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THE FUTURE OF BASS

JONI MITCHELL

ON JACO, MINGUS, LARRY KLEIN & MORE

JUSTIN CHANCELLOR • RHONDA SMITH • CHRIS CHANEY • BAKITHI KUMALO

Joni Mitchell's Bass Desires

The visionary artist sits down to reminisce about the great bass players in her past – and her life and work with Larry Klein

E. E. BRADMAN / DEC 22, 2021

Joni Mitchell should need no introduction. In a career that spans 23 albums over 53 years, the woman born Roberta Joan Anderson has embodied what it means to be a powerfully self-directed songwriter, composer, lyricist, vocalist, musician, performer, and producer. In the process, she has received every honor under the sun and been claimed as an inspiration by a wide swath of luminaries while basically being a genre unto herself.

But we're not here to talk about Joni's sublime storytelling skills, chronicles of the heart, or sharp observations about human nature. We'll let someone else tell you about her innovative guitar tunings and signature approach to harmony. We're skipping over Joni's evocative visual art, her cheeky compilations, her cool ballet, and her revelatory archive releases to get to what matters most: her bass desires.

Joni Mitchell owns a special place in our hearts because she has consistently sought out killer bass performances and made them central to her work. As you'll see below, her penchant for low end took root long before she began thinking of herself as a singer. Joni's earliest albums featured sparse bass by Buffalo Springfield/Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young icon Stephen Stills (on our cover at the top of the story), but soon, two of L.A.'s finest players stepped in to add new colors to her canvas. Wilton Felder (bottom left), the Crusaders sax legend whose immortal bass lines include the Jackson 5's "ABC" and "I Want You Back," had already logged studio time with Stanley Turrentine, Shuggie Otis, Jean-Luc Ponty, and Donald Byrd before he began working with Joni on *For the Roses* in 1972. Max Bennett (right, middle) had a dazzling list of credits — from Cannonball Adderley, Ella Fitzgerald, Marvin Gaye, and George Harrison to Elvis Presley, Charlie

Parker, Diana Ross, Barbra Streisand, and Frank Zappa – by the time he met Joni as a member of the L.A. Express in 1973. Both players added sophisticated grooves to *Court and Spark* (1974) and *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* (1975) while helping Joni to articulate what she wanted next, which she found in abundance in a 24-year-old force of nature from Florida (top left).

Jaco Pastorius' appearance on *Hejira* capped an astonishing 1976 that also included the release of his own self-titled debut, Pat Metheny's *Bright Size Life*, Weather Report's *Black Market*, and Al Di Meola's *Land of the Midnight Sun*. Their special brand of Joni/Jaco magic continued through *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter* (1977), *Mingus* (a 1979 collaboration with jazz great Charles Mingus, top right), and *Shadows and Light* (1980). A couple years later, Joni debuted a new sound and a fresh band headed by young jazz doubler Larry Klein (left, middle), who'd made a name for himself with Freddie Hubbard, Willie Bobo, and Diane Reeves. In the four decades since, Klein has remained integral to Joni's music-making process, and no one knows Joni's bass desires better.

We are honored to present Larry's transcript of their conversations over dinner during the spring and summer of 2021.

Part 1: 1968–1980

Larry Klein I was listening through to the records, going all the way back to the beginning, and I was struck by what an interesting progression it was – the development of your sense of what you wanted on the bottom end.

Joni Mitchell It is, because I started with the baritone ukulele, which has no bass strings on it. There was no bottom on my first recordings!

Klein We've talked about this subject quite a bit over the years, but there is so much that I don't know. Do you see a correlation between your painting and your approach to bass?

Mitchell The aesthetic, musically and visually, went through similar shifts. My early music had no bass on it – it was just voice and guitar, very minimal, and my early artwork was just simple lines. As I began to flesh out the artwork, I began to create more orchestration in the music.

Klein You were a dance addict in high school, right? You must have been conscious of low end, because you were listening to the jukebox while you were dancing.

Mitchell Yeah, bass and drums! I was addicted to the rhythm. And I think that early on, even though I wasn't working with bass and drums, I was thinking in a rhythmic way.

Klein Did the tunings you were working with affect the way you wanted the bass to function in your music? Did they make you want to hear notes other than the roots?

Mitchell I craved bass that was more expressive and melodic, like the lead guitar. I wanted the bass to stretch out and not just plod along anchoring everything.

Klein Early on, you used bass sparingly. On your first album, *Song to a Seagull*, for example, only "Night in the City" has bass. Was that because you weren't getting something that you needed from the other instruments?

Mitchell I wanted it to groove harder.

Klein After the first album, there was no bass on *Clouds* or *Ladies of the Canyon*, and on *Blue*, there's bass only on "Carey."

Mitchell That's Stephen [Stills] on that one, right? I like his bass playing on that track! I tried various bass players, and I usually took them off the tracks. They weighed things down, made it plodding, and didn't make it swing. They didn't do what the bass players of my teenage years did on records. I used to walk to the other side of town, across the Broadway bridge to the Avenue H swimming pool, where they had a jukebox. As I got close to the pool, all I could hear was the bass. It carried for blocks. In the 1950s, the bass, mostly upright, was really dominant on records.

Klein On *For the Roses*, Stephen is playing on some things, and Wilton Felder is playing on others. I was trying to guess which tracks were Wilton and which were Stephen. It seemed to me that some of the tracks had more connective and player-like phrases, while some were pretty much hitting the main structural points. I imagined that Wilton probably was playing on the tracks that had more elaboration on them.

Mitchell I loved Wilton's playing!

Klein Me, too. He was a beautiful bass player.

Mitchell He was extraordinary.

Klein What do you remember about the sessions with him? Did you talk much about the parts?

Mitchell Not a lot. He'd just sit there with a toothpick hanging out of his mouth [*laughs*]. I think he was a Jehovah's Witness … they're not supposed to dance, so his movement was really restrained. It felt like his body wanted to move more, but he had to hold it back. I just loved what he played, so it was a thrill for me to work with him.

Klein Another thing that I noticed about *For the Roses* was that on "Barandgrill," there is no bass, but there is bass clarinet. Was there a specific reason you used that color?

Mitchell It was the era of the lead guitar — everything had lead guitar, and I was sick of it. So I wanted to do something different, to go back to the swing era and bring some more horns into play.

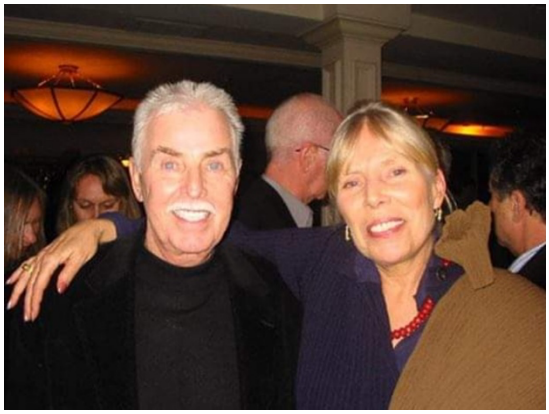
Klein How did you start working with Wilton?

Mitchell I'm not sure. It might have been through Joe Sample. They were in the same band, right?

Klein Yeah, the Jazz Crusaders. When you went into C*ourt and Spark*, Max Bennett was playing bass, Wilton played on two tracks, and Jim Hughart played on "Trouble Child." Did Max come into the picture through John Guerin?

Mitchell Well, the whole band came into the picture. Before I started recording C*ourt and Spark*, I went around looking for a band. I was tired of playing alone; I wanted other people on the stage with me. I went to [famed Los Angeles club] the Baked Potato and saw the L.A. Express play. Larry Carlton really grabbed my attention. I loved his guitar playing and John Guerin's drumming. Max was a really good bass player within a certain tradition; it wasn't exactly what I was looking for, but it worked out.

I took the whole band, you know — Tom Scott, too. I liked his playing, but I was sort of already looking for Wayne Shorter.



Joni and Max Bennett

Klein At a certain point, you work with a bird in the hand, right?

Mitchell Exactly. A lot of people preferred how the L.A. Express sounded, as opposed to when I started working with Wayne at that time.

Klein Max, Wilton — these guys were all bass heroes of mine when I was growing up, and I learned their parts on the records that they were playing on. Max always seemed to play with more of a symmetrical approach than Wilton, who had more interesting, irregular, and angular phrases in his playing, right?

Mitchell Yeah, that interests me. I like that kind of irregularity.

Klein Maybe because Wilton was a horn player, he didn't feel like he always had to anchor things symmetrically.

Mitchell What kind of horn did he play?

Klein He played tenor sax with the Jazz Crusaders.

Mitchell I didn't know that! He didn't play bass with them?

Klein He didn't actually play bass on their records. They had quite a few great bass players on their records through the years, including Leroy Vinnegar, Al McKibben, Victor Gaskin, and Larry Graham, and Wilton played tenor. They had this unison thing with the lines being played on

tenor and trombone. For that time, as a bass player, Wilton had an interesting way of coming in late on phrases, not completing the phrase in the way that you would expect. Later, like on *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*, he began doing unusual chordal things, as he did on "Don't Interrupt the Sorrow." Was it just happenstance that different musicians played on each song, or was it something that you worked out?

Mitchell No, it was my choice.

Klein So on each tune, you would think, "This feels like something for Wilton, or this feels like it would be right for Max?"

Mitchell Yes, but after a time, I preferred Wilton's playing to Max's. Max was a bit too predictable for my taste. It was solid and great; it was wonderful bass playing, but I wanted something weirder [*laughs*].

Klein Yeah, more angular stuff.

Mitchell More unpredictable.

Klein And the same thing was happening painting-wise, right?

Mitchell Yes, I was trying to get more abstract as a painter, more modern, but I went through that for a while and then I ended up reverting to my true love, which is painting as if I was alongside Gauguin and Van Gogh. That pocket of painting is where my true love was.

Klein On *Hissing*, Wilton played on "Edith and the Kingpin" and "Don't Interrupt the Sorrow," both of which were just beautiful performances. It was so great to go back and listen to those albums. For *Hejira*, you had Max playing on "Furry Sings the Blues" and "Song for Sharon," and Jaco enters the picture playing on the rest of the album.

Mitchell Yeah, that was very exciting because Jaco was doing all the things I wanted the bass to do, but nobody was doing. It's like I invented him! [*Laughs*.] When he came in on the session, I just couldn't believe my good fortune, because, you know, his playing was very eccentric. This was the bass player of my dreams. Not everybody loved it, but I did.

Joni, Jaco, and the Shadows & Light*-era band (Joel Bernstein)*

Klein How did you come across Jaco?

Mitchell He was just joining Weather Report at that point. In fact, I met Wayne Shorter through Jaco, who invited me down to one of their sessions. But I don't remember who turned me on to Jaco.

Klein With the addition of Jaco's style — going from the bottom up to the top, then occupying the middle vocal area, then back down — did you notice a shift in your aesthetic that correlated to the other forms, like painting?

Mitchell I think I did go from a more minimal aesthetic to adding more and more.

Klein One thing I think has always been a guiding principle for you is that everything should support the words and the vocal. Did you ever feel that you needed to describe what was happening in the poetry to players?

Mitchell Well, I did always tell them that the voice is the leader, that everything needs to support the voice.

Klein Tell me a little about the process that you went through with Charlie [Charles Mingus] regarding bass on *Mingus*.

Mitchell Initially, it was his last record, and he made the first calls on the personnel. I disagreed with him. I had the band in my mind that I wanted to use – mostly guys who had been in Miles Davis' band – but he didn't dig Miles. Charlie felt competitive with Miles, so when I recorded with the personnel that I chose, and played it for him, he was kind of critical. He was getting paralyzed and could hardly speak, but he said, "I want to tell you something about music," which he never did. I don't think that he liked what I did, but it was neither his music nor my music – it was a real stretch. What he wanted and suggested felt really Bradley's [the piano–bass bar in New York City] to me, and I wanted it to be more progressive than that.

Joni and Charles Mingus

Klein Yeah, you were going into a new and different thing, so you wanted to come in with …

Mitchell … something cutting-edge, not meat-and-potatoes.

Klein Did Mingus come to any of the sessions?

Mitchell No, because he was in Los Angeles or Mexico. I flew down to Mexico to play him what I had done. At a certain point, I said, "Let me put this out on my label," because I knew that Charlie wanted a big funeral and more recognition, and I thought he would get more [acclaim] if it came out on my record than if it came out on his. But the jazz community thought I

was using him, which wasn't true at all; I was trying to give him a bigger audience! It didn't really work out that way, because people didn't really like that album. They thought I had lost my marbles [*laughs*].

Klein Initially, maybe, but I know that it is very revered now by most people that I discuss it with.

Mitchell Is that right?

Klein Yeah!

Mitchell I took a lot of flak in the beginning, except in Europe, where they understood that with two composers collaborating, it would come out like neither one of us. The European reviews were more sensible. The American reviews were stupid.

Klein Well, there's a more mature sensibility in Europe.

Mitchell Yeah, they embrace jazz more than America does!

Klein The audiences are more sophisticated over there. It seems like the U.S. got stuck early on in some kind of defensive posture — they're still yelling and screaming about giving up their guns [*laughs*].

Mitchell Yeah [*laughs*].

Klein On the sessions that you did, you played with Stanley Clarke, right?

Mitchell Stanley was the first bass player Charlie called in, and Stanley was so in awe of playing Mingus' bass that he didn't play well. Charlie misinterpreted it — I was trying to make Stanley settle down, and Charles said, "You're in awe of him!" I said, "I'm not in awe of him — he's in awe of you! I'm just trying to make him calm down a bit!" [*Laughs.*]

Klein And Eddie Gomez — did you try him?

Mitchell Yeah, we tried a lot of bass players, but I wanted Jaco at that point.

Jaco appeared on four Joni albums: Hejira *(1976),* Don Juan's Reckless Daughter *(1977),* Mingus *(1979), and the live* Shadows and Light *(1980)*

Klein It's hard to get away from something that's adding that much poetry to the situation, right?

Mitchell Exactly. But Charlie was prejudiced against the electric bass, too. There was that whole electric/acoustic prejudice. I had gone through that in folk music already, when [Bob] Dylan went electric, so I thought, Oh, here we go again!

Klein Yeah, each generation of people get entrenched.

Mitchell They don't want to change, you know? When *Blue* came out, it was badly received by male singer–songwriters around me. They were prejudiced against it, and I think they were thinking — just like when Dylan went electric — "Does this mean that we have to do this now? Do we have to spill our guts like this?" [*Laughs.*]

Klein In a way, it's like, "Does this mean I have to learn to do something else?" If something doesn't come to people in an endemic way, they don't want to expend the effort to do something differently.

Mitchell Not many people really like change that much. Miles did, and that's why I love Miles. He was always experimenting and changing.

Klein Even when Miles was playing with Charlie Parker, he was always coming at it from a different angle, whereas other trumpet players were trying to play like Charlie Parker, trying to play the same lines.

Mitchell When Charlie and Miles are on the same record, I can hardly wait until Charlie shuts up and I can hear Miles again! [*Laughs.*]

Klein I think Miles knew that he couldn't be a copycat, so he had to develop his own language, and that was part of what was amazing about his talent.

Mitchell Exactly. That was kind of what my problem was, too. The standard folkie things evaded me, so I had to do something different.

Klein I think a lot of the best pop music has been born of people trying but not succeeding to play jazz in a conventional way, just as not being able to make traditional chord shapes in standard tuning inspired you to develop your own tunings. Trying to figure out a way around obstacles leads you to your own voice.

Mitchell Yeah.

Klein I know that at one juncture, you took Henry [Lewy, Joni's longtime engineer] over to where Stevie Wonder was recording. Were you trying to get at something different sonically on the bottom?

Mitchell Yeah, I wanted it to be bigger, fatter, and more domineering, and Henry was against it. Stevie was using the Moog, and he was doing things with this big, fat bass bottom, you know. I wanted to show Henry how it could be good.

Klein Was that when Stevie was working on *Talking Book*?

Mitchell I think it was. I thought it would ease tension if I did something strange on the bottom end of my records — I thought it would give me some credibility. The other thing is that technically speaking, the bass takes up more space on vinyl. Henry was worried that if I put a lot on the bottom end, we wouldn't be able to get much time on a side, but it didn't turn out to be a problem. When I was working with Jaco, Jaco kept turning himself up [*laughs*], and I didn't turn him down. Henry was telling me, "Joan, you've got to turn the bass down," and I was like, "No, I like it like that!"

Klein And although Jaco had a healthy ego, a lot of it was probably him wanting to hear that kind of weight on the bottom, because he played in a lot of R&B bands down in Florida.

Mitchell I like it up loud like that. I had no problem with it.

Klein When you listen to what's going on in hip-hop and R&B, do you hear anything interesting in the way that bottom end is being dealt with now?

Mitchell Well, the most interesting new developments in music for me recently are these new choral groups like Pentatonix. I find that as

refreshing as folk music was when it dominated rock & roll, until the British Invasion knocked folk music out of the game. I like those vocal bands, and there are quite a few of them.

Joni, Jaco, and Herbie Hancock in 1979 (Joel Bernstein)

Joni Mitchell, Larry Klein, and the Wild Things*-era band in the early 1980s (Joel Bernstein)*

Part 2: 1982–2007

Larry Klein began working with Joni Mitchell in 1981, and they married in 1982, a month after the release of *Wild Things Run Fast*. Klein played bass on *Wild Things*, *Dog Eat Dog* (1985), *Chalk Mark in a Rain Storm* (1988), *Night Ride Home* (1991), and *Turbulent Indigo*, which won the 1994 Grammy for best pop album. During this era, Klein established himself as a session player (check out Peter Gabriel's "Mercy Street," Don Henley's "Boys of Summer," and Robbie Robertson's "Showdown at Big Sky"), and eventually, a producer most associated with singer–songwriters like Shawn Colvin, Holly Cole, Julia Fordham, Madeleine Peyroux, Melody Gardot, Lizz Wright, and Tracy Chapman. His current role as a songwriter/label executive for Strange Cargo, his own imprint through Capitol/Universal, builds on that foundation.

Joni and Larry divorced in 1994, but they have continued to work together, co-producing Joni's *Both Sides Now* (2000) and *Travelogue* (2002); Klein brought in L.A. session legend Chuck Berghofer to play upright on both. In 2006, Klein married the great Brazilian singer/composer Luciana Souza shortly before playing on Joni's most recent album, *Shine*, and producing Herbie Hancock's *River: The Joni Letters*, which also featured Souza. Klein's Grammy wins — for *Turbulent Indigo*, *Both Sides Now*, and *River: The Joni Letters* — are a testament to the depth of his knowledge of Joni's music.

We've interspersed Larry's observations with excerpts of their conversations about the albums, too. First, he set the scene by telling us how he wound up working with Joni.

In the Beginning

"The way that this chapter of my life began was that I was doing quite a bit of playing with [drummer] John Guerin," says Klein. "I was immersed in the jazz world and playing with a number of my heroes, but I began tiring of the enthusiasm for virtuosity over lyricism and heartfelt performance, in both

players and the audience. I began thinking that it might be a good idea for me to cultivate more studio work and learn about how to be a good studio musician. I craved being able to hone a part so that it had the capacity to get to the heart of things rather than to dazzle or impress. John really helped me make that transition by telling people about me and calling me for different things. I wanted to learn how to use the studio as an instrument.

"Joni was coming out of her *Mingus* period, so she had called John and asked him to put together a band to do some recording. That ended up being the beginning of *Wild Things Run Fast*."

"We started with three or four songs, which was all she had written, but she was itching to get going and record. We did three songs and then she had to go off and write more songs, so she went up to her house in Canada. There was a gap of maybe a few months, a burst of sessions, and then another."

During one of their dinners, Klein played Joni selections from each album.

Wild Things Run Fast (1981)

"Chinese Cafe/Unchained Melody"

Joni Mitchell It's beautiful the way your bass takes the melody in these sections.

Larry Klein It's taken from your piano figure!

Mitchell It is? Oh, yeah!

Klein This one is still really moving for me when I hear it. [John] Guerin sounds great on it.

Mitchell I loved working with him.

Klein Me, too. He really had his own signature thing that he created.

Mitchell Is that Larry Carlton on this?

Klein No, it's Steve Lukather.

Mitchell God, I was really blessed with good bands, wasn't I? [*Both laugh.*]

Klein This sounds so good, like it could have been done yesterday.

Mitchell Yeah!

Klein Everything comes out of the piano part on this — that chordal bass thing in the intro and interludes is taken from what you're doing. Guerin is doing that little asymmetrical double-time purring thing that he did.

Mitchell Yeah, I went back and listened to his playing on *Court and Spark*. Just magnificent.

"Ladies Man"

Klein That's Carlton on this one. It's like a long strut.

Mitchell It's got a nice lope, kind of Motown. You know, an art director at A&M who worked on the Motown archives told me I was mentioned in a Motown anthology. He told me that in the notes, it said, "Meanwhile, on the other side of town, Joni Mitchell was making a new kind of folk music." I think what happened was that at [famed Detroit coffeehouse] Chessmate,

the after-hours band played jazz, and they were probably all Motown session players. They did my lead sheets for me, and they started playing my music in their set! Isn't that funny?"

"Moon at the Window"

Mitchell Beautiful! It's really interesting music, and it's not like anything else.

Klein I know – it's in its own genre. Guerin is just purring along while you and I are dancing around together on top of him, and Wayne is providing the poetic commentary. [*As Wayne Shorter figures play around the vocal, both laugh.*] When I first came in on these sessions, it was an interesting situation, because I was coming in after you had made those great records with Jaco. I realized that I wasn't going to play his game, because that would be a *real* losing game for me [*both laugh*]. Even if I was successful, that was his thing, so I had to do something new – he had already done that, and you were looking to go in a new direction and not look back. So I decided to go compositional and braid into your structure in a way that complemented and provided contrast.

Mitchell Yeah, compositional! That's what it is. It locks up to me and the structure, like on the early records: There's not much on them at all besides me, but then James Taylor occasionally comes in and locks up with me on another guitar.

Klein It's contrapuntal, but it's woven together.

Mitchell That's what I like. It's like a well-conducted symphony, everybody playing their parts and being heard, but leaving space for the other guy to come in and put his color on. That's the way I think of my music: It's color to color to color. Everybody sounds great on there – Wayne sounds great, you sound great ...

Klein … and Guerin's doing exactly what he should be doing.

Mitchell He was a great drummer for me.

Klein I loved him, too.

Klein And Wayne's intuition is so sharp. You hear the way he finds those holes and spots?

Mitchell Stepping around things! It's amazing.

"Solid Love"

Mitchell Beautiful!

Klein I think that is a great example of acing the terribly difficult task of writing a happy song that's a good song.

Mitchell It's positive. I like that figure that you're playing in those sections [the end of each bridge and the tag], where you're sliding around. It's compositional, orchestral. That's it, Klein!

"Be Cool"

Klein [responding to Wayne's figure on the tag] That's like bagpipes right there.

Mitchell Scottish! He got Scottish!

"Man to Man"

Mitchell This is really nice, Klein! I love listening to this with you.

Klein It's kind of like our diary, right?

Mitchell Is that James [Taylor on background vocals]?

Klein And Guerin, and Lukather on guitar.

Mitchell All of these sound like hit records to me.

Klein This one has a bit of a Motown thing, too. This one was in the first group of songs that we tracked together during those first sessions. I think it was "Man to Man," "Be Cool," and "Chinese Café" in the first batch.

Mitchell I'm discovering myself! [*Both laugh.*] I don't generally go back and listen to myself … I did for the ballet that I put together, *The Fiddle And The Drum*, but that didn't have anything from *Wild Things* in it.

"Underneath the Streetlight"

Klein This is New York imagery — you wrote this in New York. Most of what I'm doing on this is playing off the vocal. It's all about braiding in with your guitar and the vocal. Another happy song that is really good.

Mitchell [*Nods in agreement.*]

"Love"

Klein This is also Lukather on this one.

Mitchell This is a hymn. It's Corinthians. . . .

Klein Orchestral, right?

Mitchell We did good, Klein.

"Joni and I hit it off pretty good from the get-go," says Klein. "I loved the songs, and we had a very similar sensibility and aesthetic philosophy in many areas. Honestly, I had never spent time around a person with whom I could have a meaningful and stimulating dialogue for hours, and then meld perfectly on a musical level. There was a lot of laughter. We had fun on those sessions, recorded some beautiful music, and at a certain point, we were going out to meals together, and then we just sort of naturally gravitated into a relationship. We just liked each other so much and loved being around each other. The latter part of making that record consisted of us working together while she was still writing some of the music, and then completing the recording process, mixing the record, and all of that. It was wild and surprising to us both, and yet very organic and kind of innocent in the way that it happened."

Once the album was out, Joni and the band – keyboardist Russell Ferrante, drummer Vinnie Colaiuta, Michael Landau on guitar, and musical director Klein on bass – toured Japan, Australia, Europe, and the U.S., documented on the *Refuge of the Roads* DVD. "We ended up going on the road for about a year after *Wild Things*," Larry says. "It was quite an odyssey. We had this great band playing these wonderful songs of hers, and we were traveling around with a great crew. It was like a little village of people who loved each other – we all loved the way each other played and loved playing this music together."

Dog Eat Dog (1985)

"During the next period, Joni and I moved out to Malibu. We were both working on new music, and she was painting all the time. I had gotten a little studio together in a room in the house, and I was listening to all kinds of stuff, but one record I ended up really loving at that time was Thomas Dolby's *The Flat Earth*. Joan was writing new songs that were very topical in nature, as there were a lot of quite shocking issues at hand in the world, and we were both disturbed and upset at where things were going in this country. Joni would hear me working on new music up in the studio while

she was painting, and that's how the songs that we ended up co-writing from *Dog Eat Dog* began to develop.

"I loved the elegance and depth of the sonic perspective of *The Flat Earth*, so at some point I got together with Mike Shipley, who had engineered and mixed that record. Through Mike, we got in contact with Thomas, and that led to the forming of the team for the recording of *Dog Eat Dog*.

"During the recording, we had a very close brush with death. We were driving home to Malibu from the studio very late at night – I remember the date distinctly, because it was the morning of Live Aid – and a drunk driver hit us on Pacific Coast Highway. We were in a bad wreck, and the engine in our car caught fire. Joan was pretty much uninjured, but I broke my wrist and practically bit my tongue in half. After that car wreck, she decided that she didn't want to be driving on Pacific Coast Highway anymore, so we moved back into town."

Too Many Cooks

"It was a joint production between Joni, myself, Mike, and Thomas, and it proved to be a difficult situation. She was used to an organic process of give and take, with her being at the apex of the decision-making process. We had a wonderful give and take between the two of us, but we both felt that it would be exciting to draw on the strengths that Mike and Thomas brought to bear.

"The chemistry of input and the presentation of ideas on records by participants is a very delicate thing. The idea of being a 'producer' with Joni is really about helping her edit her ideas and figure out the best way to

execute them. She's got three or four ideas in her head at any given moment, and she is very partial to spontaneous magic and serendipity, in a jazz sense. Once in a while, she'll get stuck and solicit ideas for another path. But the other guys didn't really understand this, so there was a lot of conflict. It was very difficult because I think Thomas, and to some degree, Mike, saw it as more of an individually creative opportunity than it really was. I did everything I could to keep the thing from imploding, and we somehow made it through. It was tough.

"On the positive side — for me, anyhow — I learned a lot! In retrospect, there were too many folks trying to be creative and shape the tracks. But there *are* things on that album that are just gorgeous, and everyone there was a part of what that album is. There are instances where compromise worked to its detriment, but some real beauty there, as well."

"Ethiopia"

Klein Do you remember that we were listening to Pygmy music when we cut this?

Mitchell It's in my ballet. In my ballet, the kids are all Ukrainians and Asians, but the dance on this is all African-based. It's beautiful — they really pulled it off. I had them create a big circle onstage, and images are projected into it. In this song, we had all kinds of exotic animals — I had an elephant waving his trunk in the air, and it goes perfectly with those horn parts [at the end of the bridges]. I love how the ballet turned out.

Klein The bass part on this is really orchestral again — it's what you might write for a bass section to play rather than an electric bass part.

Mitchell All of your playing was right up my alley. It was orchestral-sounding, but it *bump, bump, bumped* when it needed to. Before Max, every bass player I had play on my music, after they left, I ended up taking them off. The only one that survived was Stephen Stills, who was not a bass player at all. I liked his bass playing.

Klein You took them off because it would weigh it down too much.

Mitchell Yeah, it was too ploddy. Stephen locked up to the guitar in a good way, and he kept the elasticity of my grooves, whereas most bass players took that away from it.

"Lucky Girl"

Mitchell You were the muse for these songs, you know? [*Both laugh.*]

Klein This one is *another* kind of music, too. I've never heard anything like this. It's like Motown from another …

Mitchell … planet. [*Laughs.*]

Klein I remember that on that session, Wayne told a story about being a kid and watching a young girl walk to church one day with her brand-new shoes on. He said that his mother told him, "She's a lucky girl!"

Mitchell Oh, yeah! [*Both laugh.*]

***Chalk Mark in a Rainstorm* (1988)**

"I was over in England doing Ben Orr's *The Lace* with Mike Shipley, and playing on what would become Peter Gabriel's *So*," Klein remembers. "I had been mistaken about how long the process was going to take, so after several months, Joan decided to come over there and stay. At that time, there was a great community of musicians who all lived around Bath [in Somerset, England], including Kate Bush, Peter

Hamill, and the guys from Tears for Fears. Being around all this music kicked her into writing gear.

"I had talked to Peter one day, and he said that if Joni had some things that she wanted to work on, we could work at his studio, which at that time was a small studio called Ashcombe House, near Bath. While I was working on sessions during the day at the Wool Hall recording studios, she would go over to Ashcombe House. I'd drive over there after I finished, listen to what she was up to, possibly add a thing or two, and tell her what I thought. It was a hyper-creative time: There was a lot of a lot of great music being made around there, and a lot of wonderful people. Sometimes you hit a magical pocket in a place, and this was one."

An Impulse to Experiment

"Joni was experimenting with a lot of different ways of challenging herself, writing-wise and sonically, and some of it had to do with experimenting around perspective and size. Some of that indirectly came from what I had been playing around with on things that I was working on with Mike Shipley. He had worked for quite some time with Mutt Lange, who was known for stacking tons of backing vocals and multitracking different elements. Joni wanted to play around with the idea of stacking acoustic guitars that played essentially the same pattern she was playing, guitar-wise – in other words, standardizing the guitar part, and stacking them up. They began to take on an orchestral character.

"As a bass player, I veered even closer to this idea of the bass being a more compositional and minimal element that created the pillars upon which all other elements were going to sit. With her building the guitars in this fashion, my impulse was to pare back even further. I wanted to create compositional parts that hit the pressure points; they had to work with her guitar parts and against the vocals. There was no room for too much motion on the bottom. I guess that you could say there was only room for very carefully considered expressive playing.

"In some cases, she would have already built a good deal of the tracks' infrastructure, and then she'd ask me to play bass on it. I had to think about the best way to anchor the songs without taking up too much space and without [the bass lines] becoming too symmetrical in the way that she and I were both averse to. It became a compositional instinct for me to shoot for the junctions where support was needed, and to do it in a way that didn't become cumbersome or feel heavy. She had always had an aversion to bass or drums feeling too settled. She called it *thuddy*."

Basses

On the *Refuge of the Road* tour DVD, Klein uses fretted and fretless 4- and 5-string BC Rich basses. "Their factory happened to be on the east side of L.A., where I grew up, and early on, they gave me an endorsement, so I was able to go out to the factory and choose a few basses," he says. Later, he used several other instruments, including Yamahas, Fenders, and a Kubicki. "I had a Kubicki X-Factor, which had a piezo pickup and nice top end to the attack, a sort of an acoustic/electric feeling. I also had an old Fender Precision Bass; I didn't get a Jazz Bass until later, and I always seemed to gravitate to a P-Bass, anyhow — they just fill in the drum area of the track better for me." For that particular period, however, it was the Yamahas he loved most, especially one BB5000. "The company had set it up exactly how I wanted it, and the neck felt beautiful. They really were lovely basses to play, and at that time, I was quite partial to using anything with an active preamp."

"In My Secret Place"

Klein This one is me and [drummer] Manu Katché. This bass line locks up with the bottom part of your guitar pattern — you can hear it locking with your low guitar strings.

Mitchell It's wild to think that when I started out, I was playing the baritone ukulele by itself, so there was no bottom at all to what I was playing. I

started with zero bass and I worked my way up to playing with the best bass players in the world.

Klein You initially wrote this for one of Prince's movies, right? You were talking with director Albert Magnoli. . . .

Mitchell He wanted syn-drums going *dugga dugga dugga dugga* for a scene with a guy who takes a girl driving through Aspen, and I said, "That's not the right vibe for that scene." I guess I wasn't giving the guy what he wanted, but what he wanted was stupid! [*Laughs*.] I like the way my voice and Peter Gabriel's come and go.

Klein It's like the feminine and masculine of the same voice.

Mitchell Yeah.

"Number One"

Klein This is also me just locking up to your guitar; the other motion comes from other elements. I see hedgerows when I hear this — you know, we were up around Bath when we worked on this.

Mitchell Crocuses and bunnies, young animals and nature. I remember that there was some crosstalk from an adjacent track — some horns or something, and it sounded like something else — so I ended up using what I heard in the leakage to build a background vocal part ["got to be a winner trophy winner, got to hold your head up high up"]. Things were going wrong — it was a weird night, but there was some magic in it. You came late to get me at Peter's studio. I put a wordless vocal down, and then the words started to come to me.

"Lakota"

Mitchell I love this song. Do you remember that on this one, I went down to the L.A. Memorial Sports Arena to the Indian show, and ended up bringing Iron Eyes Cody and a film crew back to the studio? Later in the night, ball lightning came down the wire in the back of the studio, and we had to pull the tape off the heads in case the machines would erase something. I had never seen ball lightning!

Klein Do you remember that when you came over to England, I had been writing some music at night when the sessions were over at the Wool Hall [recording studio], making some demos of musical ideas?

Mitchell No.

Klein Before you got there, Robert Plant – who had been living in Wales, not too far from where we were recording, in Beckington, near Bath – sent word to [engineer] Mike Shipley and I that he was interested in possibly co-writing some new music. I thought, What the hell, I'll send him a few things that I've been scratching out. Well, he said that yes, he wanted to write words to them. I was pretty excited. So, when you got over to England to join me, I played them for you, and you stopped for a moment, and then said, "Klein, you have to give them to me." [*Laughs.*] So I called Robert and said, "I know that this is a strange thing for me to be saying, but I have to take back those tracks." He said, "What?" "Joni wants to put lyrics to them, and she's claiming familial rights." There was silence on the line … and I was really sweating. Then he said, "Well, all right. Only for Joni." Led Zeppelin were big fans of yours!

Mitchell Well, it turned out okay, right?

Klein Oh, I wouldn't have it any other way. Are you kidding? Those songs eventually became "Lakota," "Snakes and Ladders," and "The Tea Leaf Prophecy." They're beautiful. [*Laughs.*]

Mitchell To me, the music sounded like what Western composers write for Native Americans. When I marched with the Lakota, one of them said to

me, "Joni, we're bent, but we're not broken!" I said, "Well, some of you are broken, too. I'm not retracting it."

Klein We were both marching up there in the Black Hills.

"The Beat of Black Wings"

Mitchell This is in the ballet, too. This came out great in it.

Klein On this one, I'm taking my bass cues from your left hand. These things are really operatic in form, aren't they?

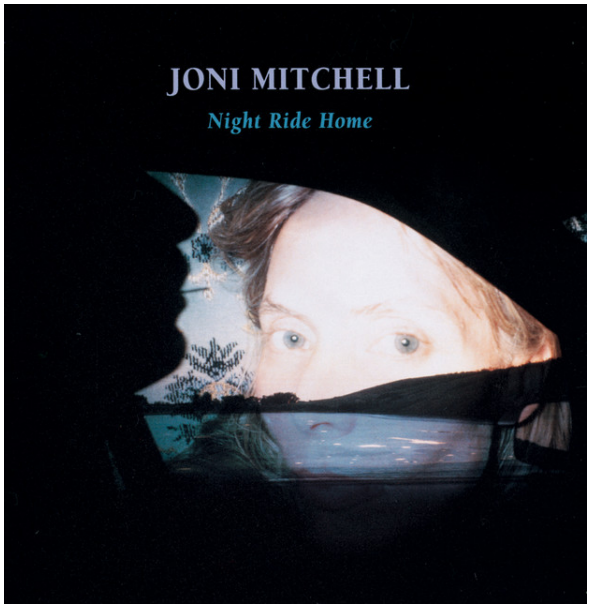
Mitchell Yeah, they are.

"Snakes and Ladders"

Mitchell They're great for ballet. I want to do another one … this song is really theatrical. I forgot how good this stuff was, all my early stuff. I really thought it wasn't any good, and I was surprised.

Night Ride Home **(1991)**"

Making *Night Ride Home* was a great time of creative experimentation," Klein remembers. "Joni's writing was absolutely stunning on that record. Our studio was in a leg of the house, and we were living the music night and day. It was an incredibly catalytic time. Not being able to get away from what we were working on was intense, and it put some strain on our relationship, but on the musical side



of things, it was a great period. It was a somewhat settled time domestically, but there can be stress and strain in getting through that, as well: One starts to wonder where the poetry can come from. Production-wise, we were braiding together technology with an organic kind of feeling, sequencing certain elements and then playing naturally against those things, combining programmed elements with played parts."

Strong opinions

"As she does on most things, Joni had strong opinions about bass parts. It was a synergistic process: I'd do a pass, and she might say, 'Just leave it like that,' or we'd talk about it, and she'd say, 'This feels a little busy here. What if you trim this down and not play that upbeat?' We'd bounce things off each other, but the bottom line at all times was that I was trying to use density and motion to help her accomplish what she was trying to get at, and hopefully, I would feel like it was something fresh for me, as well.

"I had my pantheon of jazz bass players that I really looked up to, but then I also had these L.A. studio players — Joe Osborn, Carol Kaye, Max Bennett, Wilton Felder — who were great at coming up with parts that worked and drew attention to themselves when they needed to, and not when it didn't. I was always very conscious of trying to play off what Joan's musical structure was doing, while supporting the vocal and the subtle overtones of the lyrics. Her guitar part was the beacon."

"Night Ride Home"

Mitchell This is a beautiful record. It was a beautiful night, a strange night. That was the night that there was a fire. . . .

Klein Mystical.

Mitchell That was the night we got back, the place and the bed were wet, the whole place smelled of fire, and little El Cafe [the cat we had found on Maui] was in the house during all of it.

Klein A mystical journey. It seems like one of the earmarks of this record was that we blended sequenced rhythmic material with played percussion elements to give it some splay. Do you remember the cricket?

Mitchell Yeah, our drummer. He came right into the studio.

Klein The world's best cricket sample. As I was thinking about talking to you, I went through and listened to everything, and it turned out that it's been 30 years since *Night Ride Home* was released. It made me feel good to listen to that album.

Mitchell Ah, Klein. We made some good music!

"Passion Play (When All The Slaves Are Free)"

Mitchell This is in the ballet, as well. The guy with long hair who was supposed to play Jesus sprained his ankle, and the stand-in was bald, so we had a bald Jesus [*both laugh*], but it didn't seem to bother anybody. [*Laughs.*]

Klein The bass and the guitar kind of glide together on this one.

Mitchell That's the right thing for this. My mother loved this song — she used to play it for my father: You know, "When all the *slaves* are free?" [*Laughs.*]

Klein It had a special significance for her! [*Laughs.*] This is a whole short story in a song.

Mitchell Most of the dancers in the ballet were Asian and Buddhist, but it worked. Buddha slapped people into awareness! That's what it means. Asians and Ukrainians dancing, like on "Ethiopia," but it comes off. It works.

Klein Here's another one that's like a short story.

"Cherokee Louise"

Mitchell The guitar sounds good!

Klein That's Karen Peris from the Innocence Mission on harmony vocals.

Mitchell Wayne is just the cherry on the pudding. He's so articulate. When they dance to him …

Klein … they pick up all his little figures.

Mitchell Yeah, it works just beautifully.

"Ray's Dad's Cadillac"

Klein This also is such an interesting piece of music, organic in its beautiful strangeness.

Mitchell I saw Ray not so long ago. It turns out that his Cadillac was beige, not pink. I thought that it was a pink Cadillac!

Klein Was Ray glad that you wrote the song about him?

Mitchell Oh, yeah. There was a party, and Ray and Ariel, his wife, came. It was a sweet meeting because they reminisced about when I was just starting out. Ariel called after that, and she said, "Would you call Ray's

boss and tell him you wrote that song about him? They don't believe him!" [*Laughs.*] I said, "No, I can't really do that," but it was big of her to ask, you know?

Klein Of course. Life's too short. Those things are magical … they transcend any kind of proprietary sense of anything.

Turbulent Indigo (1994)

"*Turbulent Indigo* was a very difficult record to make, because it's basically the chronicle of our relationship coming apart," says Klein. "For 85 or 90 percent of the recording process, I was living in a separate place. We would see each other in the studio, but we were coming apart. It's kind of amazing that we were able to actually make the thing. By the time she made *Taming the Tiger* in 1998, it was all her.

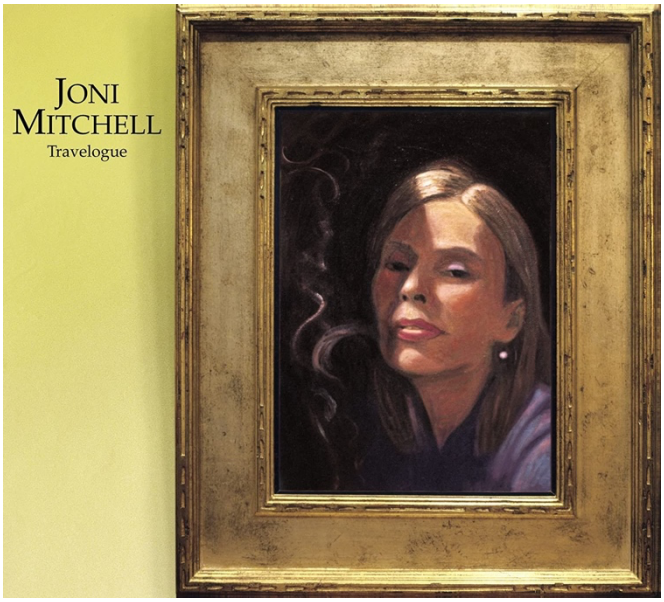
"We had this very idealistic vision of how we were going to deal with the divorce, but we accomplished what we set out to do, which was to split up without the lawyers battling and all of that acrimonious nonsense. We each bought a cat to keep us company, and I would bring mine with me to work. This record is a beautiful jewel that came out of all of this angst and difficulty.

"Coming back to it recently, it touched me deeply. We were experimenting with different ways of dealing with the bottom — from section to section, having things completely empty out for periods of time, and then thickening up again. It really is a special record."

"This idea came up between Joni and me of doing a record of standards. I'm pretty sure it was her idea. We were trying to devise a way to differentiate it from the usual records of standards that one hears, so we decided to have the songs follow the arc of a romantic relationship: from falling in love, getting married, and resolving in the way that we aspired to resolve our relationship – with equanimity and wishing each other well, as family and dear friends.

"When it came time to work on the arrangements, I wanted the orchestra to be the central fabric of each song, the underscore, like Gil Evans did – to obviate the use of piano or a central kind of instrument. You had bass and drums, but the middle was all open for orchestral movement and vocals.

"We decided to put one of her songs at the midpoint of the story, which ended up being 'A Case of You,' and then we put 'Both Sides Now' at the end. It was a very complex task to do this in a fresh and original way, of course. The last thing we wanted to do was to make 'Joni with strings.' I worked with Vince Mendoza on the arrangements, with me using my 'inner Joni' and my own aesthetic sensibility to guide me. Then I would get together with her and play her the Sibelius demos. We got Wayne, Herbie, and other soloists to play on some things, and I got Chuck Berghofer, one of the guys that I really looked up to here in L.A., to play on it. He's a great bass player – old school, with a beautiful sound, who played with Frank Sinatra for the last ten years of Sinatra's career. And of course, [drummer Peter] Erskine played on that one."



***Travelogue* (2002)**

"Because those pieces of hers worked so well on *Both Sides Now*, we decided to do another record specifically dedicated to reinterpreting and reimagining her

music. When we began trying to narrow down the song choices, Joni decided that she wanted to do a double album, so we did. It's 22 of her songs, and it was a beast! The idea of reimagining all those songs was so thrilling, but it's difficult to work with that much music, and it was a very lengthy and tough album to make.

"Again, Chuck Berghofer played bass on a lot of this album, and I played a bit, too. We pushed ourselves to try to do something with the expanded instrumentation that would enable people to hear something new in these songs, and we also chose songs that we figured might have gone under the radar for a lot of people."

Shine (2007)

"By this point, Joni just wanted to do her thing on her own. She called in players, including me, and it was best that I function in that fashion. Had I been there as anything more, I probably would have been debating certain decisions she made, but that wasn't what she wanted. Listening to it recently, I wished I had just pushed my way in there and played on 'Shine' — which I really love — because it's just Brian [Blade]'s bass drum down there. I would have loved to play on that. It's such a great song.

"'If' reminds me of 'Love,' on *Wild Things*, which is another instance where she took actual Biblical text and reframed it musically. Whenever I hear 'Love,' it brings tears to my eyes; it's so beautiful. Wayne's playing on it is just great. That's him at his most emotional, visionary best. It's the little things that he does, playing off words and her vocal and bouncing around —all intuition and extrasensory perception."

Herbie Hancock's *River: The Joni Letters* (2007)

"This album was wonderful in in every way. It ended up being such a successful endeavor and a great honor for Herbie, winning Album of the Year – it was rewarding in so many ways. But it was very challenging, too.

"My self-imposed goal was to have the music serve as underscore to the lyrics, as opposed to being just jazz versions of these songs. But making the music serve the words presented some real challenges in dealing with musicians who reside on this Olympian stratum. Herbie, Wayne, and [bassist] Dave Holland would do a pass and then go, 'That's it, right?' And I'd have to say, 'Let's look again at the lyric,' because I passed the lyrics out to each of them. I'd go over the lyrics, play the previous incarnation of the song, and talk about it with them. I had to tell my heroes – guys I listened to in my bedroom when I was a teenager, guys who live and play at the highest level when it comes to making jazz records – 'Well, that was a pretty good take, but we have to change some things.' They're not used to hearing that. Thankfully, they were very patient.

"In some ways, *River* felt like the culmination of working in this way with Joni's music – trying to keep an internalized part of her in my brain and in my heart so that I could make something that she loved." –***BM***

Joni's 1982 double portrait "Solid Love," which appeared on the inside sleeve of *Wild Things Run Fast*