

## Goldness and integrity highlight concert

by Allan Bell

Fortunate audiences viewed "Bonny Giese and Mary Moncrieff in Concert" this past weekend at the Theatre in the Citadel Theatre complex. Saturday evening's performance was notable both for the richness of its concept, and the integrity with which it was brought to fruition.

As the two principals explained at the opening, the concert was the result of a determined effort to combine the creative resources of the dancers, musicians, singers, designers, technicians, a photographer, and an anonymous poet. The final product was to be a synthesis of all the ideas, skills, and talents of the artists who had been working together since the first "rehearsal." Of the many expressions with which I was left, the most significant was my awareness of the amount of care and genuine responsiveness that the artists had for each other and their "concert."

The performance began before the audience entered the theatre and took their seats. Hanging in the air were the photographs of Forrest Bard, whose sensitive eye/lens documented the rehearsal process until the final dress.

One may well ask how a photographer, as a visual artist, could actively contribute to a concert of performing arts which are essentially involved with the temporal arts of a continuum of "presents." Upon reflection, the photographs were a celebration in themselves and a kinesis of their own in relation to the rest of the show. Before the performance, they were passing moments of color and shape which, with the hubbub of the crowd, added to the pre-curtain excitement. During the intermission when the audience could pause and reflect upon them, the pictures gave meaning and perspective to the events of the first half as well as being a visual feast of sympathetic photographic composition. After the final curtain, they took on a more significant air, as partners in the memory with the sights and sounds.

Of course, the core of the concert was the dancers. Both Mary Moncrieff and Bonny Giese exhibited strong technical prowess and an imaginative use of the environmental resources of the very intimate Rice Theatre. Perhaps because of this intimacy, one gained a precious access to the personalities of the two performers. Ms. Moncrieff was the irrepressible comely in *Banana Orange*, an abstract sketch about a transfer of identity between the respective fruits indicated by the title. Her lyricism was eminently projected into *Lament*, a dance which played with theatrical convention in having the pianist-composer, Sam Lancaster, onstage. The interaction between pianist and dancer constantly shifted the aesthetic line between dancer-accompanist and dancer-composer. At one point, Ms. Moncrieff accomplished the choreographic *trompe d'oeil* of transferring the dance from her body to the pianist's fingers.

The grace and fragility of Bonny Giese's person were best displayed in a work entitled *Indignitas*. This realistic dance was heavily endowed with monastic religious imagery but borrowed its temperament and



Bonny Giese and Mary Moncrieff

tempo from Japanese Noh drama. Here, Ms. Giese, in her portrayal of an initiate, brought a delicacy and innocence into the somewhat sinister realm of the religious order. Although her enactment of her doubts bordered upon glibness, this could have been more a function of the relative shortness of the scene in comparison to the length of the work as a whole. Her own brand of comedy, of the vivacious variety, made the dance *Converse* a refreshing interlude. Ms. Giese shared the stage with Kevin Giese, whose forceful conga-playing and intoxicating movements were a welcome foil to an evening of feminine conception.

If there can be any criticism to bring to the two choreographer-dancers, it would be of their inability to deal with extended form. The dance *2 (in reserve)* is a case in point. Here the dance began with some of the most innovative and exciting interactions between dancers, musicians, and set that I have personally witnessed. The visual, rhythmic, and dramatic counterpoint between the action on stage and the ingenious vocal-instrumental efforts was magical and stunning. At the beginning.

As the dance proceeded, it began to settle back; it seemed as if the barrier between dancer-accompanist

was once again invoked, and the dance itself pushed forward, reworking its themes in a rather standard way. Surely there were more avenues to be explored, more musical-dance interaction to be exploited. The end result was a choreographic verbosity which endangered the entire evening.

The dancers received very sensitive support and a good deal of dramatic energy from the musicians. From the duo of composer-performers Murray Dineen and Grant Ball in *Banana Orange*, from the singers of the pseudo-plainchant in *Indignitas*, from an exuberant Kevin Giese in *Converse*, from Sam Lancaster in *Lament*, from the vocalists and instrumentalists in *2 (in reserve)* — from all these sources came imaginative and appropriate oral support for the movements on stage. Compliments are due for the tasteful choices that were made.

One enigma remains for me. I found the quotation of the Dies Irae from the Requiem Mass in *Indignitas* to be a curious choice, made more curious by the fact that it was the only piece intoned without a text. The effect was jarring and perhaps too blatant for the context.

Ah well, everyone needs a good enigma to take home for the evening.

## Joni's progressing and with hejira

by Gordon Turtle

Joni Mitchell, *Hejira*, Asylum 7ES 1087

It could be argued that Joni Mitchell is the most mature contemporary songwriter today; at least, it is she that she is the most advanced lyricist. Her impact on the musical world has been large for over ten years and she is still progressing and developing; never stopping to rest on the success of any one album. When it seemed that *Court and Spark* signalled the end of her folkish writing, she simply abandoned the brass, tight, and catchy arrangements of that album and went into more subtle material with *Hissing of Summer Lawns*. Her newest album, *Hejira* is a further progression into jazz and refinement. *Hejira* often uses no more than three instruments on any one song; and usually one of them is some sort of percussive element.

But even without the solid backing of brass and electric guitars, piano and woodwinds, the arrangements on *Hejira* are wonderfully tight, amazingly complex, and lucidly executed. Of first importance is Joni herself, whose guitar work is strong, assertive, and demanding of attention, yet remaining subtle and emotive. Jazz musician Jaco Pastorius plays bass on most tracks, and his exquisite feel for Mitchell's compositions adds a new dimension to bass-playing that utilized by any other popular artist. Joni's music cannot be separated from her lyrics, and her arrangements become morose or happy, moody or bright, as the lyrics demand.

And on *Hejira*, it is the lyrics that count. Joni Mitchell is simply a brilliant poet, whether dealing with middle-class ennui, as on *Hissing of Summer Lawns*, or personal dilemmas, as on *Hejira*. *Song for Sharon* is my favorite Joni song of all time. Her deep introspection, communicated in a simple and ironic tone, touches the depths of her inner feelings. I'm almost embarrassed to listen to this song in the presence of others; my easiness is undermined by curiosity—much the



Joni

same feeling one got in elementary school when considering sneaking into the girls' washroom. This is caused by Joni's frankness, and even more so by her ability to capture one's own primal doubts while expressing hers.

Listen:  
When we were kids in Maidstone, Sharon  
I went to every wedding in that little town  
To see the tears and the kisses  
And the pretty lady in the white lace wedding gown  
And walking home on the railroad tracks  
Or swinging on the playground swing

Love stimulated my illusions  
More than anything.

Listen:  
And when I went skaaing after Golden Reggie  
You know it was white lace I was chasing  
Chasing dreams  
Mama's nylons underneath my cowgirl jeans  
He showed me first you get the kisses  
And then you get the tears  
But the ceremony of the bells and lace  
Still veils this reckless fool here.

Hardly original concepts, you might say, but their lack of pretension and their simplistic truth reflect the essence of Joni's lyrics.

"Furry Sings the Blues" is another song of Joni's where she so easily and poignantly points out her own pretensions, whether past or present. She recalls in this song a time when she and others like her would huddle about an aging blues singer, who has seen more hardship and bad times than she can imagine.

Listen:  
Old Furry sings the blues  
He points a bony finger at you and says,  
"I don't like You"  
Everyone laughs as if it's the old man's standard joke  
But it's true  
We're only welcome for our drink and smoke  
And: Why should I expect that old guy  
To give it to me true  
Falling to hard luck  
And time and other thieves  
While our limo is shining on his shanty street

It's nice to know that despite all the bullshit that is peddled for truth in music, all the hype that is marketed for cash, all the crass and ignorant rock stars that cash in on people's desire to create false heroes, there is still, after ten monumental, important, rewarding and thankful years, we still have Joni Mitchell. For of all musicians, only she has looked at life from both sides, now, and with hejira.