Culture
Guest Voices



Joni Mitchell in concert at Universal Amphitheater in 1974 (Wikimedia Commons/Paul C. Babin)

by Ray Levy Uyeda

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Editor's note: *Contributor Ray Levy Uyeda uses poetry to explore the love and ache in Joni Mitchell's 1972 album "For The Roses."*

how does a breakup happen? / what is broken / split down the center / newly defined space between you and another / not the love that's broken, but everything that holds the love together: the time, the words, the attention / everything real and unholdable / unlike their body / everything you can't get back / all the wreckage /

she is in love / still / Joni Mitchell with James Taylor / as of the writing of "For The Roses" / her fifth studio album / 1972, written in the months after / you get the sense he wanted the breaking / you get the sense she didn't /

breakups are all backward / and backward looking / "Cold Blue Steel and Sweet Fire" / "Lesson in Survival" / "Let the Wind Carry Me" / "Electricity" *(input output electricity)* / "Blonde in the Bleachers" (*you can't hold the hand of a rock 'n' roll man very long)*

breakups are all questioning what life looks like for that person without you / "Blonde in the Bleachers" *(it seems like you've gotta give up such a piece of your soul when you give up the chase*) / "See You Sometime" / "Woman of Heart and Mind" / "You Turn Me On, I'm a Radio" (*I know you don't like weak women, you get bored so quick, and you don't like strong women, 'cause they're hip to your tricks*)

12 songs / 12 breakups / 12 perfect songs / one breakup / the arrangements in "For The Roses" are more complex than those in her previous album / the one everyone says is her best / the one that sounds like a whisper / "Blue" / "For The Roses" has more woodwind and reed instruments, jazz melodies, interludes and a hit track

1971 / she / Joni / went away / away / away / back to the woods to read / philosophy and write / the songs for her next album / she was / down / depressed blue / in love and trying not to be /

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the love is everywhere in / "For the Roses" / in the care Joni takes to describe Taylor's heroin addiction / *Some turn to Jesus and some turn to heroin,* Joni says / "*Come with me / I know the way*" / the song's siren, *Lady Release*, says / *she says*

"*It's down, down, down the dark ladder*"

or the love in "Lesson in Survival" / with its lyrics that fall into each other / or the heavy / pauses that precede / *You and me* / *Deep kisses* / *And the sun going down* / later, in the second verse: *I'm gonna get a boat / And we can row it* / *If you ever get the notion* / *To be needed by me* and / to close / the words that comfort the breaking / *I will always love you*

with the breaking up / there is a wrestling with the wanting / and trying to not want / how not to want / when all you can do / is want / allows the wanting to eat within you / and there's / wanting for answers / wanting for love / or for the past to pull herself into the present / for the present not to ache so strongly / but the ache is strong / *I will always love you* / wanting can be / a fast way to lose yourself

or wind can bring you elsewhere / if you want / in "Let the Wind Carry Me" / she / Joni / sings *And I want to settle / And raise a child up with somebody* / only that the want / *passes like the summer* / *I'm a wild seed again*

did you become a lover / and how / and / where did you learn to love / from your parents / from your mother / from your father / what they did and did not do to each other / what they would not let you see / what they demanded you witness / how did you learn to talk

Joni sings through a character in / "Blonde in the Bleachers" / a figure who *tapes her regrets / To the microphone stand* / and sings / "*You can't hold the hand* / *Of a rock 'n' roll man* / *Very long*" / who is the man / who is "she" / she wants us to / *Show 'em you won't expire* / *Not till you burn up every passion* / *Not even when you die* / (how to be so alive that death will not come for you?)

after all / all words / in song and poetry / are just a way of making different sounds / with the body / what is the sound of breaking up /

"Woman of Heart and Mind" / she is coming out of the breakup / she is finally broken / enough / to see things / her past / her self / clearly / *you don't even try* / Joni sings / to us

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