's "body of work can be seen as a philosophical exploration of recurring themes: the solitary pilgrimage, the contrary pulls of love and independence, the landscapes of the modern city and of a mythic America." Whitesell, "A Joni Mitchell Aviary," in *The Joni Mitchell Companion*, 238. His three categories map, although not precisely, onto my "non-conformity," "love vs independence," and "purity vs. corruption." Whitesell focuses his subsequent discussion on one theme, "the visionary flight to a better world," as it manifests itself in four songs dating from 1968-1988: "Song to a Seagull" (1968), "Sweet Bird" (1975), "Amelia" (1976), and "The Beat of Black Wings" (1988).

RECURRENT THEMES IN MITCHELL'S EARLY WORK⁷

Independence vs. Love

As I have discussed in chapter 2, from the very first song of her debut album, *Song to a Seagull*, Mitchell concerned herself with the pursuit of and desire for independence and freedom. In "I Had a King," Mitchell's narrator refuses to be bound to a conventional, repressive marriage. In this case independence is an obvious and unproblematic goal, yet more often Mitchell establishes independence as the object of sacrifice. The characters she presents in a positive light in her songs – often including the female narrators that are apparent stand-ins for herself – to paraphrase her song "Help Me," Love their lovin', but not like they love their freedom,⁸ and must often forgo the former for the latter. In the final song on *Song to a Seagull*, "Cactus Tree," the female protagonist – presented in third-person narration – neglects a devoted lover because she is, as the song's refrain reminds us at the end of each verse, "so busy being free."⁹

The theme of independence, thus established in the songs that bookend Mitchell's debut album, becomes perhaps most pronounced three albums later, on the emotionally explicit *Blue*.¹⁰ Time and again in that collection of songs, Mitchell's in-song personae

⁷ Much of this discussion is devoted to a consideration of the three themes as they manifest themselves in Mitchell's lyrics. In those cases where thematic music-text correspondences occur that are important for my subsequent analysis of "Court and Spark," I will point them out. My goal is not to produce a survey of music-text correspondence in Mitchell's early work, but rather to lay the groundwork for a sufficiently historically informed discussion of music-text correspondences in "Court and Spark." Something resembling the aforementioned survey does in fact exist – it is Wilfrid Mellers, "White Seagull, Black Highwaywoman, Red Squaw: Joni Mitchell," in *Angels of the Night: Popular Female Singers of our Time* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 141-68. Although Mellers provides no musical examples, he traverses through Mitchell's entire output from 1968 to 1985, making countless insightful observations about music-text correspondence along the way.

⁸ Mitchell, "Help Me," *Court and Spark*.

⁹ Mitchell, "Cactus Tree," *Song to a Seagull*.

¹⁰ Sheila Whiteley, in her analysis of *Blue*, considers the "tension between freedom and dependency" repeatedly expressed in Mitchell's songs, another close corollary to my independence vs. love theme. Whiteley notes that the road of independence, of necessity accompanied by financial success, is "typically

obey some inner compulsion to abandon their lovers for the sake of freedom. In "Carey" and "California," the abandonment is treated jovially, the product of a longing for home. In the former song Mitchell's narrator tells her lover – whom she is attempting to lure out for one last evening of fun – "it sure is hard to leave here. But it's really not my home." Later in the song, however, she acknowledges that home is not necessarily a fixed location, when she sings "Maybe I'll go to Amsterdam. Maybe I'll go to Rome."¹¹ In "California," Mitchell's narrator says of a "red red rogue" with whom she had a dalliance on a Grecian isle, "And I might have stayed on with him there. But my heart cried out for you, California."¹² In both songs, "home" serves as a corollary to her own personal space, which she holds dearer than the idea of cohabitation. In "This Flight Tonight," Mitchell's narrator laments the impulsive burst of fury that placed her on a plane flying away from her lover, repeatedly urging in the song's refrain, "Turn this crazy bird around. I shouldn't have got on this flight tonight." In "River," a kind of doom-laden Christmas carol built on a musical quotation of "Jingle Bells," her narrator confesses "I'm so hard to handle. I'm selfish and I'm sad," and ultimately reveals "I made my baby say goodbye." Whether by choice or reflex, Mitchell's narrators are consistently too headstrong, difficult and independent-minded to maintain a lasting relationship.

Non-Conformity

Closely related to the theme of independence but even more ubiquitous in Mitchell's work is the theme of non-conformity, which has already been explored in chapter 3. Mitchell's characters, including both the first person narrators that are often

male territory," and that Mitchell's struggle involved resistance to a female tradition of capitulation – particularly in the realm of popular music. See Whiteley, "The Lonely Road," 78-94.

¹¹ Mitchell, "Carey," *Blue*.

¹² Mitchell, "California," *Blue*.

perceived by fans and critics as Mitchell's personae, and their male counterparts, often explicitly identified as current or former lovers, defy social mores and value individuality. In "Michael From Mountains," from *Song to a Seagull*, the title character is an artist in spirit, changing the "taffeta patterns" of "oil on...puddles" "with a stick that he found." Michael comes from somewhere else, from mountains, and he is to some extent unknowable. The song's narrator, only present as a first-person entity in the choruses, allows Michael his untamability, while still hoping to penetrate his secrets:

Michael from mountains
Go where you will go to
Know that I will know you
Someday I may know you very well¹³

In "The Arrangement," from *Ladies of the Canyon*, a vituperative narrator scorns an unnamed someone for achieving success in purely capitalist terms:

You could have been more than a name on the door
On the thirty-third floor in the air
More than a credit card
Swimming pool in the backyard¹⁴

As I discussed in chapter 3, this is a theme Mitchell would return to in "The Last Time I Saw Richard," on *Blue*. Instead of feeling "to be a cog in something turning,"¹⁵ the characters Mitchell portrays favorably spurn conventional, predictable lives and material security for self-discovery, artistic fulfillment and adventure. In "Rainy Night House," the narrator speaks adoringly to a potential lover who is a "holy man On the FM radio":

You are a refugee
From a wealthy family
You gave up all the golden factories
To see, who in the world you might be¹⁶

¹³ Mitchell, "Michael From Mountains," *Song to a Seagull*.

¹⁴ Mitchell, "The Arrangement," *Ladies of the Canyon*.

¹⁵ Mitchell, "Woodstock," *Ladies of the Canyon*.

¹⁶ Mitchell, "Rainy Night House," *Ladies of the Canyon*.

“Rainy Night House” immediately follows “The Arrangement” on *Ladies of the Canyon*, and presents precisely the alternative vision to which Mitchell alludes in the former song. The eschewal of family fortune on the path of self-discovery – which in this case eventually lead to rock stardom – is preferred to the accrual of the standard signifiers of social status via conventional avenues.

On *Blue*, the theme of non-conformity is touched on repeatedly. In “My Old Man,” the narrator celebrates her unconventional lover, who is “a singer in the park,” “a walker in the rain,” and “a dancer in the dark.” Their bond requires no traditional sanctification:

We don't need no piece of paper
From the city hall
Keeping us tied and true!¹⁷

In “Carey,” the narrator is an artistic free spirit, cavalierly contemplating her next move:

Maybe I'll go to Amsterdam
Maybe I'll go to Rome
And rent me a grand piano and put some flowers 'round my room¹⁸

In “Let The Wind Carry Me,” on *For The Roses*, the narrator contrasts her mother's strict, confining ways to her father's encouragement of individual expression:

She don't like my kick pleat skirt
She don't like my eyelids painted green
She don't like me staying up late
In my high-heeled shoes
Living for that Rock 'n' Roll dancing scene
Papa says “Leave the girl alone. Mother
She's looking like a Movie Queen”
Mama thinks she spoilt me
Papa knows somehow he set me free.¹⁹

¹⁷ Mitchell, “My Old Man,” *Blue*.

¹⁸ Mitchell, “Carey,” *Blue*.

¹⁹ Mitchell, “Let The Wind Carry Me,” *For The Roses*.

In “Judgement [sic] of The Moon And Stars (Ludwig’s Tune),” a song addressed to Beethoven, Mitchell at once celebrates and laments the “solitary path” that is the artist’s fate. The song concludes with a rousing call to cast aside etiquette in favor of unmitigated creative expression:

If you’re feeling contempt
Well then you tell it
If you’re tired of the silent night
Jesus, well then you yell it
Condemned to wires and hammers
Strike every chord that you feel
That broken trees
And elephant ivories
Conceal²⁰

In the context of lyrics already discussed, these words can be heard as Mitchell’s ideal personal creed, although, as I shall address below, perhaps not the only one to which she adheres.

Purity vs. Corruption

The theme of purity vs. corruption, present in Mitchell’s output from the start, manifests itself as two recurring dichotomies: rural vs. urban life; and independent artistry vs. entanglement with the commercial music industry. In both cases, Mitchell’s natural sympathies lie with the former element, but the seductions of the latter prove repeatedly to be enticing. The first dichotomy provides the organizing principle to Mitchell’s debut album, *Song to a Seagull*. The album’s two sides are presented as part one, “I Came to the City,” and part two, “Out of the City and Down to the Seaside.” “Nathan La Franeer,” from side one, details the narrator’s ride to the airport with a belligerent cab driver, and offers one of Mitchell’s darkest visions of the city:

²⁰ Mitchell, “Judgement of the Moon and Stars (Ludwig’s Tune),” *For the Roses*.

I asked him would he hurry
 But we crawled the canyons slowly
 Through the buyers and the sellers
 Through the burglar bells and the wishing wells
 With gangs and girly shows
 The ghostly garden grows.²¹

A more optimistic conception is presented in "Night in the City":

Night in the city looks pretty to me
 Night in the city looks fine
 Music comes spilling out into the street
 Colors go flashing in time²²

The latter song also features the album's only additional instrumental tracks – a rock-like electric bass part performed by Steven Stills, and honky-tonk piano played by Mitchell. The result is an up-tempo pop song with a catchy melodic hook, a contrast to the generally cerebral sound of the album and an early instance of Mitchell's association of pop with urban life. Mitchell's vision of the city as a place alive with magic and potential is echoed on her next album, *Clouds*, in the song "Chelsea Morning."

Mitchell's 1970 song "Woodstock" became a number 11 hit for Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young [CSNY].²³ She wrote it after having been discouraged from attending the legendary 1969 music festival by her manager, Elliot Roberts, who feared that her attendance might cause her to miss an important upcoming appearance on the Dick Cavett show.²⁴ "Woodstock" captures the idealism at the heart of the festival's

²¹ Mitchell, "Nathan La Franeer," *Song to a Seagull*.

²² Mitchell, "Night in the City," *Song to a Seagull*.

²³ Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, "Woodstock," (Atlantic 2723, 1970).

²⁴ O'Brien, *Shadows and Light*, 100.

conception²⁵ and provides, in its anthem-like refrain, the most crystallized articulation of Mitchell's equation of purity with rural existence:

We are stardust
We are golden
And we've got to get ourselves
Back to the garden²⁶

Characterized by a slow tempo and dark, brooding intensity, and filled out by her own moaning backing harmonies, Mitchell's recording has a searching quality that contrasts the up-tempo exuberance of CSNY's hit version. The latter emphasizes, to quote the song itself, "song and celebration," while the former, the thoughtful notion that "life is for learning."

The songs for Mitchell's 1972 album, *For The Roses*, were written during a one-year retreat to her country home at Half Moon Bay, north of Vancouver on the Sunshine Coast in Canada.²⁷ As soon as Mitchell established her career, she began to maintain dual residences in Los Angeles, her adoptive home, and the Canadian countryside, her native terrain – a living corollary to the torn allegiances to urban and rural life expressed in her work. "Cold Blue Steel and Sweet Fire," a chilling portrait of heroin addiction, links depressing city images – "hollow-grey-fire-escape-thief;" "pawnshops crisscrossed and padlocked" – with drug abuse and criminal activity. In "Electricity," Mitchell's narrator finds a positive life in a diametrically opposing landscape:

Well I'm learning
It's peaceful

²⁵The festival, which was officially entitled "the Woodstock Music and Art Fair," was advertised by its organizers as "3 days of Peace and Music." See Joel Makower, *Woodstock: The Oral History* (New York: Doubleday, 1989).

²⁶Mitchell, "Woodstock," *Ladies of the Canyon*. Mellers notes that "[t]he song, typical of the psychedelic sixties and the dreaming Age of Aquarius, is an ecological protest against smog, a political protest against Vietnam, and a general protest against apathy." Mellers, *Angels of the Night*, 149.

²⁷O'Brien, *Shadows and Light*, 133.

With a good dog and some trees
 Out of touch with the breakdown
 Of this century²⁸

The other half of Mitchell's "purity vs. corruption" theme pertains to the conflicting quests for success on artistic and spiritual levels and success in the music industry. This part of the theme is not emphasized on Mitchell's first several albums, but comes into increasing focus around the time of *Ladies of the Canyon* (1970), which was recorded as her own career began to approach its stratospheric heights. In "For Free," which is discussed in chapter 3, Mitchell's narrator – clearly redolent of Mitchell herself – contrasts her own ambition for "fortune: And those velvet curtain calls," to the pure musicality of a street musician, "playing real good, for free."²⁹ A similar expression of ambivalence in the face of her success occurs on *Blue* in "Carey":

Maybe it's been too long
 since I was scramblin' in the street
 Now they got me used to the clean white linen
 And that fancy French cologne³⁰

If Mitchell's persona nostalgically laments the passing of a purity conferred by humble origins, she does so only half-heartedly, fully aware that her material achievement has won her the commodity she values most, freedom. For clearly only a woman of means can choose to pursue artistic fulfillment with a rented grand piano in Amsterdam or Rome. Sometimes Mitchell's narrators state their financial ambition plainly. In "River," she sings "I'm going to make a lot of money; then I'm going to quit this crazy scene."³¹ In "California," an already wealthy narrator travels the world but longs for home. She

²⁸ Mitchell, "Electricity," *For The Roses*.

²⁹ Mitchell, "For Free," *Ladies of the Canyon*.

³⁰ Mitchell, "Carey," *Blue*.

³¹ Mitchell, "River," *Blue*.

subtly expresses disillusionment with the European jet set superficiality her fame has made available to her:

So I bought me a ticket
I caught a plane to Spain
Went to a party down a red dirt road
There were lots of pretty people there
Reading Rolling Stone, reading Vogue³²

Despite the fact that the songs of *For the Roses* were written during a period when Mitchell was removed from the everyday workings of the music industry, those workings informed her lyrics and music more than on any previous album. Lyrically, the best example of this is the title song, which chronicles the rise and fall of a pop star in a tone laced throughout with bitterness. First the artist, in a state of purity, approaches the record company:

In some office sits a poet
And he trembles as he sings
And he asks some guy
To circulate his soul around

Then, success arrives, and with it the necessary loss of wholesomeness, artistic integrity and independence:

Remember the days when you used to sit
And make up your tunes for love
And pour your simple sorrow
To the soundhole and your knee
And now you're seen
On giant screens
And at parties for the press
And for people who have slices of you
From the company

And finally, a new act supercedes the old, its triumph built on anything but merit:

³² Mitchell, "California," *Blue*. Mitchell revisits the topic of superficiality in "People's Parties," on *Court and Spark*.

And they introduce some band
 But they seem so much confetti
 Looking at them on my TV set
 Oh the power and the glory
 Just when you're getting a taste for worship
 They start bringing out the hammers
 And the boards
 And the nails.

The narrator, again unquestionably suggestive of Mitchell herself, admits to hypocrisy, her own artistic purity fatally compromised by her entanglement in the system she would seem to abhor:

I guess I seem ungrateful
 With my teeth sunk in the hand
 That brings me things
 I really can't give up just yet³³

These lines encapsulate a core dilemma for Mitchell, and indeed for any ambitious musician balancing the demands of artistic growth and commercial viability.

Mitchell's complex relationship to the pop music industry and the demands of maintaining her significant position within it manifest themselves musically as well as lyrically on *For the Roses*. The album features numerous guest musicians and increasingly complex arrangements, yielding a richer, more commercial composite sound than that of her previous, fully acoustic albums. Mitchell's comments about the song "You Turn Me On, I'm a Radio," made in 1972, reveal that at least in some instances the turn to a more singles-oriented production aesthetic was consciously undertaken:

I've never had a hit record in America, so I got together with some friends and we decided we were going to make this hit—conjure up this bit of magic for AM radio, destined to appeal to DJs.³⁴

³³ Joni Mitchell, "For the Roses," *For the Roses*.

³⁴ Mitchell, interview by Penny Valentine, in *Sounds* (June 10, 1972). Reprinted in *The Joni Mitchell Companion*, 54.

Recorded with country band accompaniment featuring steel string acoustic guitar, electric bass, harmonica and drums, and centered around a memorable melodic hook setting the catchy title phrase, the song did attain for Mitchell her first appearance in the Top 40, peaking at number 25. The lyrics to “You Turn Me On” draw parallels between a casual, part-time relationship and the soothing if unsubstantial fare of pop radio. The narrator’s first-person proclamations of malleability and servility seem a subtly ironic commentary on Mitchell’s professed intentions for the song, and suggest a willful abdication of artistic self-determinacy:

Oh honey you turn me on
 I’m a radio
 I’m a country station
 I’m a little bit corny
 I’m a wildwood flower
 Waving for you
 I’m a broadcasting tower
 Waving for you³⁵

There are also allusions to prostitution, a subject Mitchell would revisit more explicitly on *Court and Spark* in the song “Raised on Robbery.” “You Turn Me On” begins with the suggestive lines:

If you’re driving into town
 With a dark cloud above you
 Dial in the number
 Who’s bound to love you

The narrator’s would-be lover, or listener, or john, is fickle – which is perhaps an indication of Mitchell’s conception of the AM radio audience – but she accepts him on his terms:

I know you don’t like weak women
 You get bored so quick

³⁵ “You Turn Me On, I’m a Radio,” *For the Roses*.

And you don't like strong women
 'Cause they're hip to your tricks
 It's been dirty for dirty
 Down the line
 But you know I come when you whistle
 When you're loving and kind
 But if you've got too many doubts
 If there's no good reception for me
 Then tune me out, 'cause honey
 Who needs the static
 It hurts the head

The ambivalence Mitchell's narrator feels for the object of her appeals can be seen to neatly reflect Mitchell's own unsure relationship with the commercial music industry. Her narrator is eager to please, to "come when you whistle," but will drop her pursuit immediately, seemingly without pain, if "there's no good reception for me." Like the narrator's advances, the song "You Turn Me On" might be thought of as a kind of trial balloon, sent out by Mitchell to a prospective audience she had not previously courted. Her dalliance with commercially targeted recording would continue in her follow-up album, *Court and Spark*, which yielded two top-40 hits, including "Help Me," her only top-10 single ever. Thereafter, however, her interest in AM viability seemed rather suddenly to abate, as her subsequent albums through *Mingus* were increasingly assured essays in experimental music and jazz, none stocked with a tailor-made radio single.

Of particular interest is Mitchell's ability to draw connections between words and music on a far deeper level than mere word painting. Just as she alluded to a jazz conception of vocal melody in "The Last Time I Saw Richard," in part to contrast her narrator's non-conformity with the title character's thorough capitulation, here Mitchell's invocation of a breezy country-pop soundworld is imbued with deeper meaning by the agreement of the text. In this song, as with "Blonde in the Bleachers," from the same

album. Mitchell's thematic concern is not with purity per se, but instead many of its opposites, including fickleness, shallowness, and transience. "Blonde in the Bleachers" is about the impossibility of maintaining a relationship with a rock star. The pivotal line, "You can't hold the hand of a rock and roll man very long," coincides, in a bit of obvious but nonetheless satisfying word-painting, with the entrance of a rock band (identified by the liner notes simply as Steven Stills). Again, Mitchell links rock and roll, stylistically and lyrically, with infidelity, impatience, and ultimately impurity. Such stylistic associations are manifested again, in infinitely more complex fashion, on "Court and Spark," to which I now turn.

COURT AND SPARK AND "COURT AND SPARK"

After having employed Tom Scott as a freelance wind player on *For the Roses*, Mitchell went in 1973 to hear his jazz-fusion band The LA Express play at a North Hollywood club, The Baked Potato.³⁶ At the same time that her interest in fashioning a successful AM radio hit was forming, her musical arrangements and rhythmic sensibility were becoming more sophisticated, and she was growing increasingly frustrated with the limitations of working with rock studio musicians. As she explained in a 1979 interview:

I had attempted to play my music with rock & roll players, but they couldn't grasp the subtlety of the form. I've never studied music, so I'd always be talking in abstractions. And they'd laugh. "Aww, isn't that cute? She's trying to tell us how to play." Never negatively, but appealingly, you know. And finally it was [studio drummer] Russ Kunkel who said, "Joni, you better get yourself a jazz drummer."³⁷

Impressed with the LA Express's performance, she invited them to sit in on the sessions for her next recording, and ultimately the band's core members – John Guerin on drums, Max Bennett on bass, Tom Scott on winds, Joe Sample on electric piano, and Larry

³⁶ O'Brien, *Shadows and Light*, 146.

³⁷ Cameron Crowe, "The Rolling Stone Interview: Joni Mitchell," *Rolling Stone* 296 (July 26, 1979), 51.

Carlton on electric guitar – appeared on the 1974 album *Court and Spark* as Mitchell's first steady backing band.³⁸ Ironically, while Mitchell's engagement of this ensemble of skilled jazz players enabled her to broaden her musical horizons and probably played a pivotal role in sparking her steadily increasing jazz orientation of the mid- to late-1970s, the band's predisposition towards light jazz-rock fusion imbues the album's overall sound with a glossy jazz-pop luster that was quite in keeping with the prevailing style of mid-1970s AM radio. Thus Tom Scott and the LA Express's presence simultaneously endowed Mitchell with the potential to achieve her greatest commercial success to date, and to explore uncharted artistic territory that extended beyond the narrow borders of mainstream taste. Seeds of the realization of both potentials, as well as an acute awareness of the significance of her new working arrangement, are in evidence on the album's first track, the title song "Court and Spark."

The short instrumental introduction of the song does not betray the presence of musicians other than Mitchell herself. As *Court and Spark* is the first album on which she collaborated with a band from start to finish, it is significant that its initial sound is solo piano. From the outset, Mitchell's identity as an instrumentalist is thrown into relief. The presence of a band on the recording clearly means that the sovereignty of that identity, which heretofore in Mitchell's output had gone unchallenged, will now be called into question. An underlying narrative of instrumental autonomy thus emerges, on the album as a whole and particularly on its title track. The extent to which Mitchell the guitarist, and Mitchell the pianist can resist being either absorbed or overwhelmed by

³⁸ Despite having a steady band, Mitchell by no means abandoned her use of studio musicians and guest artists. Other performers on the album included Jim Hughart and Wilton Felder on bass, Milt Holland on chimes, Chuck Findley on trumpet, Wayne Perkins, Dennis Budimir, Robbie Robertson and Jose Feliciano on electric guitar, and David Crosby, Graham Nash, Susan Webb and the comedy duo Cheech and Chong on backing vocals.

Tom Scott's LA Express is a central issue in "Court and Spark," and one that resonates both with the general theme of independence present in much of Mitchell's work, and the complex relationship to independence expressed by this particular song's narrator.

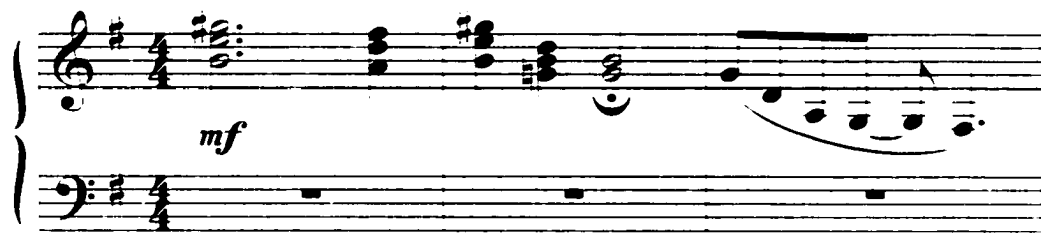
The significance of the Mitchell/band dichotomy extends beyond its reference to the independence theme. From the time of her first album, Mitchell had employed rock instruments not indiscriminately, but in order to calibrate the text-music relationship of her songs at a deep level. As I have discussed above, the use of electric bass on "Night in the City" helps to depict the frivolous urban atmosphere of the song. On "You Turn Me On, I'm a Radio" the presence of a basic rock ensemble can be heard to represent both the narrator's and Mitchell's commercial ambition, as well as the fickleness of the male protagonist, and by extension, the AM radio audience. A direct link between rock and fickleness is also made both lyrically and musically in "Blonde in the Bleachers," when the unreliable "rock and roll man" is alluded to as the band enters. The tendency for Mitchell to this point had been to associate rock sounds with frivolity, capriciousness, and material ambition. Additionally, as an urban sound, rock falls on the far side of the purity-impurity dichotomy explored above. But like so many other things with compromised purity, it seems to hold for Mitchell and her in-song personae a particular temptation. In "Court and Spark," the sounds of rock deftly entangle the purer sounds of Mitchell's acoustic instruments, working at times in concert with, at times in deference to, and at times in domination of those timbres with which she made her name. The band's ever-evolving role on the recording forms a corollary to the struggle for purity

undertaken by the song's protagonists.⁵⁹ Before turning to a consideration of the lyrics, however, I shall examine the music that precedes the vocal entrance.

The Piano Introduction to "Court and Spark"

The seven-bar piano introduction to "Court and Spark," consisting of two short phrases three and four bars long respectively, foreshadows much of the song's musical and lyrical content. Each phrase introduces at least one source of musical conflict that will play a major role throughout the song, sonically invoking the related themes of independence and non-conformity, as well as another of "Court and Spark's" key subjects – indecisiveness. The piano's very first utterance, a close position second-inversion E major chord (see example 4-1), seems to ask a question.

Example 4-1: Piano Intro to "Court and Spark," mm. 1-3



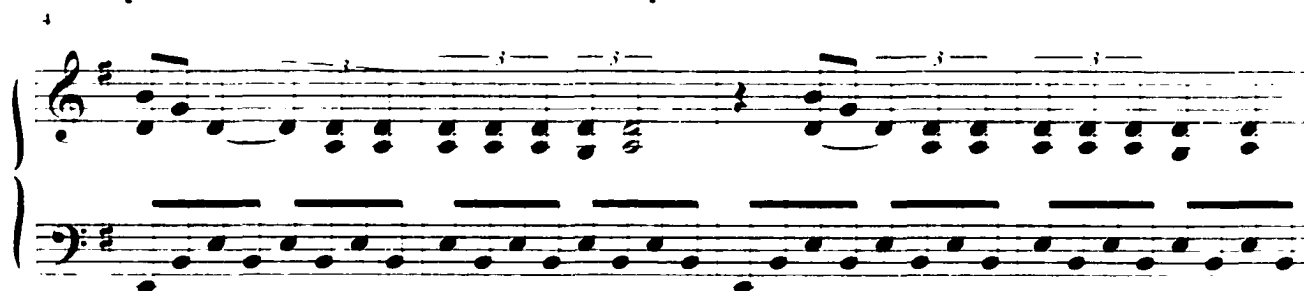
It lingers momentarily, unbound by strong metric feeling, and then yields to three chords in steady succession: D - A - E, B - G#. The phrase then rests on a G#-B dyad. Once again we hear in this phrase the progression ,VII - I (D-E, in E), by now familiar in Mitchell's work. Of more interest, however, is the stark juxtaposition of G# – the highest note of the first sustained chord – and G# – the lowest note and root of the phrase's final chord. The

⁵⁹ In Lori Burns' analyses in the book, *Disruptive Divas: Feminism, Identity, Popular Music* (New York: Routledge, 2002), which she co-wrote with Mélisse Lafrance, Burns pays particular attention to the friction that arises between vocalists and ensembles, noting that "especially in the case of songwriting, the singer's voice in relation to the supporting musical texture can be an important site for the communication of tension or conflict." 59. In the present analysis, alongside my interest in the conflict between the vocal and the ensemble, I am particularly concerned with the conflicts between disparate elements of the ensemble. As I shall argue, such conflicts have central significance in "Court and Spark."

musical gesture seems to suggest the weighing of options, and indeed, G $\sharp$ and G $\natural$ are options Mitchell will touch upon repeatedly in the song's vacillations between the major and minor forms of the key E. In m. 3, the phrase cadences on A $\sharp$, with the G $\sharp$ retained as a suspension that is first transferred down an octave, and then resolved to F $\sharp$. As the subsequent portion of the introduction makes clear, the G $\sharp$, and its comparatively sober demeanor, prevails in this first exchange.

The second phrase of the piano introduction is reproduced as Example 4-2.

Example 4-2: Piano Intro to "Court and Spark," mm. 4-7



Alongside the entrance of Mitchell's characteristic root-fifth-octave ostinato in the left hand, whose resolve contrasts with the hesitation of the first phrase, comes the simultaneous introduction of two musical conflicts pivotal to "Court and Spark."

The first is rhythmic. The repeated quarter-note triplet figure in the right hand clashes with the steady running eighths of the left, suggesting opposition to the prevailing rhythmic subdivision. The hemiola becomes the song's principal rhythmic motive, recurring at the end of each section – the verses and the bridge alike – for steadily increasing durations. As with "The Last Time I Saw Richard," and indeed many of Mitchell's piano songs, the left-hand ostinato provides a kind of norm, a steady, unwavering pattern to which the music's other components, be they vocal or instrumental, can either conform or express resistance. Here, the two hands' rhythmic

disagreement coincides with a harmonic one, which is the other musical conflict introduced at this moment. In the first two beats of m. 4, the left and right hands adhere to the eighth-note pulse and present an unproblematic Em7 chord. At the instigation of the quarter-note triplet on beat three, however, each hand settles on the dyad of a perfect fourth, B-E in the left hand, and A-D in the right. Since the bass part has clearly established an E harmony, the D in the right hand continues to sound like the 7th of the chord, while the A becomes a suspended fourth. But, consistent with a harmonic tendency of Mitchell's described above in my discussion of "I Had a King," the suspended fourth is now normalized as part of the harmony. The momentary descents from A to G in mm. 5 and 7 are treated not as resolutions of the suspensions, but rather as accented lower neighbors that in fact resolve up to A. The resultant sound is at once evocative of jazz harmony, either as a quartal sonority (B-E-A-D) or extended chord (Em11), and productive of grating irresolute friction. Since there are pivotal moments in "Court and Spark" where pure triadic harmony prevails, these complex chords are never fully integrated into the song's soundworld, but instead retain their ability to convey unease.

As in "The Last Time I Saw Richard," no single doctrine of harmonic practice prevails. In m. 3, the G# is treated as a standard suspended fourth that resolves to F#, the chord third of D major. In mm. 5 and 7, the G# would seem to be the chord third of Em7, but continues to be treated as a non-harmonic tone. Mitchell's juxtaposition of these two harmonic approaches imbues those moments of pure triadic harmony with an especially satisfying quality – a sudden abeyance of the nagging harmonic conflict that is the song's normal sonic environment.

POETIC ANALYSIS OF "COURT AND SPARK"

Figure 4-1: Lyrics to "Court and Spark"

verse 1:

Love came to my door
With a sleeping roll
And a madman's soul
He thought for sure I'd seen him
Dancing up a river in the dark
Looking for a woman
To court and spark

verse 2:

He was playing on the sidewalk
For passing change
When something strange happened
Glory train passed through him
So he buried the coins he made
In People's Park
And went looking for a woman
To court and spark

bridge:

It seemed like he read my mind
He saw me mistrusting him

And still acting kind
He saw how I worried sometimes
I worry sometimes

verse 3:

"All the guilty people," he said
They've all seen the stain –
On their daily bread
On their Christian names
I cleared myself
I sacrificed my blues
And you could complete me
I'd complete you

verse 4:

His eyes were the color of the sand
And the sea
And the more he talked to me
The more he reached me
But I couldn't let go of L.A.
City of the fallen angels

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The lyrics of "Court and Spark," reproduced as figure 4-1, revisit the themes discussed in the introductory section of this chapter – purity vs. corruption; independence vs. love, and non-conformity – although often from new perspectives. As is frequently the case in Mitchell's songs, a female narrator describes her interaction with a male love interest. The man, given only the symbolic moniker "Love," has many of the features Mitchell's narrators traditionally cherish. He perhaps most resembles the "singer in the park" from "My Old Man," but his "madman's soul" also calls to mind the "bright red devil" of "Carey," and "the red red rogue" of "California," both of whom are described with indulgent affection. This character embodies the quality of purity more than any of

Mitchell's other creations, save perhaps for the "holy man on the FM radio" from "Rainy Night House." Indeed, he is rather directly presented as a spiritual, even Christ-like figure. Intriguingly, his path to salvation, as well as his claims to purity and non-conformity, lies not in self-expression or individualism – often Mitchell's most valued traits – but in self-sacrifice. He has a revelation while playing in People's Park, and henceforth forgoes his own selfish pursuit of creative expression and material gain in favor of "looking for a woman [t]o court and spark." When he is given voice in the third verse with a first-person utterance, he distinguishes himself from "All the guilty people," who have "seen the stain [o]n their daily bread" and "Christian names." In contrast, he "cleared [himself]" by "sacrific[ing] [his] blues." In this case, "blues" refers not to any downtrodden emotional state, but rather to the actual music he was playing on the sidewalk. "All the guilty people" are those who, as he once did, place their own material ambition ahead of a commitment to selfless love. Although the currencies referred to, "passing change" and "daily bread," suggest humble, honest work, a subtextual condemnation of commercial pandering nonetheless exists. His screed is directed against selling out, not simply in artistic but also emotional terms. His own selflessness is not simply told, but shown. In the bridge, the narrator describes her own actions and thoughts through the filter of his understanding gaze. His desire, professed in the third verse, to both complete and be completed by her is authenticated by this melding of the minds. His purity is confirmed again in the final verse, as the narrator describes his eyes as being "the color of the sand [a]nd the sea," invoking Mitchell's rural paradigm.

The narrator is moved by this convincing charmer, but is ultimately trapped. In a reversal of the independence vs. love theme's standard arrangement, in which a narrator

forced to choose between love and freedom opts inevitably for the latter, she foregoes a freedom offered by true love to remain beholden to L.A., “[c]ity of the fallen angels.” Those fallen angels are precisely the “guilty people” about whom she’s been warned, and her inability to cast them aside is a tacit admission that her own livelihood is as stained as theirs. It is not merely a place that she cannot abandon, but a way of life. The narrator’s choice, or lack thereof, also involves an embrace of urban corruption at the expense of rural wholesomeness, revisiting that recurring dichotomy in Mitchell’s work.

The placement of “Court and Spark” as the premiere song on Mitchell’s most commercial album – her first full collaboration with a band – was significant. Coupled with her then recent preoccupation – expressed in her lyrics, music, and in interviews – with the music industry’s darker side, it suggests a significant autobiographical subtext for the song. It is as if Mitchell is dramatizing her own feelings of guilt and impurity over her increasing engagement with the “starmaker machinery behind the popular song,” to quote another of the album’s tracks.⁴⁰ Such an interpretation is bolstered by the skillfully choreographed deployment of instruments throughout the recording. The above-mentioned narrative of instrumental autonomy, together with Mitchell’s other compositional procedures, provides the song’s somewhat oblique lyrics with a revelatory and multi-dimensional setting. As is often the case in Mitchell’s work, the possibility for multiple, conflicting readings of “Court and Spark” – a testament to its subtlety – exist.

THE MITCHELL/BAND DICHOTOMY ON “COURT AND SPARK”

With the entrance of the voice in “Court and Spark” comes the first hint of the more complex sonic environment that will characterize the entire album. The piano

⁴⁰ Joni Mitchell, “Free Man in Paris,” *Court and Spark*.

sonority is now bolstered by the subtle addition of electric piano doubling the right hand part, yielding a richer and less pure sound.

Example 4-3: Verse 1 of "Court and Spark," mm. 8-15

8

V

Love came to my door With a sleep-ing ro-ll And a

E.P.

vib

Pno.

10

V

mad-man's so-ul He thought for su-re I'd seen him Dan-cing up a riv-er in the

FL.

flut. trill

E.P.

Pno.

Example 4-3 (continued)

13

V

da rk Look-ing for a wo-man To cou rt and spark

E.P.

Pno.

A C G A/E-B

The harmonic discord established in the introduction remains through most of the verse, with the right hand's simple close position triads in frequent disagreement with the chords outlined by the left hand's root-fifth-octave ostinato. Example 4-3 is a transcription of the first verse.

With a harmonic rhythm of one chord per measure, the progression in mm. 8 to 12 is: Em7 G A-E D/A-E Bm7 D/G-D. The harmonic friction abates in m. 13 for the setting of the refrain phrase "looking for a woman to court and spark." The progression there is A C G A/E-B, and the comparative warmth of the pure triads that begin this phrase corresponds to the sense of salvation the male character associates with the acts of courting and sparking. As I shall discuss below, this progression is elaborated upon in the bridge, where the narrator describes the near-euphoric feeling aroused by the mysterious stranger's empathy.

The momentary entrance of a flute – played by Tom Scott – in mm. 11-12 is a second indication that the specific deployment of instrumental forces over the course of the song will play a significant role in highlighting and deepening the meaning of the text. Here the flute's brief phrase, commenced with a trill, is like a summoned memory of the male protagonist "Dancing up a river in the dark." The subtlety of the flute's entrance – it is in fact quite easy to miss – echoes the entrance of the electric piano, and is echoed by the subsequent gradual entrance of the full band. Each instrument seems almost to sneak into the texture, its own timbre arising naturally from the resonance of the piano. First the bass joins at m.16, relieving the piano's left hand of its duty for the return of the quarter-note triplet motive, which now consists of the descending triads A-E-D in the piano's right hand over the bass's E-E-B. The electric piano seems momentarily absent from the texture at this moment. Example 4-4 is a transcription of this passage.

Example 4-4: The Bass Joins the Texture, mm. 16-19

The drums and electric guitar then enter together at m. 20, the former with a soft sixteenth-note pattern on the hi-hat, and the latter with a smooth, bending-note gesture

that fades in by way of a volume pedal and echoes the melismas on the words “dark” and “spark” in mm. 13 and 15-16.⁴¹ Their entrance is shown in example 4-5.

Example 4-5: Entrance of the Guitar and Drums, mm. 20-22

20

V

E.Gtr.

Bs.

Dms.

E.P.

Pno.

He was play-ing on the side-walk For

volume pedal

vp

The overall impression given by the band’s means of arrival might be described as “coy,” thoroughly in keeping with the song’s theme of courtship. Indeed, such a description might also apply to Mitchell’s real-life courtship period with Tom Scott and the LA

⁴¹ The sound is most similar to that achieved with a volume pedal, but might also attained through the manual manipulation of the guitar’s volume knob while the guitarist is playing.

Express. In 1979, she described some of the early rehearsal sessions for *Court and Spark* to jazz journalist Leonard Feather:

They all found it extremely difficult at first, hearing the music just played and sung by one person: it sounded very frail and delicate, and there were some very eggshelly early sessions where they were afraid they would squash it, whereas I had all the confidence in the world that if they played strongly, I would play more strongly.⁴²

Once the full band has joined the texture, the resultant sound takes on the smooth sheen of jazz-tinted pop. The playing is decidedly tasteful, with the guitar continuing its volume-pedal-enabled incursions, the drums maintaining and occasionally syncopating its hi-hat pattern (for instance, with a half-open hit at m. 24, in tight sync with the voice's appropriate eighth-note displacement of the word "strange"), and the bass sustaining root tones with sporadic lazy elaborations. Although the piano is still perceivable as a distinct entity, more and more it gels with the sound of the band – fulfilling a process that began with the entrance of the electric piano. In m. 25 the electric guitar actually doubles the right-hand part of the piano and electric piano, momentarily adding to the composite sound and demonstrating the height of musical cooperation.⁴³

The absorption of Mitchell's piano part into the composite fabric of the band suggests two diametrically opposite meanings. On the one hand, the meshing together can be heard to represent precisely the communion of souls in which the song's male protagonist seeks deliverance. This construal is given added legitimacy in the song's bridge, where it is supported by the lyrics, the harmonic structure, and the further blurring of instrumental boundaries. The chord progression of the bridge is an elaboration of that

⁴² Leonard Feather, "Joni Mitchell Makes Mingus Sing," in *The Joni Mitchell Companion*, 92-93.

⁴³ Of course Mitchell's voice remains indisputably at the forefront of the texture, the instrumental narrative I am describing relegated to a secondary level. At the same time, it is the instrumental arrangement, not the melody, nor the harmonic structure, which varies consistently from verse to verse, belying the song's otherwise strophic layout.

which sets the verse's key refrain word "court." in mm. 14 and 28. As I have noted above, those moments are characterized by the sudden presence of pure triads, as well as the satisfying progression of an ascending fifth: C G. For the bridge, Mitchell doubles the duration of each chord, then transposes the progression up a major second, and finally returns it to its original pitch level, yielding the entire progression: C G D A C G in mm. 35-40. Just as the warmth of the earlier, shorter progression helped to convey the purity and nobility of the male character's cause, here the appealing, extended string of fourth-related triads and the tender melody it supports imbues the narrator's description with tangibility. The words themselves describe an ideal moment of understanding between two people: "It seemed like he read my mind/ He saw me mistrusting him and still acting kind. He saw how I worry sometimes." For its part, the band adopts a more forward posture. Example 4-6 is a transcription of the bridge section.

The sonic metaphor of total selfless coexistence with another would seem to be completed by this section's blending of timbres. The drums play a straight rock beat, replete with snare and bass drum, and the bass line is considerably more active and rhythmic than it had been in the second verse. The electric and acoustic pianos play in nearly identical registers, sometimes trading phrases, and sometimes doubling one another. The two instruments are so closely enmeshed that my transcription can only claim to present a near approximation of their respective parts.

Example 4-6: The Bridge, mm. 35-43

35

V

seemed like he re-ad my mind He saw me mis-trust - ing him and still act - ing

Bs

Dms

E.P.

Pno

38

V

kind He saw how I wor - ried some - times wor - ried some

Bs

Dms

E.P.

Pno

ppp

breathily

Example 4-6 (continued)

41

Voice (V): I worried sometimes

Violin (vi):

Viola (vii):

Electric Guitar (E. Gtr.): V.P. n.

Bass (Bs.):

Drums (Dms.):

Electric Piano (E. P.): mf

Piano (Pno.):

Yet even before the bridge is over, its warmth and romantic faith are challenged. In mm. 40-41, the narrator repeats the line "I worried sometimes," only now transferring the verb to the present tense, "worry." This serves not only to confirm her would-be lover's insight into her character, but also to foreshadow her ultimate inability to accept the happiness he offers. The line coincides with the return of the hemiola motive, subtly introduced by the electric guitar in m. 41, and then joined by acoustic piano in m. 42, and electric piano, bass, and drums in m. 43 (see example 4-6). Harmonic discordance also

returns at this juncture, arriving in the form of an A major triad (first played by the winds, then picked up by the piano) with D in the bass that sets the syllable “times” on the downbeat of m. 41. The result is an effective bit of tone painting. A seed of worry is indicated by dissonance and the guitar’s faded-in triplet, and then builds to near-panic as the other instruments effect a dramatic crescendo through m. 44.

In the two verses that follow the bridge, the unfolding of orchestrational events suggests a different interpretation of the band’s representational significance. The text for the third verse is the male character’s obscure proclamation about “all the guilty people.” At the start of this verse the arrangement is similar to that of the second verse. The drums return to their understated sixteenth-note pattern on the hi-hat, and the bass, filling in the texture’s bottom, retains some of the increased activity it first assumed in the bridge, with syncopated chromatic passing tones and anticipated downbeats. The electric guitar is notably absent, and the electric piano returns to doubling the acoustic piano’s right hand. The flute (and one other woodwind instrument which sounds somewhat like a flute) returns with a trill-like figure in m. 50 that sets the stage for the male character’s dramatic revelation: “I cleared myself I sacrificed my blues.” The flute’s narrative role here is not entirely different from its function in the first verse, where it seemed to represent a glorious memory. Here it provides a fanfare for the song’s most dramatic moment, in which the male protagonist describes his sacrifice. The pivotal word “blues,” with its double meaning, is set to the melisma B-C♯ beginning on the downbeat of m. 52. At precisely that moment, a transcription of which is shown in example 4-7, the drums drop out, and the electric piano, bass, and flutes sustain an A triad for one measure before also quitting the texture.

Example 4-7: The Band Drops Out/The Acoustic Guitar Enters, mm. 51-57

51

V. *cleared my-self I sac-ri-ficed my blue s And you could com -*

Fl.

Bs.

Dms.

F.P. *tremolo effect*

Pno.

54 *breathily*

V. *plete me I'd com - pie te you*

Ac. Gtr.

Pno.

The male character's sacrifice of his music, the blues he played on the sidewalk for passing change, and the stain on *his* daily bread, is strikingly enacted by the band's abandonment of *their* music. At m. 53, suddenly, Mitchell – the instrumentalist – is left alone.

The drama of this moment is immediately compounded by the orchestration of the next line: "and you could complete me." The syllable "-plete" is sung on the downbeat of m. 54 (see example 4-7), and is emphasized by the entrance of a new instrument: acoustic guitar. Just as the last resonance of the electric piano fades, the entrance of Mitchell's trademark instrument with an emphatic strummed chord and characteristic riff, near the forefront of the texture, more than two thirds of the way through the song, redefines our understanding of "complete."

Again, it is difficult to resist making biographical connections between the narrator and the historical Mitchell. Indeed such connections seem to present themselves. The acoustic guitar is the instrument with which Mitchell to this point in her career had had both the closest and longest association. More importantly, as we have seen, it is the instrument on which, thanks to her use of alternate tunings and sophisticated right hand technique, she had the most developed personal style. The guitar's pronounced entrance on the very word "complete," immediately following the band's hasty departure, suggests that completeness involves not the absorption of one's own persona into a powerful but faceless multitude, but instead the very opposite – truth to self. Thus the progressive commingling of Mitchell's instrumental work with that of the band did not, in fact, symbolize the union of two souls so longed for by the male protagonist. Instead, we may

now understand, it depicted the narrator's entanglement with the "guilty people," her corruption by association.

The following, reciprocal line, "I'd complete you," in mm. 55-56, yields to a demonstration of sorts, a close relative to the depiction of the narrator's worry at the end of the bridge. In mm. 57-62, the acoustic guitar offers intermittent solo statements over the piano's steady eighth-note ostinato in the left hand, and hemiola motive in the right (see example 4-8).

Example 4-8: Guitar, Piano and Voice, mm. 57-65

The musical score for Example 4-8, mm. 57-65, is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 57 to 60, and the second system covers measures 61 to 65. The score is for three parts: Voice (V), Acoustic Guitar (Ac. Gtr.), and Piano (Pno.).

System 1 (mm. 57-60):

- Measure 57:** The Voice part begins with a whole note rest. The Acoustic Guitar part has a whole note rest. The Piano part features a steady eighth-note ostinato in the left hand and a hemiola motive in the right hand.
- Measure 58:** The Voice part has a whole note rest. The Acoustic Guitar part has a whole note rest. The Piano part continues the steady eighth-note ostinato in the left hand and the hemiola motive in the right hand.
- Measure 59:** The Voice part has a whole note rest. The Acoustic Guitar part has a whole note rest. The Piano part continues the steady eighth-note ostinato in the left hand and the hemiola motive in the right hand.
- Measure 60:** The Voice part has a whole note rest. The Acoustic Guitar part has a whole note rest. The Piano part continues the steady eighth-note ostinato in the left hand and the hemiola motive in the right hand.

System 2 (mm. 61-65):

- Measure 61:** The Voice part begins with a whole note rest. The Acoustic Guitar part has a whole note rest. The Piano part features a steady eighth-note ostinato in the left hand and a hemiola motive in the right hand.
- Measure 62:** The Voice part has a whole note rest. The Acoustic Guitar part has a whole note rest. The Piano part continues the steady eighth-note ostinato in the left hand and the hemiola motive in the right hand.
- Measure 63:** The Voice part has a whole note rest. The Acoustic Guitar part has a whole note rest. The Piano part continues the steady eighth-note ostinato in the left hand and the hemiola motive in the right hand.
- Measure 64:** The Voice part has a whole note rest. The Acoustic Guitar part has a whole note rest. The Piano part continues the steady eighth-note ostinato in the left hand and the hemiola motive in the right hand.
- Measure 65:** The Voice part has a whole note rest. The Acoustic Guitar part has a whole note rest. The Piano part continues the steady eighth-note ostinato in the left hand and the hemiola motive in the right hand.

The lyrics "His eyes were the color of the sand" are written under the Voice part in measure 63.

Example 4-8 (continued)

64

V

Ac. Gtr.

Pno

And the sea And the more he talked to me you know the more

The guitar's part is marked by a higher degree of rhythmic independence than any instrument has thus far exhibited: yet sometimes it also falls in line with the piano. It precipitates the piano's quarter-note triplet in the second half of m. 57 with one of its own in the first half, while in m. 59 the last two notes of the guitar's improvisatory line fall in rhythmic unison with the start of the piano's hemiola motive. The passage offers a demonstration of the kind of relationship the narrator's stranger truly envisions: one where each partner in the relationship retains his or her identity, all the while contributing to form a complex and beautiful union. The themes of independence and non-conformity are expressed here not only in the guitar line's unconfined rhythm, but also in its abundant use of alternately tuned open strings – a hallmark of Mitchell's guitar style. Yet at this point it is the manifestation of the purity vs. corruption theme that most blurs the lines between the song's narrator and Mitchell herself. Just as this moment of completely acoustic music evokes the purity of a relationship unstained by the distractions of greed and urban existence, it also hearkens back to Mitchell's earlier music, which in its acoustic purity was less inculcated in the sordid machinations of musical commerce.

This spare instrumentation carries over into the next verse, where the narrator compares her seducer/redeemer's eyes to "the sand and the sea," and acknowledges his deep impact on her. In m. 64 the acoustic guitar plays an ascending scalar figure whose natural minor quality and freely floating rhythm evokes the phenomena concurrently described by the narrator (see example 4-8). In the first two beats of m. 66, as she sings, "he reached me," the guitar doubles the right hand part of the piano – confirming the connection described in the lyrics (see example 4-9). But the song's tragic denouement follows immediately thereafter, and is likewise depicted both in words and orchestration. In mm. 66-70 the narrator admits, "I couldn't let go of L.A., city of the fallen angels." The first syllable of the pivotal word "angels" falls on the downbeat of m. 70, and coincides with the return of the electric guitar, bass, drums and winds.

Example 4-9: Reentrance of the Band, mm. 66 – 72

The musical score for Example 4-9, mm. 66-72, is presented in a standard musical notation format. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The piano accompaniment is in treble and bass clefs. The lyrics are: "he reached me But I couldn't let go of L.A. city of the". The score shows the vocal line and the piano accompaniment for measures 66 through 72. The piano part includes a right hand (RH) and a left hand (LH) part. The right hand part is in treble clef and the left hand part is in bass clef. The score is written in a standard musical notation format, with notes, rests, and bar lines. The lyrics are written below the vocal line.

are confirmed to be none other than Tom Scott and the LA Express. The acoustic guitar plays a final flourish in mm. 70-71 before exiting the texture for good, apparently unable to share the sonic stage with its foil. Its exit corresponds to the return of the hemiola motive, its internal conflict emphasized more than ever before by the repeated dissonant D's in the piano's left hand and the bass – beneath an A major triad in the ensemble – and the doubling of the melodic line by yet another new instrument, chimes (see example 4-10). In addition to the slightly cacophonous build up of overtones generated by the repetition of the stepwise, three-note descending line – C = B A – on tubular bells, the instrument's presence expands upon the quasi-Christian connotations of the entire piece, lending gravity to the song's final moments and confirming the bleakness of the narrator's sentence.

The poignancy of the song's denouement owes not only to Mitchell's sensitive and finely nuanced attention to orchestrational detail, but as well to her meaningful calibration of the song's form and lyrical content. As we have seen above, the title phrase "court and spark" – which represents the male protagonist's path to redemption – is treated as a refrain in the first two verses. The phrase is begun in mm. 14-16 and mm. 28-30 at that moment in the harmonic progression where dissonant clashes between the bass and upper tones yield to pure triads. The acceleration of the harmonic rhythm at this moment, and the tonally satisfying progression of a descending fourth also serve to mark it as both structurally significant and transcendent. When this part of the progression comes around in the third verse, beginning at m. 54, the syllable sung is the above-mentioned "-plete," and the acoustic guitar plays its dramatic first chord. The eschewal of the refrain phrase in favor of this more sincere statement – the male protagonist's

testimony that he yearns for more than superficial wooing and the thrill of new love. yearns in fact to enter into a deeply fulfilling relationship – combined with the shift in instrumentation discussed above, casts this moment as an intensification of its earlier (verses 1 and 2) incarnations.

We now may understand the male character's initial proclamations that true salvation lies only in the courting and sparking of a woman to be a kind of defense mechanism – a trivialization of his innermost desires, that in their unexpurgated form will render him particularly vulnerable. We are finally and fully made privy to the depth of these desires in the third verse. Mitchell's thorough synchronization of form, lyrics and orchestration is what imbues this pivotal moment with its depth of feeling. When this point of the progression recurs again in the final verse at m. 69, it is instilled with irony – as the syllable sung on the downbeat is "fall-" from "fallen angels." Now the feeling of rightness conveyed by the harmonic warmth indicates not salvation, but damnation. The chord progression that up until now represented a wholesome and righteous transcendence now evokes a perilous submission to temptation. The full band's raucous rendition of the hemiola motive in mm. 72-74 (example 4-10) may in this light be heard as a devilish dance of victory, all the while maintaining its ability to conjure forth the dying throes of the narrator's struggle for resistance. When the rhythmic and harmonic discord finally resolve to the sustained E major chord in mm. 75-78, all of the distinct instrumental timbres cease to be clearly distinguishable, and a composite, homogenous sound remains. The failure, whether it is the narrator's to retain true love, or Mitchell's to resist the loss of her individual identity to the carnivorous popular music industry, is complete.

Example 4-10: The Finale, mm. 73-78

The musical score for 'The Finale' (mm. 73-78) is presented in a multi-staff format. The vocal parts include E. Carr (Soprano), BS (Baritone), and Chorus (Chorus). The piano accompaniment is for Piano (Pno). The score is written in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one sharp (F#). The vocal lines are characterized by long, sustained notes and melodic phrases, while the piano accompaniment provides a harmonic and rhythmic foundation with chords and moving lines in both hands.

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing analysis of "Court and Spark," I have examined both the lyrical and musical manifestation in one song of several definitive themes that serve to unify Mitchell's early output. Additionally, I have scrutinized the complex web of meanings engendered by the concerted working of Mitchell's nuanced approaches to lyric writing, text setting, form, harmony and instrumental arrangement. The ubiquitous presence of Tom Scott's LA Express on *Court and Spark*, a new situation for Mitchell, seems to call forth in her a proclivity for self-reference that transcends the conventional "autobiographical" quality so frequently attributed to her and her singer-songwriter peers. While Mitchell's lyrics had always made apparent references to the facts of her own life, on *Court and Spark* she displays an understanding that her instrumental work, when

placed in relief by the playing of a band, had significantly enhanced power both to define a complex persona (or even multiple personae) and to explore her pivotal themes of independence vs. love, non-conformity and purity vs. corruption. Mitchell's self-awareness, as expressed in the song "Court and Spark," extends beyond a mere conception of herself as a difficult woman seeking love, or one enamored by the resolute independence of a man she cannot keep.

A principal subtext of the song – hinted at in the lyrics but made viscerally clear in their setting – is Mitchell's cognizance of her own identity as an artist and a star at a particularly crucial moment in her career. Her at times grudging, at times eager entanglement with the popular music industry had already provided subject matter for earlier material, most particularly the songs "For the Roses" and "You Turn Me On" from her previous album, *For the Roses*. With "Court and Spark," however, she approaches this topic with a greater degree of subtlety and refinement than ever before. The personification of artistic integrity and commercial pandering by Mitchell's acoustic instruments and the band's electric sound respectively is a masterstroke, one that finely elucidates the song's multifarious lyrics. Ironically, it is Mitchell's clever exploitation of precisely those sound elements responsible for instilling this album with its depth of commercial potential, together with her keen harmonic and formal sense, that enables her to achieve a level of nuance in her text setting akin to art music. This subtlety extends to Mitchell's blurring of the lines between her in-song persona and historical self. Particularly in the treatment of the acoustic guitar – whose power to convey the "completeness" alluded to in the lyrics, as well as the themes of purity and independence, rests largely on its signal role in Mitchell's output to that date – Mitchell turns the

conventional pop music conception of the self-referential persona on its head. Here it is not merely a question of autobiographical clues in the lyrics lending intrigue to the song (and fodder for obsessive fans and pop journalists), but rather a case of the symbiotic three-way connection between lyrics, instrumentation and Mitchell's personal history instilling the work with an essential layer of meaning.

Mitchell's engagement with the pop music industry, both in terms of her subject matter and her own success within it, peaked with *Court and Spark*. Several of the album's other songs, including "Free Man in Paris" and "People's Parties," deal with the concerns of those occupying pop music's upper echelons. The former song chronicles the frustrations of a record label executive – ostensibly based on David Geffen – who is overwhelmed with "people calling me up for favors" and the responsibility of "people's futures to decide."⁴⁴ "People's Parties" deals with the superficiality of high society. The album's hardest rocker, "Raised on Robbery," depicts a prostitute in the midst of an unsuccessful pick-up – another obvious linking on Mitchell's part between rock music and the impurity of selling out. The songs "Help Me," "Free Man in Paris," and "Raised on Robbery" reached numbers 7, 22 and 65 respectively on Billboard's Hot 100, and the album peaked at number 2. Yet *Court and Spark*'s final track, Mitchell's cover of the Lambert Hendricks and Ross tune "Twisted," is a campy, tongue-in-cheek jazz number about insanity that foreshadows the decided turn away from the mainstream Mitchell would take beginning with her next album, *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* (1975). That album features experiments with world music and jazz, an increasing aversion of the tight, three-minute pop song format, and a lyrical shift away from autobiographical subject matter in favor of social commentary. Along with *Hissing*, Mitchell's subsequent

⁴⁴ Joni Mitchell, "Free Man in Paris," *Court and Spark*.

albums in the second half of the 1970s. *Hejira* (1976), *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter* (1977), and *Mingus* (1979), represent her most artistically ambitious and least commercially calculated work to date. *Court and Spark*, however, demonstrates that despite its own insinuations to the contrary, commercial ambition – at least for Mitchell – did not necessarily come at the expense of artistic integrity.

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5

Conclusion and Seeds for Future Research

If there is one theme that unifies the three preceding analyses – and might thus serve to concisely characterize Mitchell’s artistic and personal ethos, it is non-conformity. In the most basic sense, Mitchell practiced non-conformity in the way that all creative artists do, by striving to develop an original voice and create works of art that bore her personal stamp. As my analytical chapters have demonstrated, Mitchell’s idiosyncratic approaches to the guitar, harmony, singing, piano, stylistic identity and arranging clearly delineate her work as that of a musical non-conformer. Yet for Mitchell, non-conformity was not merely a code of conduct, but also quite frequently her subject matter of choice.

Each of the songs that I have analyzed grapples with the idea of non-conformity in both lyrical and musical terms. In “I Had a King,” as Mitchell’s narrator claims her freedom from an oppressive relationship, she distinguishes herself from the earthy “ladies in gingham,” emphatically asserting, “I can never become that kind.” From the beginning of her career, Mitchell lays her philosophical stake not with the obsolete folk revival, which valued a shared music and a sense of community, but with the rebellious and uncompromising ideology of rock. This stance is manifested musically both in Mitchell’s substitution of her own idiomatic, alternate-tuning-driven harmonic language for the universal chordal vocabulary of folk, and her vocal acrobatics, which juxtaposed a rich alto register with a pure folk soprano whose potential for parody Mitchell exploited.

“The Last Time I Saw Richard” concerns non-conformity on several levels.

Mitchell’s narrator refuses to trade her 1960s idealism for the cynicism and materialism

whereby the aural presence of her own instruments, acoustic piano and particularly acoustic guitar, represent the purity and completeness offered by the Christ-like male lead, whereas the opposing sounds of Tom Scott and the L.A. Express represent “the guilty people,” with “stains on their daily bread.” In so doing, she effects a subtle allusion to and commentary upon her own trajectory from folk singer to pop star, which climaxed with the album *Court and Spark*. Despite the outcome of the song’s narrative, Mitchell’s distinct instrumental identity on the recording, even amidst a rich and variegated texture, establishes that the non-conformity that ultimately slips away from her narrator is still very much at play in her own work.

That non-conformity would remain a significant factor in Mitchell’s career after *Court and Spark*, as she used the creative capital she gained from the tremendous commercial success of that album to venture forth into uncharted experimental territory. On *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* (1975), Mitchell incorporated Burundi drumming in the song “The Jungle Line,” anticipating influential forays into African music by Peter Gabriel and Paul Simon by seven and eleven years respectively.¹ She also returned to another track from Lambert, Hendricks and Ross’s 1958 album *The Hottest New Group in Jazz*, this time fusing their “Centerpiece” with her own “Harry’s House,” revealing an ever deepening absorption of her formative jazz influences. The album’s final track, “Shadows and Light,” is a cryptic meditation on the nature of perspective. Here Mitchell accompanies herself only with intermittent chords on the Arp Farfisa synthesizer and stacked vocal harmonies that often feature unresolved quartal sonorities. Coupled with

¹ Mitchell, *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*, Asylum 1051, 1975; Peter Gabriel, *Peter Gabriel (Security)* (Geffen 2011, 1982); Paul Simon, *Graceland* (Warner 25447, 1986).

the song's nearly through-composed formal design, these features contributed to Mitchell's furthest straying from the pop mainstream up until that time.

On *Hejira* (1976), whose subject matter is Mitchell's experiences during a year traveling across America, she performs on electric guitar for the first time, and on several songs collaborates with the renowned jazz-fusion bassist Jaco Pastorius.² Mitchell's gift for pop melody yields here to her growing fascination with ambient sonorities and an ungrounded bass line. Additionally, many of the album's tracks do not feature drums – virtually guaranteeing their unsuitability for rock radio airplay. In 1977, Mitchell released the double album *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter*, which contained the eighteen-minute "Paprika Plains." Redolent of her still growing jazz ambition, and scored for full orchestra, the song caught the attention of the legendary jazz bassist Charles Mingus, who contacted Mitchell to discuss a potential collaboration. Mingus had also been intrigued by the cover of the album, which featured a photograph of Mitchell disguised as a black man – her alter ego, Art Nouveau.³ Her audacity intrigued the great jazz musician, and perhaps it was Mitchell's adventurousness of spirit and risqué visual declaration of non-conformity that marked her as a kindred spirit in his eyes.

The album that eventually resulted from their collaboration was *Mingus* (1979), released after Mingus died in January 1979. Mitchell ended up writing lyrics to four melodies composed by Mingus, as well as two fully original compositions based on his autobiography, *Beneath the Underdog*.⁴ Mingus himself was too ill to perform on the album, and after much deliberation and many unsuccessful rehearsal sessions with an

² Mitchell, *Hejira* (Asylum 1087, 1976). On the genesis of the album see O'Brien, *Shadows and Light*, 166-69.

³ Ibid., 174-77.

⁴ Charles Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog: His World as Composed by Mingus*, ed. Nel King (New York: Knopf, 1971).

ensemble that he had hand picked. Mitchell ended up bringing in her own musicians, including Jaco Pastorius, Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock, Peter Erskine, Don Alias and Emil Richards. While *Mingus* clearly constitutes Mitchell's deepest foray into jazz, it is not unproblematically classifiable as a jazz album. Its spirit of experimentalism is reflected by a comment Mitchell made in 1983:

Well, after *Court and Spark* I got fed up with four beats to the bar, and by the time I hit the *Mingus* project I was having the rhythm section play totally up in the air. Nobody was anchoring the music. I wanted everything floating around.⁵

Yet as noted in chapter 3, a strong case can be made for the authenticity of Mitchell's jazz performance on *Mingus*. Charles Hartman remarks specifically on the structure of the song "Goodbye Porkpie Hat" and on Mitchell's "instrumental" use of the vocal line. The careful attention paid to orchestration and the general unpredictability of the music also invoke the aesthetic values of art music.

With *Mingus*, Mitchell exhausted the reservoir of good will she had built with her pop fan base. From *Court and Spark* to *Mingus*, the widening chasm between her own music and the pop mainstream gradually cost her in terms of record sales, as *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*, *Hejira*, and *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter* peaked at numbers 4, 13, and 25 respectively on the Billboard charts. While *Mingus* reached number 17 and Mitchell's next studio album, *Wild Things Run Fast* (1982), reached 25, she has failed to break the top forty with any of her subsequent album releases.⁶ This has been the source of some bitterness for Mitchell, whose resolute dedication to non-conformity has never totally supplanted her at-times ambivalent commitment towards commercial success.

⁵ Mitchell, "Joni Mitchell is a Nervy Broad," interview by Vic Garbarini, *Musician* (January 1983), reprinted in *The Joni Mitchell Companion*, 115.

⁶ Mitchell, *Wild Things Run Fast* (Geffen, 1982). Chart data are taken from O'Brien, *Shadows and Light*, 327-331.

Speaking in 1988 to *Q* reporter Phil Sutcliffe, Mitchell commented upon the impact that *Mingus* had on her career:

It hammered the nail into my coffin which said: Joni is dead on pop radio, she's a jazzier. I would do it again in a minute, though, that project. To have the experience of collaborating with such an unusual character and a fine jazz musician. Definitely.

This quote reveals a fundamental principle that has distinguished Mitchell's career. Just as her characters are often torn between the competing demands of love and independence, and almost always opt for the latter in the end, so Mitchell, unquestionably drawn to the prospect of pop adulation, has never been willing to sacrifice her fierce commitment to non-conformity to maintain it. To the extent that her own musical interests coincided with the prevailing values of AM or FM radio, Mitchell has been willing to make deliberate overtures to the masses. These have never, however, come at the expense of her own thoroughgoing originality, or musical and poetic sensibilities. When her musical instincts drew her beyond the furthest reaches of popular taste, she steadfastly heeded them, and hoped that the public would catch up.

It was Mitchell's good fortune to have come of age professionally during a time when her own dedication to unconventionality and self-exploration were in step with the values of a significant sector of society. The adoption of this value system by major record labels – particularly Warner-Reprise, who gave her her first contract – fostered the requisite nurturing environment for Mitchell to grow into her own considerable potential. This growth initially yielded the increasingly accessible and commercially lucrative product whose craftsmanship and timeliness have been the subjects of this dissertation. Just as the circumstances of Mitchell's early career gave her the space to flourish as a

⁷ Mitchell, interview by Phil Sutcliffe, *Q* (May, 1988), reprinted in *The Joni Mitchell Companion*, 147.

creative *artist* within an entirely market-driven industry, so her quickly won stardom enabled her to maintain that space, pursuing her restlessly adventurous musical interests to domains that would certainly have terminated the recording contracts of lesser figures. The seeds of what might appear on the surface to have been surprising developments in Mitchell's career after 1974 were, as I have demonstrated, very much in place from the time of her first several recordings. Her stylistic journey brought her first closer to, then farther from the commercial pinnacle, but retained a relatively steady pace throughout the first eleven years of her career.⁸

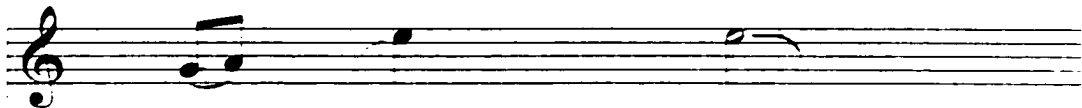
The music that Mitchell recorded in the years after the period of my study, particularly the experimental albums discussed briefly in this conclusion, are as worthy of exposure and serious scrutiny as I have demonstrated her early work to be. Thus, in closing, I state my belief that far from having exhausted the work of Joni Mitchell as a subject for scholarly inquiry, I have merely shed light on some aspects of a brilliant and intriguing musical career, one that would substantially reward further investigation. Particularly in the domain of close readings of Mitchell's music, there is ample work to be done.

⁸ Thereafter Mitchell continued her stylistic evolution, but considerably slowed her rate of production, releasing only three studio albums in the 1980s, and three in the 1990s.

Appendix A

Key to Symbols and Tunings in the Transcriptions

Voice slide between notes slide up to note sustain note, then slide down slightly

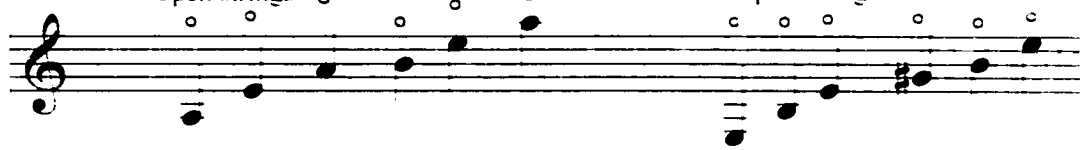


Electric Guitar fade in with volume pedal pull-off pre-bend gliss. slide down neck

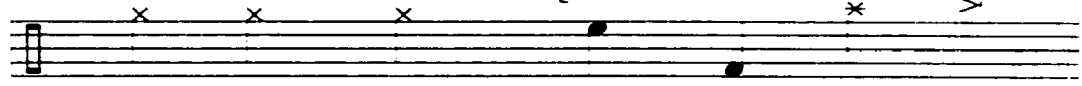


Bend string *n.* pull-off hammer-on pre-bend release

Acoustic Guitar "I Had a King" open strings "Court and Spark" open strings



Drum Set open hi-hat high tom-tom crash cymbal



closed hi-hat half-open hi-hat bass drum light accent

 = Slightly after the beat
 = Slightly before the beat

Other Instruments: piano, bass, electric piano, flute, woodwinds, chimes.

The bass, electric guitar, and acoustic guitar all sound one octave lower than written.

Appendix B

"I Had a King"

Words and Music by Joni Mitchell

Transcription by Daniel Sonenberg

Capo 7th fret
Tuning: D A D E A D (A E A B E A)

0:05

Acoustic Guitar

double-tracked guitar enters here

0:09

V

I had a king In a

Gtr.

V

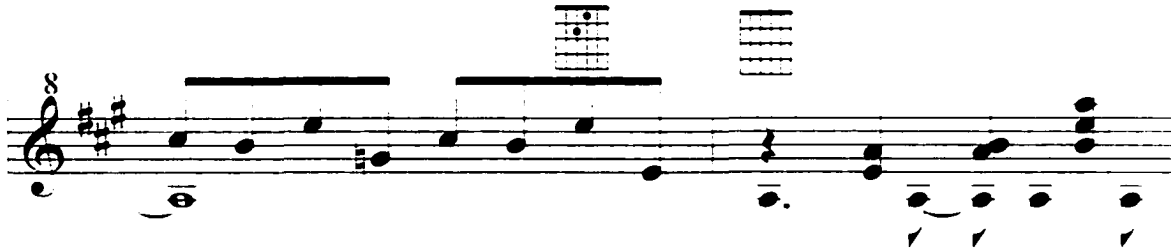
ten - e - ment cas - tle Late - ly he's tak - en To

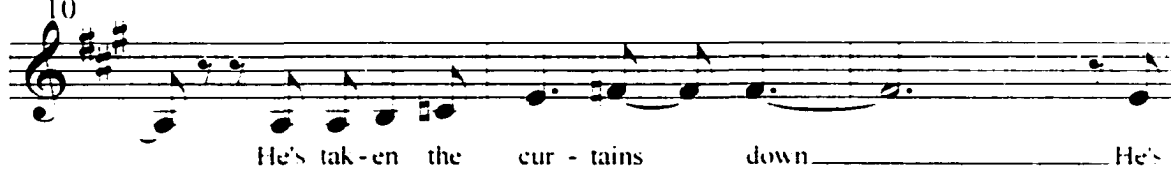
Gtr.

© 1968. (Renewed) 1996 Crazy Crow Music. All rights administered by Sony ATV Tunes LLC, 8 Music Sq. West, Nashville, TN 37203. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

0:18

V 

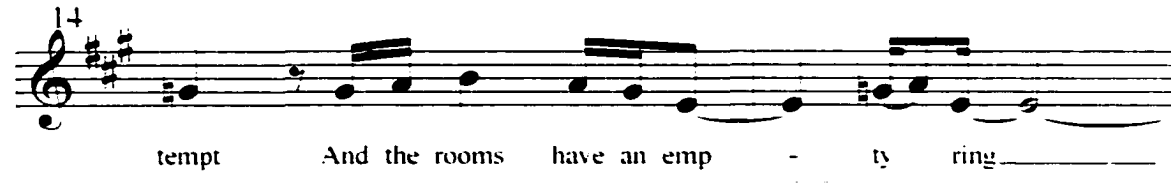
 Gtr. 

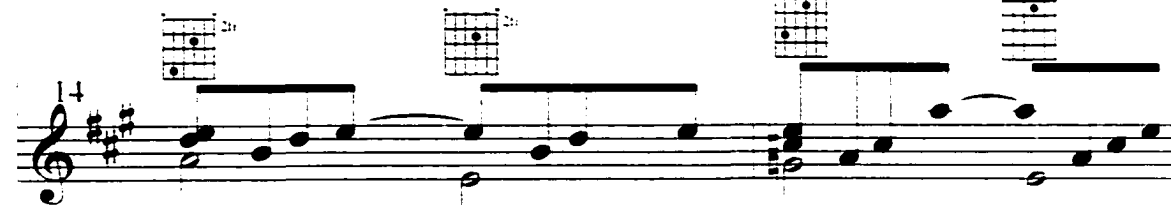
 V 

 Gtr. 

 0:27 V 

 Gtr. 

 V 

 Gtr. 

0:35

V 16

He's cleaned with the tears Of an act -

Gtr. 16

V 18

or who fears For the laugh - ter's sting

Gtr. 18

V 20

poco rit *a tempo*

I can't go back there

Gtr. 20

23

V

an - y - more _____ You know my keys won't

Gtr.

25

0:55

V

fit the door _____ You know my thoughts don't

Gtr.

27

fit the man _____ They ne - ver can

Gtr.

29 1:04

V

They ne - ver can

Gtr.

31 1:08

V

I had a king Dressed in

Gtr.

33

V

drip-dry and pais - ley Late - ly he's tak - en to

Gtr.

35 1:17

V

sy - ing I'm cra - zy and blind He lives in a -

Gtr.

1:26

38

V

noth - er time Lad - ies in ging - ham Still

Gtr.

41

V

blush while he sings them of Wars and

Gtr.

43

V

wine But I in my lea - ther and

Gtr.

45

V

lace I can ne - ver be - come that - kind

Gtr.

1:35

47 1:46

V

I can't go back there

Gitr.

50

V

an - y - more You know my keys don't

Gitr.

52 1:55

V

fit the door You know my thoughts don't

Gitr.

54 1:59

V

fit the man They ne-ver can

Gitr.

56

V

They ne-ver can

Gtr.

59 2:08

V

I had a king in a salt rust - ed car - riage

Gtr.

61

V

Who car-ried me off to his count-ry for mar-riage too

Gtr.

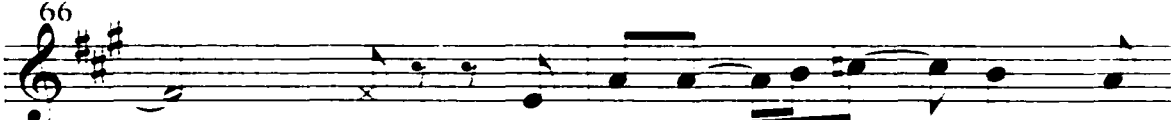
63 2:19

V

soon Be-ware of the pow - er of moon

Gtr.

66 2:26

V. 

There's no - one to blame. no there's

Gtr. 

68

V. 

no - one to name as a trait - or here

Gtr. 

70 2:35

V. 

The king's on the road and the

Gtr. 

72

V. 

queen's in the grove till the end of the year

Gtr. 

74 2:47

V

*left guitar drops out here

right >

left >

I can't go back there

74

Gtr.

77

V

a - ny - more You know my keys won't

77

Gtr.

79 2:56

V

fit the door You know my thoughts don't

79

Gtr.

81

V

fit the man They ne-ver can

81

Gtr.

84 3:05

V. 

They ne-ver ca- n

Gtr. 

They ne-ver can-

87 3:14 *vib*

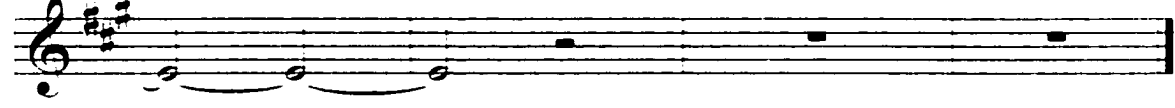
V. 

They ne-ver ca-

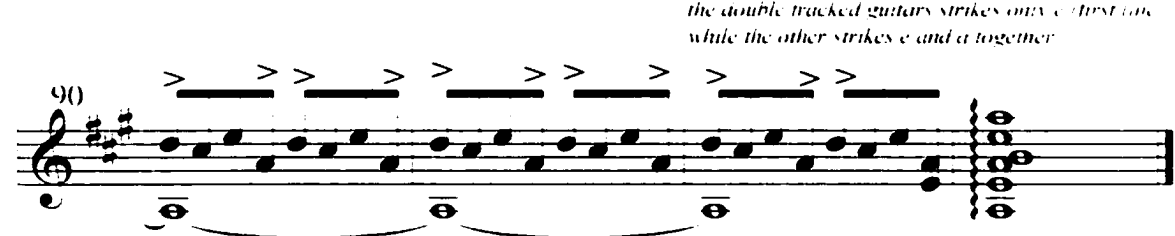
Gtr. 

They ne-ver ca-

90 *rit.*

V. 

n

Gtr. 

** On the final eighth note of this measure (92), one of the double tracked guitars strikes only e (first line) while the other strikes e and a together*

Appendix C

"The Last Time I Saw Richard"

Words and Music by Joni Mitchell

Transcription by Daniel Sonenberg

0:05

Piano

Pno.

Pno.

Pno.

0:18

10

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permission.

0:27

13

Pno.

0:36

16

Pno.

0:44

19

Pno.

22

Pno.

0:53 0:58 *mf* 5

V

The last time I saw Ri-chard

Pno.

25

28

was De-troit in six-ty eight 'n' he told me all ro-

Pno.

30 1:04

man-ties meet the sa me fate some day cyn-i-cal and

Pno.

32

V

drunk and bo - ring some - one in some dark ca - fe

Pno.

34 1:12

V

You laugh he said

Pno.

36

V

you think you're im - mune go look at your eyes they're

Pno.

1:23

38

V

full of moon you like ro_____ ses and kiss - es and

Pno.

40

V

pret - ty men to tell you all_____ those pret - ty

Pno.

1:30

42

V

lies pret_____ ty lies_____

Pno.

V ⁴⁴ When you gon-na re - a - lize they're on - ly pret - ty lies

Pno.

V ⁴⁶ 1:38 o - n ly pret - ty lies just

Pno.

V ⁴⁹ 1:46 pret - ty lies

Pno.

Pno.

V. 1:55

He put a quart-er in the Wur_____ litz-er and he

Pno.

V.

pushed three but - tons and the thing

Pno.

2:01

V 57 *3* *3* *←* *←*

be - gan to whirr _____ and a bar maid came by in fish - net

Pno.

V 59 *3* *3* *3* *3*

stock - ings and a bow tie and she said

Pno.

2:08

V 60 *3* *→* *←* *3*

Drink up now it's get - ting on time to close _____

Pno.

60

2:12

62

V

Rich-ard you haven' - t real - ly changed I said it's just that

Pno.

64

V

now you're re - man - ti - ci - zing some pain ——— that's in your head you got

Pno.

2:20

66

V

tombs — in your eyes but the songs you punched are dream ———

Pno.

68 *spoken*

V ing list - en they sing a love so sweet love _____

Pno.

2:29

70

V so sweet _____ when you gon-na get your - self back

Pno.

72

V on your fe _____ et Oh _____

Pno.

74 3 2:41

V love can be so sweet love so

Pno.

77

V sweet

Pno.

80 2:52 5 3

V Rich - ard got mar - ried to a

Pno.

82

V

fig-ure ska - ter and he bought her a dish - wash - er and a

Pno.

84

V

cof - fee perc - o - lat - or and he drinks

Pno.

85

V

at home now most nights

Pno.

3:05

86

V

with the T - V on and all the house lights left up bright

Pno.

88

3:09

V

I'm gon-na blow this damn

Pno.

90

V

can—dle out I don't want no-bod-y com-ing o-ver to my—ta

Pno.

92 ³

V

ble I got noth - ing to talk to a - ny - bo - dy a -

Pno.

93

V

bout all good dream - ers pa — ss this way some day

Pno.

95 3:21

V

hi - ding be - hind bot - tles and dark ca - fes da - rk

Pno.

97 3:27

V *ca - fes* *on - ly a dark co - coon be - fore I*

Pno.

99

V *get my gor* *geous wings and fly*

Pno.

101 3:35

V *a - way on - ly a phase* *these*

Pno.

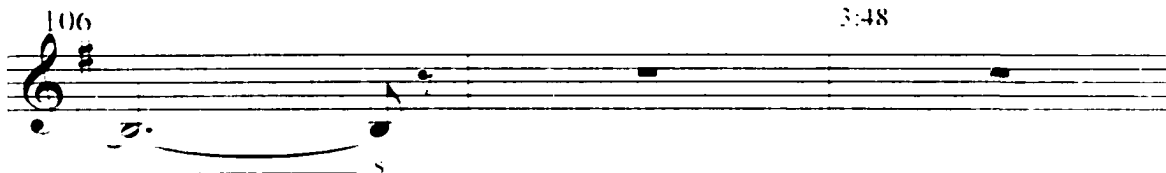
103 — 3 —

V 

dark ca fe day

Pno. 

106 3:48

V 

Pno. 

109 3:52

Pno. 

3:57

112 *rit.*

Pno. 

Appendix D

"Court and Spark"

Words and Music by Joni Mitchell

Transcription by Daniel Sonenberg

Piano

mf

4

Pno.

8 0:17

V.

Love came to my door With a sleep - ing roll _____ And a

vib.

E.P.

Pno.

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10 0:24

V. mad-man's so-ul He thought for su-re I'd seen him

FL. *flute*

E.P.

Pno.

12 0:28

V. Danc-ing up a riv-er in the dark__rk Look-ing for a wo-man To

E.P.

Pno.

14 0:37
"k" is not strongly articulated

V. *cou_____rt and spark_____*

Bs.

E. P.

Pno.

17

Bs.

Pno.

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20 0:43

V.

E.Gtr.

Bs.

Dms.

Pno.

He was

volume pedal

sim

n.

— 3 —

The musical score is for measures 20 and 21, starting at 0:43. It is written in the key of D major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The Voice part (V.) has the lyrics "He was" under a dotted quarter note. The Electric Guitar (E.Gtr.) part features a "volume pedal" marking and a "n." (natural) marking. The Bass (Bs.) part has a triplet marking "— 3 —". The Drums (Dms.) part has a "sim" (sustain) marking. The Piano (Pno.) part has a sustained chord marked with an 8 and a sharp sign.

22 0:47

V.

play - ing on the side - walk For pass - ing change — When some - thing

E.Gtr.

Bs.

Dms.

E.P.

Pno.

24 0:51

V. s - trange happened Glo - ry train passed through him So he

E.Gtr. *pp*

BS.

Dms.

E.P.

Pno.

26

V.

bur - ried the coins he made In Peo - ple's

Bs.

Dms.

E.P.

Pno.

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27 0:58

V.

E. Gtr.

Bs.

Dms.

E.P.

Pno.

28 1:03

V.

cou rt and spar

E. Gtr.

Bs.

Dms.

E. P.

Pno.

30 1:06

V.

E.Gtr.

Bs.

Dms.

E.P.

Pno.

32

E.Gtr.

Bs.

Dms.

Pno.

34

V.

1:14

It seemed like he re - ad my mind

n. *ppp*

p *sempre* *vib*

E.P.

Pno.

36

V.

He saw me mis - trust - ing him and still act - ing

Bs.

Dms.

E.P.

Pno.

38 1:22 *breathly*

V. kind He saw how I wor - ried some - times I wor__ ry some -

E.Gitr. *ppp*

Bs.

Dms.

E.P.

Pno.

41 1:27 1:31

V.

time _____ s

FL.

winds

E.Gtr.

vp

n.

Bs.

Dms.

E.P.

vp

Pno.

44

vp

n.

mf

1:39 47

V

"All the guil - ty peo - ple" he said They've

Bs.

Dms.

E.P.

Pno.

48

V.

Bs.

Dms.

E.P.

Pno.

all seen the stain — On their dai - ly bread — - On their Christ-ian

50 1:48

V. names _____ I _____ cleared my-self I sac-ri-ficed my

flutes

Fl.

Bs.

Dms.

E.P.

Pno.

52

V

blue s And you could com -

Fl.

Bs.

E.P.

Pno.

53

54 1:55 *breathily*

V

plete me I'd com - plete

Ac.Gtr.

Pno.

55

56

V.

you _____ (uh)

Ac.Gitr.

fret noise

Pno.

59

Ac.Gitr.

minimal fret noise

Pno.

The musical score is written for three parts: Vocal (V.), Acoustic Guitar (Ac.Gitr.), and Piano (Pno.). The key signature is one sharp (F#). The time signature is 4/4. Measure 56 shows the vocal line with lyrics 'you' and '(uh)', and the guitar with a 'fret noise' annotation. Measure 59 shows the vocal line with 'minimal fret noise' annotation. The piano part consists of chords and a bass line.

62 2:11

V

His eyes were the col-or of the sand

Ac. Gtr.

Pno.

64 2:16

V

And the sea And the more

Ac. Gtr.

Pno.

65

V

he talked to me you know The more he reached me But I

Ac.Gitr.

Pno.

67 2:21 2:26

V

could-n't let go of L. A. Cit-y of the fall en

Ac.Gitr.

Pno.

70 *"s" is not strongly articulated* 2:31

V. *an* _____ *gels* _____

Fl. *winds*

E.Gtr. *vp* *horn-like*
n.

Ac.Gtr. *3* *3* *3* *3*

Bs. *3* *3* *3* *3*

Chm.

Dms. *sim*

E.P.

Pno. *3* *3*

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7

**"THE ART OF EATING":
SEVEN SONGS ON TEXTS ABOUT FOOD BY
CONTEMPORARY WOMEN WRITERS**

by

DANIEL SONENBERG

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Music in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts. The City University of New York

2003

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Music in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts.

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The Art of Eating

I. When a man is small

Text by M.F.K. Fisher

Music by Daniel Sonenberg

Delicately ♩ = 112

5

p *ff*

When a man is small he

9 *fff*

loves and hates food with a ter - ri - ty

sfz *fff* (approx. pitches)

13 *mf* *p*

which soon dms

sfz *pp poco rubato*

18 *sfz* *p*

At six

mp *mf* *p*

23 *f*

years old his ve - ry bowels will heave

mf p cresc. sf sf sf f p cresc. sf

shrill and mechanical

27 *f*

When such a dish as creamed corn or

sf f mechanical sf

30 *p dolce (in tempo) poco rit. a tempo p*

cold ta - pi - o - ca ap - pears be - fore him His throat

pp dolce

p

bathed in pedal

33 *f* *mp*

will close and spots of nau - se-a and rage swim in his

mf p cresc. sfz sfz sfz f mp cresc. sfz sfz

38 *f* *ff* *mechanical and mad*

when such a dish as creamed

sfz sfz sfz sfz ff mechanical sfz sfz

42

corn or cold ta - pi-o - ca when such a

sfz sfz sfz sfz

46

when such a dish as when such a dish

49 *p dolce* *poco rit.* *a tempo*

ap-pears be-fore him ap-pears be-fore him

p dolce *mp*

bathed in pedal

Piano Solo

• Play in strict tempo, and without pedal unless otherwise indicated

52

mf

55

58

61

64

pp mysterious

ced.

68

p

It is hard ——— la - ter

72

p *sempre* *f*

to re - mem - ber why ——— but at the

p *sempre* *ff* *mf*

77

time there is no pose in his dis - gu —

gliss. *ff* *fff* (approx. pitches)

(sprechstimme - pitches approximate)

81 *p* poco gliss

st He can - not eat

sf *pp*

86 *p* *f* *b* *o* *.*

he says to hell with it

p *mp*

scd.

The Art of Eating

9

II. Gobble Gobble

Text by Carla Drysdale

Music by Daniel Sonenberg

Childlike and Rapturous ♩ = 108



* The piano part should not be too dry



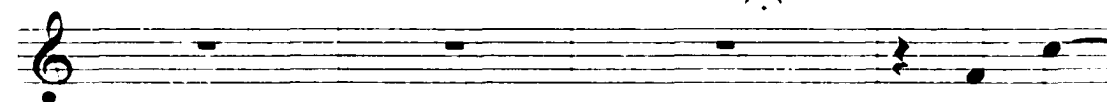
5

poco rit.

poco

a tempo

p dolce



9

year - old teeth chew peach flesh from pit rud - dy

poco rit. *a tempo*

13

tur-rows ex - posed my sens -

cresc. *f*

17

es blind - ed by the wal-nut sized lump

meno f *p sub.*

25

28

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31

p

my moth-er's

p sub.

35

In strict tempo

mf

mouth pitch-es laugh-ter so de-li-cious I must find

ff sub. *mf*

with reckless intensity and fear

39

*f**p**ff*

room for it in mine

ff *p sub.* *cresc.*

pedal liberally

44 *poco accel.**lunga a tempo*

44 *poco accel.* *lunga a tempo*

lunga

fff *p*

49 *lunga*

49

54

*poco**p dolce*

poco *p dolce*

poco *poco*

poco

poco

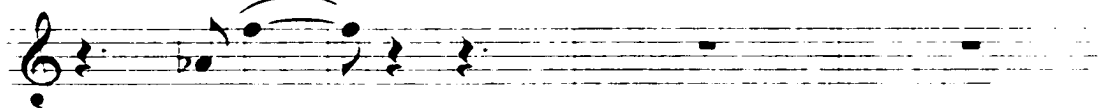
poco

so

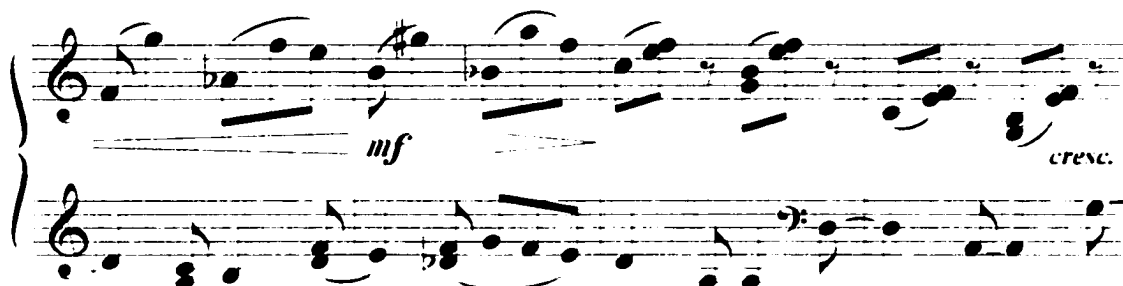
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swal-low

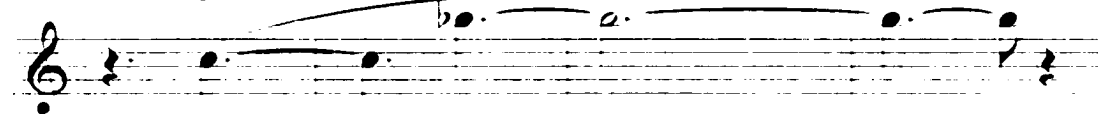
58

p *mf*

choke



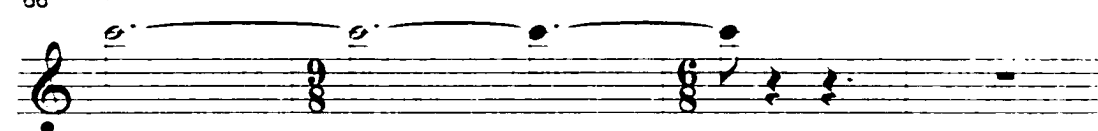
62

p *f*

gasp



66

ff

laugh



70

Musical score for measures 70-71. Measure 70 features a single treble clef staff with a whole rest. Measure 71 is a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The treble staff has a series of six vertical bar lines, followed by a half note G4, a half note F#4, and a half note E4. The bass staff has a series of six vertical bar lines, followed by a half note D4, a half note C4, and a half note B3. Dynamics include piano (*p*) and forte (*f*).

The Art of Eating

III. Les Amants

Text by Carla Drysdale

Music by Daniel Sonenberg

Largo ♩ = 50
Languorous

mf *mp* *rit.*

Leg. (pedal liberally)

A Tempo
mp

Nine - ty de - grees in a

f *p*

Pro - ven - çal kit - chen our bo - dies slick in the

f *p*

poco rit.

A Tempo

8 *f* *p dolce affectionately*
 mol - ten mo - ment you sit a - lert

f *p dolce*

10 *poco accel.*
 green eyes fixed on the feast

cresc.

12 *f* *ff* *A Tempo* *poco rit.*
 of me

ff *mf*

A Tempo

15 *p*
I lang-uish on the mar-ble count-er-top not

p dolce *mf* *p* *dolce*

18
sure how I got there

f

20 *mp* *f*

The musical score is for a voice and piano piece. It begins at measure 15 with a vocal line in 4/4 time, marked *p* (piano). The lyrics are "I lang-uish on the mar-ble count-er-top not". The piano accompaniment consists of two staves. The right hand plays a melody with a *dolce* (sweet) marking, while the left hand provides harmonic support. Dynamics include *p*, *mf* (mezzo-forte), and *dolce*. Measure 18 shows the vocal line continuing with the lyrics "sure how I got there". The piano accompaniment features a triplet in the right hand and a *f* (forte) dynamic. Measure 20 introduces a new piano texture with a *mp* (mezzo-piano) dynamic in the right hand and a *f* dynamic in the left hand. The score concludes at measure 24.

22

mus - cles taut

p

• = •. (Tempo II) poco accel.
This should not feel like a tempo change

25

rubato

sfz

Poco più mosso

28

mf cresc.

sfz

ff

Your

ff

rit.

straw - ber - ries o - ver my bel - ly and

mf

freely

breasts as I o-pen to you

p

(Tempo II) accel. rit.

p

Very Fast *ff* recklessly

A Tempo *mp* cresc.

♩ = ♩ (Tempo III)

your lips drip with cin - a - mon li - quid of me

molto accel.

●. = 108 rit. ----- Very Fast

ff recklessly

Tentatively ●. = 96 rit. -----

p

Very Fast

ff

Tempo I ♩ = 50
(or a little bit slower)

p

A-cross red tiles I hear

ff *mp* *p*

sea wind ri-sing up to a low ho-wl

mf *mp* *p*

Pno.

Musical score for piano and voice. The score is written in 4/4 time. The piano part consists of two staves, and the vocal part is on a single staff. The lyrics are "be-tween St. Tro-pez and St. Max-".

Dynamics and markings include:

- f* (forte)
- p* (piano)
- dolcissimo*
- rit.* (ritardando)
- A Tempo*
- mf* (mezzo-forte)

The lyrics are: "be-tween St. Tro-pez and St. Max-".

A Tempo **rit.**

ime

Pno.

p *f*

The Art of Eating

IV. Clear View

Text by Katherine de Lorraine

Music by Daniel Sonenberg

Gently $\text{♩} = 60$
non rubato

Piano *p*

*pedal liberally**

pp

leg.

While specific pedaling instructions are occasionally given, the piano part should be quite "wet" throughout

p

10

Le - mon slice in a glass of wa - ter

13

is a smile

16

float - ing up - side - down

mp

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It consists of three systems of staves. The first system (measures 10-12) has a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The second system (measures 13-15) continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The third system (measures 16-18) also continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The piano part features arpeggiated chords and moving bass lines. Dynamics include piano (p) and mezzo-piano (mp). There are also accents (>) and slurs throughout the piano part.

Musical score for a piano and voice piece, measures 19-25. The score includes vocal lines and piano accompaniment. Dynamics include *pp* (pianissimo), *p* (piano), *mp* (mezzo-piano), and *mf* (mezzo-forte). Articulations include accents (>) and slurs. The piano part features complex chordal textures and moving lines in both hands. The vocal part enters in measure 25 with the lyrics "poke it with my straw it rolls".

Measures 19-25:
 Measure 19: Vocal line begins with a half note G4. Piano accompaniment starts with a half note G4 and a half note F#4.
 Measure 20: Vocal line continues with a half note A4. Piano accompaniment continues with a half note G4 and a half note F#4.
 Measure 21: Vocal line continues with a half note B4. Piano accompaniment continues with a half note G4 and a half note F#4.
 Measure 22: Vocal line continues with a half note C5. Piano accompaniment continues with a half note G4 and a half note F#4.
 Measure 23: Vocal line continues with a half note D5. Piano accompaniment continues with a half note G4 and a half note F#4.
 Measure 24: Vocal line continues with a half note E5. Piano accompaniment continues with a half note G4 and a half note F#4.
 Measure 25: Vocal line continues with a half note F#5. Piano accompaniment continues with a half note G4 and a half note F#4.

Lyrics: poke it with my straw it rolls

o - ver and grins

f

mp

p

A few flesh - y pie - ces

p

2

Detailed description: This is a musical score for piano and voice. It consists of six systems of staves. The first system (measures 28-29) features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano part has a complex, rhythmic pattern with many beamed sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The second system (measures 30-31) continues the piano accompaniment. The third system (measures 32-33) shows the piano part with a more melodic line. The fourth system (measures 34-35) features a vocal line with the lyrics 'A few flesh - y pie - ces'. The piano part continues with a similar rhythmic pattern. The fifth system (measures 36-37) shows the piano part with a more melodic line. The sixth system (measures 38-39) continues the piano accompaniment. Dynamics include *f* (forte), *mp* (mezzo-piano), and *p* (piano). There are also articulation marks like accents and slurs.

39 *pp*
drift towards the bot - tom

43 *pp*
sim.
p
sure to set - tle

46 *dim.* *p*
be - fore a -

Detailed description: The musical score is for a voice and piano piece. It consists of six systems of staves. The first system (measures 39-40) shows a vocal line starting with a half note, followed by eighth notes, and a piano accompaniment with a melodic line and a bass line. The second system (measures 41-42) continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment, with a *pp* dynamic marking. The third system (measures 43-44) features a vocal line with a *p* dynamic and piano accompaniment with a *dim.* marking. The fourth system (measures 45-46) shows a vocal line with a *p* dynamic and piano accompaniment. The fifth system (measures 47-48) continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The sixth system (measures 49-50) shows the final vocal line and piano accompaniment. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, beams, and dynamic markings.

49 no - ther Old Yel - low sun slips be -

p *sfz* *mp*

52 hind Hunt - ing Hills

mf *sub.*

54 Poco Rit. A Tempo

f *p sub.*

57

56 *p* *f*

I'm writ - ing out what re - mains of

56 *ff*

ne - ga - tive men in my

59 *ff* Pushing Forward

59

* *sc.* * *sc.*

A Tempo **Poco Accel.** **Poco Rit.** **Poco Accel.** **Poco Rit.**

mp

life

mp *f* *mp* *f*

p

Kam - i - kaz es ho - ver - ing o - ver their

p

69

69

graves

Pno.

mp

p

p *dolce*

1

Pno.

pp *dolce*

1

Detailed description: This page of a musical score, numbered 35, contains two systems of music. The first system includes a vocal line in treble clef and a piano accompaniment in grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The piano part begins with a '69' measure number and a 'graves' tempo marking. It features dynamic markings of *mp* (mezzo-piano) and *p* (piano), and ends with *p* *dolce*. A first ending bracket is shown. The second system also includes a vocal line and piano accompaniment, starting with a '1' measure number and a *pp* *dolce* (pianissimo dolce) marking. It concludes with another first ending bracket marked '1'.

Poco Rit.

73 watch their sun - - set de - scents

Pno.

p

A Tempo

f brightly

my lips smi - ling and o - pen

Pno.

f

The Art of Eating

V. Scrambled Eggs

Text by M.F.K. Fisher

Music by Daniel Sonenberg

Allegro con brio ♩ = 112

1 *f*

3 *ff* *p* *f* *p* *f* *ff*

6 *p*

I can sug - gest a good

p *f* *f* *p* *sfz* *p*

sed.

8 *f sub.* *mf*

rec-i-pe for a shrew to take lit-tle time

ff *p* *f* *mf*

11 *p* *cloyingly sweet*

be-ve-ry in-di-gest-a-ble

f *p dolce* *mp*

13 *f*

and im-ply trust-ra-tion

ff *f*

15

out - rage and great bore - dom

ff *p*

18

p *mf*

by its gen - e - ral air of hard - ness and

sfz *f sub.*

20 *p dolce* **In strict tempo**

tough care - less pre - par - a - tion

p *f* *ff* *p*

poco rit

22

ff *cresc.*

25 **a tempo** *mf*

Four eggs four ta - ble spoons of wa - ter

f *mf* *f p*

28

Cook - ing oil or fat salt pep - per

p *p*

30

32

poco rit

And.
Beethoven-like
poco più mosso

p

Beat eggs ang - ri - ly

pp sf sf p

37 *mf*

un - til they froth Add the wa - ter sea - son with-out thought

mf

40 *p* 2 2

Heat oil quick - ly to the smok - ing point in this skil - let

f p

43 *p* *ad.*

Pour in egg mix - ture and stir fast

f p *p*

poco rit

a tempo

46

pp sfz sfz

48

Scrape on to cold plates

cresc. sfz sfz f

51

and slam down on care - less - ly laid ta - ble

*senza rit.**poco rit*

54

p *mf* *ff* *p*

Tempo I

57 *p* *f sub.*

I can sug-gest a good rec-i-pe for a shrew

f p *sffz* *p* *ff* *p*

60 *mf* *p* *cloyingly sweet*

to take lit-tle time be-ve-ry in-di-gest-a-ble

f *mf* *f p dolce* *mp*

63 *f*

and im - ply trust - ra - tion

65 *ff* *f*

out - rage and great bore - dom

68 *p* *mf*

by its gen - er - al air of hard - ness and

sfz *f sub.*

70 *p dolce*

tough care - less pre - par - a - tion

p f ff p

72 *f shrill*

tough care - less pre - par - a - tion

f p f ff

74

p ff

The Art of Eating

VI. I Imagine I Answer Your Letter

Text by Alison Jarvis

Music by Daniel Sonenberg

Plaintive and Rhapsodic ♩ = 76 ♩ = 114

Piano

The musical score is written for piano and consists of three systems, each with two staves. The first system is marked *p poco rubato* and *mf*. The second system is marked *p* and *mf*. The third system is marked *mf*. The score features various musical notations including notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

* Although marked "poco rubato", the tempo should remain relatively constant, and this song should never lose its feeling of rhapsodic forward motion, except where specifically indicated.

10

p dolce

13

p

God knows how man - ny true

p

15

p

ber - ries I've picked since

17

moon

19

my fingers

21

mf *p*

lips tongue all stained the

mf *p*

23

same blue sum - mer dark

25

f *pp* *sotto voce*

28

p

31

32

mf

p intensely

the sky

p

33

mp

Detailed description: This musical score page contains measures 31 through 37. It features a piano accompaniment and a vocal line. The piano part begins in 4/4 time, with the right hand playing chords and the left hand playing a moving bass line. At measure 32, the tempo changes to 3/4. The vocal line enters at measure 32 with the lyrics 'the sky'. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings. The piano part continues with complex chordal textures and moving lines in both hands. The vocal line has long notes and ties, emphasizing the lyrics. The score concludes at measure 37 with a final chord in 4/4 time.

40 *f* *p*

42 *p sub.* *f*

turn ing

45 *mp*

and I'm stand - ing near - ly

pp *mp*

Detailed description of the musical score: The score is for a piano and voice. It begins at measure 40 with a treble clef staff and a 3/4 time signature. The piano part consists of two staves (treble and bass clef) grouped by a brace. Dynamics include *f* (forte) and *p* (piano). There are slurs and accents throughout. At measure 42, the time signature changes to 3/4. The vocal line enters with the lyrics 'and I'm stand - ing near - ly'. Dynamics for the voice include *p sub.* (piano subito) and *f*. The piano accompaniment continues with complex textures, including *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *pp* (pianissimo) markings. The score ends at measure 45.

48 *f*

breath - - less on a

50 *f*

hull a - ti - re with hawk - weed

sf

sim.

53

the sun a stray

55

flame

drip - ping in - to the

mf

ff

o - pen mouth of o - cean

ff marcato

60

p

63

64

69

p

it you were here

pp *dolcissimo*

And.

71

now _____ you'd

p

* Leo. *

know _____

mf

I'm the same nev - er e - nough

mf *p*

mf *p dolce*

ne - ver e - nough of an y -

mf *f* *p dolce*

80 thing

pp

83 re - mem - ber the pine plank din - ing ta -

mp *p*

Lea * Lea * Lea * Lea * Lea

85

molto rit.

ble

f *p*

87 *Leo.* *al tempo* *mp* *Leo.*

I had made

mp

Leo. *cresc.* *senza ped.* *Leo.*

89 from that old col - lapse of

cresc.

Leo. *Leo.*

92 *f* *molto rit.*

barn

94 *a tempo* *mp*

three days in to Au - gust and it's

mp

lined with jars of cap - tured blue

f *molto rit.* *p sub.*

99 *Slower* $\bullet = 90$ *p*

pre - served and la - beled with my na -

102 *Slower* $\bullet = 76$ *molto rit.* $\bullet = 96$ *Slower than Tempo I*

me

mp *pp*

rit.

105 *Tempo I* $\bullet = 76$ $\bullet = 114$

p rubato

Slightly Slower, Tentatively

108 *rit.* *pp* *freely, almost spoken*

all night

mf *pp*

111 *poco rit.* *a tempo* *poco rit.*

some times I cook and stir

a tempo *pp* *dolcissimo*

113 *dolcissimo*

drink wine un - til my

115

mf

limbs be - gin to sway like hol - low re -

mf

117

eds

p

119

f grandly

mom - ing

122

fill the liv - ing - room

ff

126

mf

through win - dows

p *mf dim.*

ad lib.

128

p *mp* *rit.*

stripped of cur - tains

130 **Slower** $\bullet = 90$ *p* *poco rit.* *a tempo*

if you were here now

p rubato *p dolcissimo*

132 *poco accel.* *poco rit.* *p*

you'd

mf

134 *a tempo*

see how the

p sub.

136 **Slowly, with quiet pain** ♩ = 40

sun finds ev - er - y ob - ject

p dolce

138 *p* and touch - es each

139 *f* ta - ble lamp and chair

p *f*

$\bullet = \bullet \bullet = 114$

141 *poco*

143 *p*

like blue - ber - ries are touched

145 *pp*

out - side on the hill o - ver and o -

148

ver _____ o - ver and o -

151 *rit.*

ver and o - ver and o - ver _____

154 **Very Slowly** ♩ = 52 *p*

if you were here _____ now

155 *mp* you'd

pp dolce *mp*

157 *rit.* $\bullet = 102$ know I'm the same

f *pp sub.*

159 *poco rit.* *a tempo* *rit.* wo - man you left stand - ing here

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It consists of five systems of staves. The first system (measures 155-156) is in 3/4 time, with a vocal line starting on a whole note and a piano accompaniment. The second system (measures 157-158) is in 4/4 time, with a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The third system (measures 159-160) is in 4/4 time, with a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The score includes various dynamics such as *mp*, *pp*, *dolce*, *f*, *sub.*, *poco rit.*, *a tempo*, and *rit.*. A tempo marking of $\bullet = 102$ is also present. The lyrics are: "you'd", "know", "I'm the same", "wo - man you left", and "stand - ing here".

161 **Slower** *p* *molto rit.* *mf*

ga pi ng

p *mf* *ff* *pp*

Lev.

The Art of Eating

VII. Midwest Albas

Text by Collette Inez

Music by Daniel Sonenberg

Poco Adagio ♩ = 50

p *sincerely*

In

L.H. *pp*

Piano *p rubato*

heart-land caf-e - ter-i - as I hear the re-so-lute chirp of wo-men

L.H.

9 *mf* *< >*

heap - ing pale food on white plat - ters tu - na sur - prise

L.H.

12 *p* *mf* *f* *rit.*

ba - by corn nib - lets flash fro - zen cod po - ta -

L.H.

p *mf* *f* *sffz*

senza ped.

The musical score is for page 71 of a piece. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano part is divided into two systems, each with a left-hand (L.H.) and right-hand (R.H.) section. The first system covers measures 9-11, and the second system covers measures 12-14. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 2/4. The vocal line has lyrics: 'heap - ing pale food on white plat - ters tu - na sur - prise' and 'ba - by corn nib - lets flash fro - zen cod po - ta -'. The piano accompaniment includes various dynamics such as *mf*, *p*, *f*, *sffz*, and *sfz*, as well as articulation marks like accents and slurs. The first system ends with a repeat sign. The second system includes a 'rit.' (ritardando) marking and a 'senza ped.' (senza pedale) instruction for the left hand.

a tempo

p *p* *f* *p*

toes whipped ridged stuffed mashed washed down with

p dolce

mp *poco gliss.*

peach cob - bler co - co - nut pie sigh - ing

mp

mf

un - der va - nil - la ice cream in a scoop

mf

25 *f* grandly

and

L.H.

p

loaves wa - fers snaps strips squares puffs

L.H.

f grandly

Poco più mosso

31

p

crul - lers cakes guests at the wed - ding of le - mon

L.H.

Pno.

f *p*

>

34

p dolce — 3 —

and me - rengue at the mar - riage of

f *p dolce*

37

brown and serve hum-ming in the com-pa-ny of veal

Pno.

40

f *sfz*

Pno.

41

ff *sfz* *p cresc.*

Pno.

43

mf

Pno.

40 *mf*

sole in fo - il baked by mid - west - ern wo - men

f *p* *f* *p*

49

of - fer - ing con - so - la - tions of but - ter - milk bis - cuits

52

p

the

Pno. *pp dolce*

55 *3*

sol - ace of frit - ters through - out the bread -

Pno. *p*

58 *meno mosso*
mf

bas - ket states of the land rend - ered help - less

Pno. *mf*

62 *rit.* *a tempo* *mp*

in a rain of salt in a melt down of

Pno.

66 *rit.*

cream

L.H.

Pno. *p*

70

L.H.

Pno. *pp*