



ODE TO JONI

De Angelis channels Mitchell
for evening of music, B2

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De Angelis masters dulcimer to play Mitchell hits

John Turner
Skaneateles Journal

SKANEATELES — If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then Joni Mitchell would be elated.

Had the Canadian folk/jazz icon, easily one of the most distinguished pop music figures of all time, been in attendance at Saturday's "A Tribute to Joni Mitchell: A Concert" presented by Maria De Angelis and friends, she would likely have stood and cheered alongside the rest of the crowd.

The show, which took place at the First Presbyterian Church in Skaneateles, included De Angelis and her five-piece band performing stunning renditions of songs from Mitchell's early career for a crowd of more than 300.

Holding the concert in Skaneateles was the brainchild of Joe Strodel Jr., president of the Skaneateles Area Council for the Arts.

After witnessing the show at Jazz Central in Syracuse in January, Strodel knew the Skaneateles community would be as thoroughly entertained by De Angelis as he was.

"The playing and singing of (Mitchell's music) has had a spiritually energizing and therapeutic effect on me," De Angelis



Singer Maria De Angelis performs songs by Joni Mitchell for more than 300 people at the First Presbyterian Church in Skaneateles Saturday. Accompanying her is bassist Phil Flanigan.

Glenn Gaston/Special to Skaneateles Journal

said about the tribute concerts.

De Angelis starting playing Mitchell's songs at age 11. But she wasn't aware of the complexity of the music until she was much older.

"This year, I've thrown myself into studying and playing these

songs the right way, with her organic but unconventional tunings and instrumentation," she said. "It's been a task way out of my comfort zone. But you have to embrace risk in order to take these songs on."

Strodel's idea for a concert

morphed into a multifaceted affair, starting with a pre-show reception at the Skaneateles home of Jim and Kimball Kraus.

"Music, Martinis, and Joni Mitchell Masterpieces," co-sponsored by the arts council and Everson Museum of Art in Syra-

cuse, was a decadent affair catered by the Sherwood Inn. The dozens of party guests enjoyed cocktails and treats served by the Sherwood staff as they socialized at the home on West Lake Road.

Paintings by Mitchell, also an accomplished artist, were hung throughout the Kraus' residence for a touch of added elegance.

After the crowd was settled in at the church for the 8 p.m. concert, the band was introduced by emcee Jeffrey Pepper Rodgers, of Fayetteville, a musician/journalist that Strodel said he recruited because Rodgers has interviewed Mitchell extensively in the past.

The group opened with the early Mitchell hit "Big Yellow Taxi," and proceeded to play two sets of remarkable songs, including "Free Man in Paris," "A Case of You" and "Ladies of the Canyon."

One highlight of the concert was De Angelis' playing of the mountain dulcimer, a four-stringed instrument similar to a guitar, in several numbers. The inclusion of the dulcimer had interesting backstories for both her and Mitchell, De Angelis explained during the show.

"In 1970, Joni took a trip to Europe and lived in caves in Greece and hung out with Gypsies in Spain, and took only a dulcimer with her," she told the

crowd as she demonstrated the instrument.

On that trip, De Angelis continued, Mitchell, using only the dulcimer, wrote the bulk of the material for her 1971 album "Blue," which many consider her finest work.

De Angelis said she learned to play the dulcimer in preparation for Saturday's concert. Then, showing her instant mastery of the instrument, she and the band played a remarkable version of "California," the album's best-known hit.

De Angelis returned to her jazz roots during the show's closing number, "Woodstock." The band's swinging interpretation, which included a raucous high-end piano line, saw the crowd leap to its feet at song's end, showering De Angelis and the band with applause for nearly a full minute.

The delighted spectators included Carey Eidel and wife Angela Daddabbo, of Auburn, who serve as artistic directors at Auburn Public Theater.

"I think (the song) 'Circle Game' was my favorite," Eidel said afterwards, adding that he has been a Joni Mitchell fan since childhood. "Plus, the guitar and dulcimer playing was really special, because I know (De Angelis) learned to play just for this concert."