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Harmonic palette in early Joni Mitchell

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Abstract

Joni Mitchell has recently been critically received and marketed as a 'classic' songwriter. Yet the existing literature has hardly begun to explore the sophistication of her technical achievement. One of her most distinctive contributions is in the realm of harmonic innovation. Through a comprehensive survey of her work, I have found that Mitchell's songs fall under five categories of harmonic organisation: modal, polymodal, chromatic, polytonal, and pedal point. I examine these categories in detail, choosing a variety of examples from the early years of her career (1966–1972). My analyses are intended to contribute to a more knowledgeable appreciation of Mitchell's intellectual stature as a composer. While many songwriters have been inventive within traditional tonal harmony, Mitchell's work is impressive for its extended exploration of alternatives to single key structures and the major/minor system.

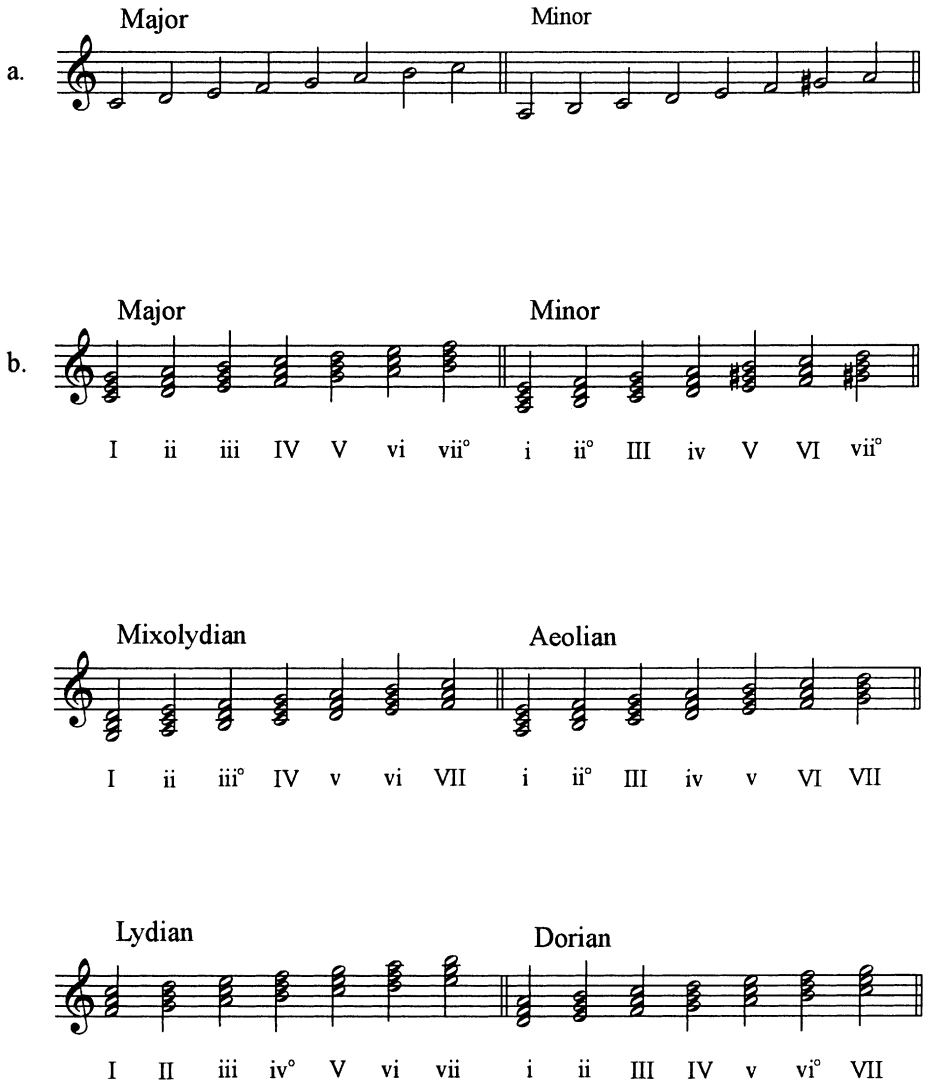
Joni Mitchell has always been a songwriter's songwriter. Her reputation in the musical press, on the other hand, has been a stormier affair. After her early critical and popular success, three of her mature, complex and ambitious projects from the 1970s received damning reviews (*The Hissing of Summer Lawns, Don Juan's Reckless Daughter* and *Mingus*).[1] In 1979, a number of critics disparaged her collaboration with Charles Mingus (at his invitation) as hubristic; this final blow helped to relegate the albums that followed in the 1980s, with their sometimes strident synth-pop, to obscurity.[2] But despite the critical slings and arrows, Joni's music has never lost its solid base of admiration among her songwriting peers. The list of musicians who acknowledge her influence is impressive and growing. Also impressive is the appreciation she commands over a spectrum of styles: not only in folk-inflected rock (David Crosby, for one, considers her the greatest singer–songwriter of the late twentieth century)[3] and pop of all stripes (dedicated admirers include Sting, Seal, Shawn Colvin, Natalie Merchant, John Mellencamp and Annie Lennox), along with country (Wynonna), R&B (both Prince and Janet Jackson have claimed Joni as an important muse) and jazz as well (Cassandra Wilson, Joshua Redman). By the 1990s, with her return to a sound favouring acoustic instruments, she began to be marketed as a 'classic', and was confirmed in her classic status by a series of prestigious awards and tribute concerts.

But, as sometimes happens, Joni Mitchell has been established as a cultural icon without the benefit of a specific and detailed analysis of her artistic contribution. Just what is it about her songs that make them so enduring, so invigorating, so exquisitely sculpted? The answer lies in many dimensions – from the profundity of the poetic thought to the intricacy of the musical surface – each of which demands sustained attention. But what sets her work apart from that of her song-

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writing peers perhaps more than anything is the extent of harmonic innovation. In this essay I will focus on this one facet of Joni's compositional technique: her subtle yet thorough-going expansion of the possibilities of traditional harmonic progression.

Though many (but by no means all) of Joni's songs are defined by a single key, few use the traditional major or minor modes in their pure state.[4] She is much more likely to use Aeolian, Dorian, or Mixolydian modal bases, with their special quality due to the lowered seventh scale-degree, and their different arrangement of harmonies around the tonal centre. Both the major and minor scales include a leading tone, i.e. a seventh degree only a semitone below the tonic with a strong tendency to resolve upward (Example 1a). Both also contain a major dominant (V)



Example 1. Modes. The modes on the left begin with a major triad, those on the right with a minor triad.

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triad (Example 1b). In contrast, Aeolian, Dorian and Mixolydian each have a seventh degree one whole tone below the tonic, thus with no leading-tone tendency. In addition, all three favoured modes share a minor dominant and a major subtonic triad. The lack of a strong dominant or leading tone creates a very different sense of hierarchy among the chords of these modes. The latter can be seen by comparing the triads built on successive degrees of each scale (Example 1b). Each mode offers a unique disposition of major, minor and diminished triads within its scalar hierarchy. But beyond this, whatever mode she may choose as primary, Joni is consistently interested in breaking up the integrity of its scale in a variety of ways, often flickering between two or more modes within a single song. This complex harmonic sensibility is fully in place with the earliest songs she chose to record (written in 1966 and after).

I will discuss several songs in detail from Joni's early career. For my purposes this covers the years 1966–72, i.e. the first five albums, before the dramatic shift toward jazz stylings and an integral back-up band in *Court and Spark*. The albums and their release dates are: *Song to a Seagull* (also widely known as *Joni Mitchell* – hereafter abbreviated as *SS*; 1968), *Clouds* (*Cl*; 1969, though most of the songs were written before 1968), *Ladies of the Canyon* (*LC*; 1970), *Blue* (*Bl*; 1971), and *For the Roses* (*FR*; 1972). (Complete discographies can be found in Hinton 1996 and Luftig 2000.) Since Joni is known for the restless dynamism of her stylistic experimentation, this plan has the advantage of focusing on a discrete stylistic period. I have chosen my analyses to illustrate the range of techniques used to create her fresh and subtle harmonic innovations, techniques she has continued to explore throughout her career. In order to concentrate on matters of chord structure and harmonic progression, I will not be able to do justice to Joni's instrumental figuration, which is fully composed, with rhythmic and textural intricacies in its own right. Nor will the poetic felicities make more than brief appearances.[5] Yet I hope that my blueprints, in conjunction with a rehearing of the iridescent, tensile structures themselves, will disclose the harmonic genius at work.

My focus on the aesthetic dimension of Joni Mitchell's work is not intended to foreclose inquiries into its social or political dimensions. I feel, however, that the existing literature has hardly begun to explore the sophistication of her technical achievement, and it is this shortcoming I want to redress. The issue remains a sore point with the songwriter, who in various interviews has bristled at the tenacious but potentially trivialising label of 'folksinger', in view of the limited technical resources associated with folk styles. 'I was only a folk singer for about two years, and that was several years before I ever made a record. By that time, it wasn't really folk music anymore. It was some new American phenomenon. Later, they called it singer/songwriters. Or art songs, which I liked best'.[6] Accordingly, I will be using analytical tools developed for the interpretation of art music, i.e. music of remarkable thematic integrity and structural complexity. The tardiness of music critics to approach Joni's work from this angle no doubt has to do with the professional boundaries erected between elite and popular cultures as well as the different values animating each sphere, evident in the uncomfortable fit of Joni's compositional attitude within the venue of commercial songwriting. But beyond this, it is hard not to detect an element of gender bias at work in the handling of her public image. Though among the creative artists of her generation her brilliance is without question, the protocols of prestige have been much less well oiled for her than for her male peers. Perhaps the trouble arose due to her search for recognition *as a*

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writer in terms still protected (however lamely and unavowedly) as a male cultural prerogative: recognition, that is, for intellectual stature and compositional artistry rather than for popular, iconic or sexual appeal. An appeal such as I am making to aesthetic achievement, to structural analysis and thematic criticism, may seem to be a reactionary, depoliticising move. But for a female composer even now at the start of the new century, in a pop music industry that never had any trouble beatifying male bards of more limited technical prowess, like Bob Dylan, this is still a political act.

Modality

My discussions will begin by considering Joni's modal usage. I highlight three songs, all in D. In the first two, a single mode – Mixolydian – predominates. Mixolydian is a favourite mode in this period, counting for a dozen songs and appearing as a shading in others.[7] It is used in the song 'Ladies of the Canyon' (*LC*), which is conceived as a triple self-portrait of Joni's creative and domestic life in Laurel Canyon, Los Angeles.[8]

'Ladies of the Canyon' (*LC*) Guitar tuning: C G D F C E (capo 2)

Intro:	| Am A | A^7 | D | D |
Phrase 1, 2:	‖: D | Am^{13}_{11}/C | GM^7/B | D :‖
Phrase 3:	| Am^{13}_{11}/C | $Em^{(9)}_{7}/B$ | Am^{13}_{11}/C (+ AM) | B^{13}_{11} |
Phrase 4, 5:	‖: D | Am^{13}_{11}/C | GM^7/B | D :‖

The particular Mixolydian flavour that Joni paints with here is the juxtaposition of major I and minor v (e.g. phrase 1), an atmospheric pairing made all the more poignant by the ornamental extension of the Am chord (see Example 2).[9] The top two tones retain the lingering aura of the tonic, but in this chordal context, struck as they are off the beat and directly clashing with a melodic G, they add a delicious sting. Thus already in the first two bars of the verse, Joni has fashioned an evocative harmonic resonance to offset the poem's bardic romanticisation of a latterday bohemia.

But the reader, having been promised Mixolydian, may have been momentarily thrown by the appearance of major V in the intro. This is an instance of Joni's ploy of switching between modes, in this case between Mixolydian and major. The very opening progression (v–V) plays on what one might call a diatonic loophole in place at the seventh scale degree, which slips between the options of C and C♯. The sunny A^7 chord in the intro (also used as a lead-out) by its contrast enhances the atmospheric flavour of Am^{13}_{11}. Most striking, however, is how, at the peak of her melodic arch (phrase 3), Joni weaves the two options together. At the words, 'And her coat's *a* second-hand one', over a sustained C in the low guitar register, the voice briefly reaches to C♯. This simultaneous cross-relation is so artfully spaced that it sounds quite natural – though it is certainly climactic, triggering as it does a



Example 2

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move in a chromatic direction. The move is to an extended B chord (which may be read as a V/ii with elided resolution) whose pungent G♯ introduces a Lydian shading (see Example 3). In the densely layered vocalisations that round off the verse, the cross-relation is once again in evidence, the guitar cleaving to C and the vocal layers (harmonised in sevenths!) to C♯.

The Mixolydian mode, in other words, is like a base coat, over which Joni applies a shifting array of other modal highlights. This painterly conception of harmony is reflected in the poem's conflation of music with colour (verse 4), just as the image of filigree reflects the precisely etched guitar figuration. At all levels, in fact, this signature song is expressive of a refined aesthetic sensibility – the poetic structure is classically engineered, with an ingenious set of rhymes for the key words of the refrain, and a unique device whereby the fourth line of each verse is then inverted. We will find as we continue to explore Joni's harmonic subtlety that, as she says here of her artistic alter-ego, she weaves a pattern all her own.

'Sisotowbell Lane' (*SS*) Guitar tuning: C G D F C E (capo 2)

Interlude: ‖: $Dsus^4_2$ D $Dsus^4_2$ | D^{13}_{11} :‖

Phrase 1, 2: ‖: D | D^{13}_{11} | D^{13}_{11} | GM^7/B | D | A^7sus | ($1\frac{1}{2}$ bars) A^7sus | $Dsus^4_2$ D $Dsus^4_2$ | D $Dsus^4_2$:‖

Phrase 3: | D^{13}_{11} | D^{13}_{11} | D^7 | D^7 | G/B | D/A | A^7sus | ($1\frac{1}{2}$ bars) A^7sus | (to interlude)

Lead-out: ‖: $Dsus^4_2$ D $Dsus^4_2$ | D^{13}_{11} :‖ $Dsus^4_2$ D | GM^7/B | A^{13}_{11}/D |

'Sisotowbell Lane' is the portrait of a place – a rustic retreat whose amenities are detailed with a quirky lack of precision. Joni does not use mixed modes here. The harmonic progression, at root, is simplicity itself – D, G and A chords. The Mixolydian flavour in this song takes the form of an extended 7th chord built on the tonic. In the instrumental interlude this chord (D^{13}_{11}) is non-functional – or rather, a function (movement to IV) is implied without materialising. Within the overall comfy character of the music, this lends a nuance of potential excitement, promise held in reserve. In the verse, the D^{13}_{11} chords are resolved, but only after lingering to savour their irresistible dissonance. As a result the first two phrases have unusual proportions. Their first half (I–V/IV–IV–I) is slightly expanded to five bars; their second half (V–I) to four and a half bars. This rhythmic dilation, especially the casual addition of half-bars, perfectly suits the poem's blend of indolence and eccentricity.

Those half-bars extend the effect of the song's unusual dominant. Joni chooses neither minor v (using C) nor major V (using C♯), but a suspended A^7 chord with its own in-between quality. She then embellishes this chord's characteristic D with chromatic neighbours (see Example 4). This extraordinary cadential moment is



Example 3

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Example 4

complemented by a slight dislocation of the tonic; after every dominant, the tonic has to take a moment to hitch up its suspenders, as it were. That is to say, the upper two notes of the triad are approached quickly from below. But after a few beats $\hat{3}$ and $\hat{5}$ are already sagging again, so on the whole the impression at cadences is not so much of a straight D triad as of a Dsus^{4}_{2}. The song's final cadence manages to tie up these various loose ends without losing the sense of open-endedness so appealingly maintained throughout. The last chord (produced by strumming open strings) is spelled as in Example 5. It fuses elements of DM, Dsus^{4}_{11} *and* A^{7}sus (i.e. simultaneous dominant, suspension and resolution) as it rings with the dissonance and promise of a 13th chord.

Joni's harmonic scheme in this song uses a series of suspensions, delays and implications that together create a pleasing relaxation of directedness. The constant impression of hovering in some out-of-the-way, neither-here-nor-there zone chimes with the spaciness of the poem, which creates its own temporal eddies ('we always do, yes sometimes we do'). The diatonic field is intact, but its syntactic elements are mildly askew – a dislocation meant to capture the essence of this spot off the beaten path.

Polymodality

'The Dawntreader' (*SS*) Guitar tuning: D G D D A D

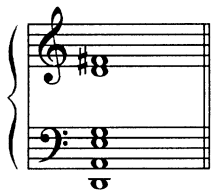
The notation (sus) indicates that both suspension and resolution are equally present in the guitar figuration.

Interlude: | C(sus)/D | G(sus)/D | D Dsus | D |
Dorian Mixo

Phrase 1,2: ‖: D^{open} | Dm7 | C^{open}/D | C^{open}/D | C(sus)/D | G(sus)/D | D Dsus | D :‖
Pivot Dorian Mixo

Phrase 3: ‖: C^{open}/D B^{open}/D | C^{open}/D A^{open}/D G^{open}/D :‖ C^{open}/D B^{open}/D | C^{open}/D A^{open}/D |
| G^{9}/D | G^{9}/D | A/D | A/D | $\text{B}\flat\text{M}^{7}$/D | $\text{B}\flat\text{M}^{7}$/D |
Major Aeolian

Phrase 4: | Gsus | G | Gsus | G | C(sus)/D | G(sus)/D | D Dsus | D | (to interlude)
Dorian Mixo



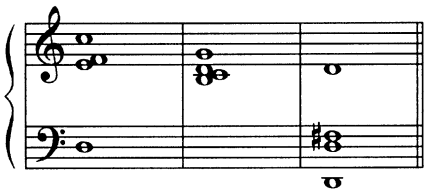
Example 5

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With my third example, we move beyond the use of single primary modes. In 'The Dawntreader', a lyrical seafaring fantasy, D Mixolydian and D Dorian are so entwined that it is impossible to declare either one prevalent. All but one of the phrases trace a movement from Dorian to Mixolydian. The guitar interlude (which also serves to accompany the close of phrases 1, 2 and 4) begins by picking out both the suspension and resolution of a C chord (see Example 6). The F natural places this first chord in Dorian. The third bar arrives at a D major triad, which in the context of the surrounding C naturals is placed in Mixolydian. The intervening G chord belongs to both modes. This recurrent gesture launches in one mode and settles in another. It settles in register as well, filtering from limpid high notes gradually down to a bottom-heavy cadence. Such a gesture of submergence befits the journey imagined here, an internalised, symbolic journey, whose initial vision is of the fabled treasure strewn across the ocean floor.

After the cadence, Joni trades D major for an open D, a pivot to the Dorian at the beginning of phrases 1 and 2. This open chord at the portal of each verse encapsulates the tonal equipoise she has constructed between two modes, one given initiatory, the other cadential importance. The harmonic base of this song is thus truly polymodal. Joni applies further highlights to this dual base in the long, climactic third phrase. It begins with an oracular string of quintal structures – open 5ths moving in parallel over a pedal D. This is the most extended passage of Mixolydian in the song (note the melodic F♯s). But as the voice begins to rise from its murkiest depths, there is a dramatic shift to the major mode, with melodic accentuation of C♯. At the moment of greatest tension ('he stakes all his *silver*'), as the voice reaches an unexpected highpoint (dissonant with the chordal root), there is yet another exotic intrusion – B♭M^7, a chord borrowed from the Aeolian. All this tension is magically sprung at phrase 4 ('on a promise to be free') with the return to the home Dorian, and the release of the low D that anchored the whole of phrase 3. Altogether, then, Joni exploits three diatonic loopholes in 'Dawntreader', not only the central switch at $\hat{3}$ between F and F♯, but two others at $\hat{6}$ (B–B♭) and $\hat{7}$ (C–C♯). This pushes the scalar resources in use toward the full chromatic (only E♭ and A♭ are not used). But Joni has carefully apportioned her use of chromatic intrusions in order to create an arc of modal transformation. This arcing path embodies a siren call of longing, underpinning the song's combined dreams of personal enrichment, social redemption, and mythicised heterosexual romance.

The previous three examples give an idea of the range of harmonic effects Joni can unfold within one key, D Mixolydian, by her use of complex chordal structures, harmonic suspension and mixed modes. In 'Dawntreader', the modal mixture becomes an alloy of two basic modes within a single key. Similarly complex alloys can be found in two other songs from the first album. 'Nathan La Franeer', a lament for an inhuman cityscape, has a triple modal base. Like 'Dawntreader', it uses sus-



Example 6

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pended chords as pivots between modes. The blending of G Dorian, major and minor creates an eerily unwholesome tone. 'I Had a King', a requiem for a failed romance, in ironic-medieval garb, is also a triple alloy on A. Here major and Aeolian elements are starkly juxtaposed. Dorian elements are prominent in the second half of the verse. (The song is also notable for its portentous extended quartal structures, e.g. before the chorus.) Such polymodal bases as these in fact represent the most common harmonic scheme found throughout Joni's career. Their prismatic effect is tangible in many of her most beloved songs: 'All I Want' (*Bl*) – D♭ major/Mixolydian, 'My Old Man' (*Bl*) – A major/Dorian, 'Woman of Heart and Mind' (*FR*) – B major/Mixolydian/Lydian, and 'Court and Spark' (from the album of the same name) – E Dorian/Aeolian/Mixolydian. I would say that the forked harmonic paths and expressive polarities made possible by Joni's polymodal usage form one of the most characteristic attributes of her musical style. To illustrate further, I will discuss two well-known examples from her third and fourth albums: 'Rainy Night House' and 'Blue'.

'Rainy Night House' (*LC*)

Intro (in A): | Am(sus)^7 | Am^7 | G | G | Am^7 | Am^7 | G | G | C | B♭ | Am | G | G |
Aeolian (Phryg)
| C G | F | B♭ | B♭ | Em | Em | Am | Am |
(Phryg)

Phrase 1,2 (in D): ‖: Dm | B♭ | Am(sus)^7 | A :‖
Aeolian minor

Phrase 3: | Dm | G | C | F | B♭ | Dm | C | Am | Am | G | G | Dm | Dm | Dm | Dm |
Dorian Aeolian Dorian

Joni uses piano rather than guitar to accompany 'Rainy Night House'. There is nothing here like the inlaid busywork of layered and suspended voice-leading found in the accompaniment to my first three examples. Instead the harmony takes the form of forthright triads, for the most part, moving in loose-jointed progression. In comparison to the finely strung artifice of the other songs discussed, this song adheres to a rhetoric of natural, direct expression. The nocturnal scenario as it is pressed into lyric form is fragmentary and blurred around the edges: an intense but tenuous assignation, whose contingencies, lightly sketched in, do not come close to anchoring the melancholy that threatens to overwhelm the performer.

The song begins with a long instrumental prelude, Schumannesque in its expansiveness. The tonic Am chord is cramped and depressed by elements of a G triad in the right hand. Subsequent moves to a clear G (VII in A Aeolian) provide a sense of alleviation. The next harmonic pass takes us through B♭, whose Phrygian influence imparts another depressive shading. The third pass expands on these dualities: G issues into a breath of C major elation, while B♭ harshly runs up against its tritone relation on the way to cadence. The outcome of all this preparation is a shock of dislocation as the curtain opens with an abrupt move to the key of Dm.

The entire vocal body of the song thus exists in an uncanny relation to its soulful prelude. The polymodal expressive duality is carried over, but in inverted configuration, as if pulled through the die of memory. The B♭, originally a foreign intrusion threatening the solace of the Aeolian mode, is now integral to the fabric of D Aeolian. The Am(sus)^7 chord reappears, now bluffly on the beat, with its effect of emotional truncation like a catch in the throat. We have to wait for the consoling G. When it appears it is now the 'foreign' (Dorian) intrusion, in a cycle-of-fifths passage holding out the hope of elation. This whole third phrase recalls distinct

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segments of the prelude, now interpreted in the new key. The B♭ and G chords have exchanged priority, and it is the earthbound modal elements that now hold sway. The prelude and the verses consist of much the same events, yet they tell different stories. But which version – the instrumental or the vocal – is to be taken as present experience, and which the transformation of poetic reflection? Which is reinterpreting the other? Neither musical statement establishes more than a dreamy unreality. Unanchored with respect to its modal character, emotional tone, and formal framing, 'Rainy Night House' steeps us in its intense search for identity ('who in the world I might be'), a search whose inconclusiveness is scarcely to be distinguished from outright loss.

'Blue' (*Bl*)

Intro: | no chord (D) | G | Bm | G |
Aeolian

Phrase 1: | Bm A/B | Bm A/B | GM^7 D/E | E | D/E | E | Bm^7 D/G | E/A | E/A |
Dorian mixed

Phrase 2: | Bm A/B | Bm A/B | D/E | E | D/E | E | Bm^7 D/G | E/A | E/A |
(Aeol?/Dor?) Dorian mixed

Phrase 3: | Bm A/B | GM^7 D/G | D/E | Eopen |
Aeolian (Dor?)

Phrase 4: | $\frac{3}{4}$Bm A/B | GM^7 D/G | $\frac{4}{4}$D/E Em^7 | $Asus^4$ | Bm | Bm | F♯m |
Aeolian

Phrase 5: | D/E A/E D/E | D/E A/E D/E | D/E A/E D/E | D/E A/E |
Pivot

Phrase 6: | Bm A/B | Bm A/B | F♯m | F♯m | D/E A/E | D/E | D/A | A |
(Aeol?/Dor?) [A major?]

Phrase 7: | Bm A/B | Bm A/B | D/E | E | D/E | Em^7 | Em^7 | Em^7 | Bm | F♯m | D/E | D/E |
Dorian Aeolian Pivot

Lead-out: | A/B E/B | Bm^7 | B^7 |
Dorian blues

'Blue', written in 1971, is the latest song we have yet discussed. In this devastating love song, the principals are once again imagined as seafarers, navigating the treacherous waters of drugs and depression. In an image of masterful ambivalence, Joni lets the sailor's tattoo stand for the indelible lacerations of love, the needle-tracks of addiction, and the ink of her own pen, filling in the empty spaces. Joni's use of the piano creates a more multifaceted harmonic surface than in the previous example. Triadic shapes in the right hand often conflict with the bass, creating extended structures of various kinds. Thus in the characteristic gesture opening phrase 1, the right hand moves down from Bm to A over a constant bass (see Example 7). The pure tonic triad moves to a multiply dissonant, internally conflicted chord (interpretable as $Bm^{11}_{7,9}$) – as if emotionally sullied, depressed, ambivalent. The weight of this one gestural scrap is enough to send the singer into a weary tailspin before she even starts. As her leaden arabesques give way to a more animated impulse ('I've been to sea before'), the sense of rhythmic release is accompanied by

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a mode switch from Aeolian to Dorian. The passage rides the uplift of the new mode's major subdominant, only to stall once again at the end of the phrase, in a progression which hopelessly tangles the focal loophole of G and G♯ (see Example 8). These chords form another kind of extended structure (G^{9}_{7}, A^{9}_{7}), whose strange parallel dissonance arrests the flow, pulsing in stunned aftershocks.

The Aeolian element in the song (using G) appears in VI (G) and iv (Em), the Dorian element (using G♯) in IV (E), and the emotional polarities between them are set up economically, but to maximum effect. Dorian emerges concretely only three times in the body of the song, but its hopeful quality is held in potential through much of phrases 3–6 by the use of a pivot chord, D/E, which could resolve in either mode. Those moments when it does resolve unequivocally to an Aeolian Em are traumatic, knocking the wind out of the sails (see the fermatas in the previous diagram, phrases 4 and 7, representing a dramatic loss in rhythmic momentum). From a palette of such deflationary gestures, Joni creates a design of poignant emotional irony. The inevitable let-downs are made more powerful because she never abandons her passionate yearning.

The central relationship of the poem is apparently unresolved, poised between anchored commitment and undone moorings. On a formal level, the song is correspondingly torn between rhapsodic flight and broken structure. Atypically, 'Blue' is through-composed rather than strophic. The musical phrases, uneven in length and prone to wandering, are anchored by two recurrent melodic segments. The first segment (**a**) is stated, then repeated more succinctly and with a new rhythmic vigour, in the first two phrases. Phrases 3 and 4 state the second segment (**b**), again with variations in its rhythmic integrity. Phrase 5 is built from transposed repetitions of **b** and leads directly into phrase 6, a climactic transformation of **a** (note that the **a** phrase always begins with an address to 'Blue', Joni's totemic name for her beloved). The final phrase returns to the original a (though with a new close). The underlying symmetry can be schematised as: **aa′ bb′ b″a″ a** $^{\text{closed}}$. But this structural clarity is brilliantly unbalanced by the unexpected, extraneous elements introduced in the form of rhapsodic digressions. The first of these comes at the end of phrase 4. The rhythmic flow, halted at the Aeolian iv, struggles to regain composure. When it does, the moment is made remarkable by the introduction of a new harmony, F♯m (v) – the first dominant to appear, which will have a cadential role



Example 7



Example 8

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from this point on in the song. Another digression occurs at the end of phrase 6, when the harmonies seem to spin off into a new key altogether, by cadencing strongly on A. This momentary sidetrack is patently wishful, its gestures somehow not fully integrated into the song's fabric. And in fact the piano cadences in these four measures do represent a kind of intrusion, constituting as they do an almost exact quotation of a passage from another love song on the album – the introduction to 'My Old Man'. They thus (subconsciously?) capture and import the brief memory of a happier time, a different outcome.

The final phrase makes a strong move toward formal closure, on the one hand, by melding the beginning of phrase 1 with the closing harmonies of phrase 4, and thus recapitulating the song's expository gestures while foreclosing their hopeful turn to Dorian. Yet as the piano postlude winds down, not only does it return to Dorian, but it comes to rest on a *major* tonic sonority – yet another unexpected, extraneous flight of fancy, a symbol of hope not quite deferred. Like the previous points of departure, the song's final moments make a bid for freedom and open-endedness, with a wry nod to the classic musical vehicle of ambivalent emotion, the blues.

Chromaticism

A third harmonic strategy in Joni's early work, much less common than modal and polymodal usage, is directly chromatic progression. Chromatic passages spice up the relative innocence of songs such as 'Michael from Mountains' (*SS*) and 'Morning Morgantown' (*LC*). A more thorough chromaticism lies behind some of Joni's spacier tunes. A good example of this is 'Songs to Aging Children Come'. The hallucinatory lyrics and helium-infused vocal warbling are matched by the far-out chord progressions, which experiment with tritone and third relations.

'Songs to Aging Children Come' (*Cl*) Guitar tuning: B F♯ D♯ F♯ B D♯

Intro: | B Lydian | . . .
Phrase 1: | G | F♯ | F | B |
Phrase 2: | A | G | F♯ | B | B |
Refrain: | D | F | F Lydian | F Lydian | B | E♭ | E♭ Lydian | E♭ Lydian | G | G |

The refrain is notable for shifting upwards first through two minor thirds (B D F), then again through two major thirds (B E♭ G). A no less thorough chromaticism can be found in 'Marcie', but here careful stepwise voice-leading mitigates the unsettling effect of the farflung harmonic path. Perhaps it should also be mentioned that this example can be heard in terms of polymodality. In its melancholy cycling down through the chromatic scale (mirroring the cycle of the seasons in the poem's urban backdrop), the song presents a shifting kaleidoscope of Aeolian, Lydian and major qualities on G (see Example 9).



Example 9. Phrase 3.

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'Marcie' (*SS*) Guitar tuning: D G D G B D

Phrase 1: | B♭^{6} | A | Am^{7} | G Gsus$^{4}_{2}$ G |
Phrase 2: | B♭^{6} | A | Am^{7} | G Gsus$^{4}_{2}$ | G Gsus$^{4}_{2}$ G |
Phrase 3: | E♭M^{7} | D | C | B | B♭^{6} | A | Am^{7} | G Gsus$^{4}_{2}$ | G Gsus$^{4}_{2}$ G |

Polytonality

All the songs so far discussed, whether modal, polymodal or chromatic, are defined by a single key centre (save 'Rainy Night House', which modulates once, to remain in the new key). But one of the most original paths of exploration in Joni's oeuvre has to do with the fission or doubling of tonal centre. While the self-assured essays into dual tonalities really only begin with the fifth album (*FR*), we find an isolated example from 1967, at the beginning of her output.

'I Don't Know Where I Stand' (*Cl*) Guitar tuning: C F C G A C

Phrase 1: | D | D | C | C |
Phrase 2: | D | D | F^{7} | F^{7} |
Phrase 3: | B♭ | B♭ | Am | Am | B♭m^{6} | Gm | F | F |

Each verse of 'I Don't Know Where I Stand' begins in D Mixolydian, and modulates by a single dramatic swerve at the end of phrase 2 to F major. Seams between verses (i.e. between the concluding F and opening D) remain exposed. Furthermore, the song ultimately cadences, by a Phrygian progression, on yet a third tonal centre, as follows: D A♭ G. Assigning a key requires a double (D–F) or perhaps even triple label (D–F–G). The title (also the refrain) of this engaging song thus acquires an added pertinence to its uncertain harmonic structure – although the effect is by no means confused or uneasy, but consists rather of refreshing changes of perspective.

Five years later, in 1972, Joni begins to explore multiple tonalities in earnest. I will discuss two songs from that year, one whose tonal poles are harmonically distant from one another, the other whose poles are closely interrelated.

'Let the Wind Carry Me' (*FR*)

Intro: | F♯m E | DM^{7} | F♯m^{7} E | D | F♯m^{7} | E | D | A/D | F♯m^{7} . . .
VERSE 1 – Phrase 1: | F♯m^{7} | E | F♯m^{7} | F♯m^{7} |
Phrase 2: | Am^{7} | Am^{7} | Am^{7} | Am^{7} |
Phrase 3: | G | F | Am^{7} | Am^{7} |
VERSE 2 – Phrase 1: | Am^{7} | F | Am^{7} | Am^{7} |
Phrase 2: | F♯m^{7} | F♯m^{7} | F♯m^{7} | F♯m^{7} |
Phrase 3: | E | D | F♯m^{7} | F♯m^{7} |
Interlude: | Am^{7} | Am^{7} | Am^{7} | Am^{7} | F♯m | Em | Em | Am | Am |
F♯m	Em	Em	Em	F♯ Em	C♯m	C♯m
F♯m	E	F♯m	E	G	A	Bsus	Bsus	Bsus	Bsus
Am D	G	G	Bm A	B♭$^{+4}$	B♭$^{+4}$	Esus	Esus	Am^{7}	Am^{7}

The first example, 'Let the Wind Carry Me', takes personal dualities as its theme. From the day-to-day disagreements between her mother and father during her formative years, Joni extrapolates a dichotomy between two belief systems: the work ethic and the pleasure principle, the domestic urge and the urge for rootlessness. She finds both urges in contradiction within her own soul. A similar contradiction is played out in the song's tonal structure, which is split between F♯m and Am, triads with only one pitch in common. Joni makes the most out of this harmonic distance by leaving the modulations very exposed – a bald exchange of one tonic for another. Each verse modulates once; in fact little of harmonic interest occurs in the verses save for the focal modulation.

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These building-blocks, though simple, are set into a formal plan of stunning design. Key to the overall plan is the remarkable use of commutative modulation; that is, the verses, instead of always beginning from the same tonal pole, go both back and forth between F♯m and Am. Verse 1 begins in F♯m, modulates, then cadences in Am. Verse 2 begins in Am, modulates, then cadences in F♯m. After an extended instrumental interlude (beginning and ending in Am), Joni reverses this tonal arrangement: verse 3 moves from Am to F♯m, verse 4 from F♯m to Am. Given that the introduction and lead-out are both in F♯m, the whole song thus works as a set of interlocking harmonic palindromes:

[F♯m] F♯m–Am Am–F♯m [Am–unstable–Am] Am–F♯m F♯m–Am [F♯m]

In fact, another duality is evident here – between a tonal orientation of constant volatility and its arrangement in a design of mathematical symmetry.

The volatile, rootless quality comes to the fore in the lengthy interlude. It is difficult to ascertain any progession of keys here, since tonal allegiances are so thoroughly adrift. Clearly this instrumental passage conveys the alluring vagrancy captured in the poetic image of the wild seed on the wind. Yet at the same time, it is within this passage that Joni explores a liaison between her two tonal poles. In contrast to the body of the song, which preserves and exposes the distance between F♯m and Am as a leap between unrelated worlds, the interlude intertwines the two triads as if in pursuit of a higher synthesis. In line with the romantic impulse of the song, however, such a synthesis never does materialise.[10]

My second example from 1972 is 'Cold Blue Steel and Sweet Fire', a fiendishly cool portrayal of heroin addiction.[11]

'Cold Blue Steel and Sweet Fire' (*FR*) Guitar tuning: C G D G B D

Intro:	‖: G F G B♭	G F G :‖
Phrase 1:	C (Lydian)	C	C	C	
Phrase 2:	‖: G F G B♭	G F G :‖
Phrase 3:	C (Lydian)	C	C	C	
Phrase 4:	G F B♭	D	C	C	
Chorus:	C B♭ C B♭	C B♭ C	D F/B♭	C/F	C/F G	
	C (Lydian)	C	C	C ‖: G F G B♭	G F G :‖

Where 'Let the Wind Carry Me' used a distant third relation between tonal poles, this song uses C and G, a much closer fifth relation. Since these two keys share so much harmonic territory, Joni is able to set up a more muddled, irresolute sense of duality. To compound the experience of vacillation, the passages centred on C are cast in the Lydian mode, whose F♯ carries a leading-tone momentum toward G. The passages on G are cast in a mixed mode (similar to a blues scale) which favours F natural. Another way to put this is that the C passages are infused with elements of G major, and vice versa. Arrival on one or the other tonal pole thus usually provides only a momentary stability, since an impetus toward the other pole is immediately set up. The first phrase is in C, but already pushes toward G; phrase 2, on G, is immediately ready to fall back down to C. Neither pole is clearly differentiated from the other.

The only moment of clarity occurs at the end of each verse, where the poetic lens focuses on the images of 'Sweet Fire' and 'Lady Release'. At this point the appearance of a D chord allows the tonality to resolve to a G centre. The D chord is clearly a dominant, and the C chords that follow are clearly subdominants of G. The way seems clear for a moment. But where does it lead? – 'down, down the

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dark ladder'. At these words the bottom drops out of the clear dominant. From D we are thrown, by way of exquisite harmonic sensations (extended triadic structures), back into the familiar muddle and vacillation. The reigning tonal gesture thus creates an inextricable, vicious cycle, a perfect foil for the hollow, elusive release which taunts the junkie. Tonal centres and words blur together indistinctly for the 'hollow-grey-fire-escape-thief' who can find no escape from the concrete urban jungle or the fever burning in her veins. Yet the tone of this song remains cool and unruffled, ironically detached from the human pathos it portrays. The authorial voice enjoys a modernist control over the symbolic language, gelid and obscure, and a modernist distance from its disintegrating subject. The suave, bluesy cadences are closer to the taunting, disembodied perspective of Lady Release than to the addict's private descent into hell.

Strict pedal points

My fifth and final category has to do with the use of pedal points. In diametric contrast to her forays into multiple tonalities, Joni has written songs which explore a strong, almost unceasing rootedness to a single pitch centre. Harmonically, such songs do overlap with the single or mixed modes of the first two categories, but their use of insistent tonal anchors constitutes a distinct organising principle. For this reason I have placed them in a separate category. The pedals are typically on the tonic, but in two dulcimer songs Joni experiments with a dominant pedal.

Joni uses pedal points not as a tried-and-true, folk-derived, naïve expression of affirmation, but as a special technique with a striking range of effects. The textural and rhythmic profiles of the pedals vary from song to song. In 'Song to a Seagull' (*SS*) the pedal occupies its own registral plane, tolling at regular intervals deep beneath the melodic surface. This pattern establishes a symbol of open, multilayered space and a solemnity suitable to the poem's oracular delivery. In 'Cactus Tree' (*SS*), a nostalgic catalogue of past loves, the tonic throbs in a constant pulse amidst a closely knit texture as if the listener were pressed intimately to a warm musical body. The pedal in 'I Had a King' (*SS*) is further in the background and more subtly crafted, merely an accompanimental fabric that always retains the same lower limit. (In a further intricacy, the guitar establishes a pronounced upper limit as well, which is in fact a secondary pedal on the dominant.) The harmonic effects Joni achieves are just as varied. In 'Song to a Seagull' the tonic C bass supports two competing harmonic layers: the voice remains almost wholly in Mixolydian, while the guitar's upper reaches stray onto darker modal paths. In 'For the Roses' (*FR*) the unchanging B♭ pedal is set in a fluid polymodal context (Lydian, Aeolian and Mixolydian), as if caught in an ever-shifting play of light. 'Cactus Tree' works with a limited range of colours (only four basic chord-forms in the entire song: I, IM7, IV, Vsus), deriving a great deal of sentiment from simple plagal cadences on F♯.

Beyond their expressive leverage, Joni uses such limitations of harmony and voice-leading to engage with the song's thematics, by fashioning gestures of confinement and freedom. In 'Cactus Tree', the rhythmic pedal's gravitational field – periodically released – is used to enact the dilemma of the song's heroine, caught between the pull of romantic attachments and her yearning for independence and self-fulfilment. The pedal in 'Song to a Seagull' likewise has thematic impact, as an ironic anchor tugging against the impulse toward visionary flight. In the faux-medieval 'I Had a King', the narrator cast as 'queen' is confined (presumably for

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childbirth) till the end of the year. The song's progressions creep by stepwise motion from one chord to the next, with dominants pressed into unwonted positions in order to accommodate the tonic bass. In contrast, two dulcimer songs from *Blue*, strung on dominant pedals, enjoy a much more unencumbered harmonic activity. The poet in 'All I Want' is travelling on a personal quest, looking for the key to set her free. The song's harmonies are restless and polymodal, dancing around a joyously jangling internal pedal. The more laidback love song 'A Case of You', in straight D♭ major, has cadences that unwind with a Baroque precision and inevitability.

I would like to take time to consider one example in greater detail. 'Both Sides, Now' is one of Joni's most celebrated songs, though her own dejected performance bears little resemblance to the Judy Collins cover version from 1967 which first made it a hit.[12]

'Both Sides, Now' (*Cl*) Guitar tuning: E B E G♯ B E capo 2

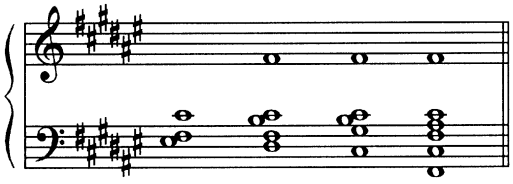
Phrase 1/3: ‖: F♯M^7 B^9 | C♯^{7}sus F♯ B^9 | F♯ C♯^{7} | C♯^{7} F♯ C♯^{7}sus |
Phrase 2/4: | F♯M^7 B^9 | C♯^{7}sus | F♯M^7 B^9 | C♯^{7}sus (blues) :‖
Chorus: | F♯ C♯open^7 | F♯ C♯open^7 F♯ | F♯ C♯open^7 F♯ | F♯ C♯open^7 F♯ |
| F♯M^7 B^9 | F♯ B^9 F♯ | F♯M^7 B^9 | C♯^{7}sus | C♯^{7}sus |
Interlude: | F♯ B^9 | F♯ F♯M^7 B^9 | F♯ B^9 | F♯ B^9 |

The harmonies are (almost) pure major, and tend toward the monochrome (I, IV and V).[13] By now we can appreciate how incredibly limited such a palette is in the context of Joni's style. She exploits the redundancy for expressive purpose: the repetitive treading of the same harmonic paths captures an appropriately world-weary tone. Yet, within this monochromatic spectrum, Joni is careful to create textural variety, and sculpt a precise lyrical shape with its own highs and lows.

The tonic pedal (F♯) is rarely relinquished. The I and IV chords are able to swivel freely around this axis, but many of the dominants are more constrained, appearing as they do in a suspended form which retains the F♯. The pedal is not restricted to a single plane, however, but traverses a two-octave spread. In the guitar interludes, the pedal is present at all three pitch-levels, in a series of plagal cadences whose full chords are bounded at top and bottom by F♯ (see Example 10). During the verses, the pedal bounces between octaves. At the beginning of phrase



Example 10



Example 11

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1 (as well as in many of the F♯M^7 chords throughout), the texture contracts around the central F♯ 3. The C♯^{7}sus chords drop F♯ 3 in favour of F♯ 4 (see Example 11). The sovereignty of the pedal, while harmonically constant, is texturally mobile and variegated, allowing for a moving bass. But the resulting bass line uses tonal homing as a repetitive, despondent gesture. Again and again, the bass E♯ moves down to C♯ and thence to F♯. E♯, having lost its upward-leading function, is now acting strange, and serves as the departure point for a dispirited course downwards.

Only twice does E♯ lead directly up to the tonic, at the end of phrases 1 and 3 in the vocal line (e.g., 'ice cream castles *in the air*'). These parallel moments stand out for several reasons. The voice, within a verse of generally drooping contours, rises a full octave span. At the same time, the guitar bursts past the F♯4 which has capped its range until now. Not least, the vocal cadence with its leading-tone and clear unconstrained dominant momentarily revokes the tyranny of the pedal. This elated gesture first corresponds with the high spirits at the outset of each verse of the poem. But then something goes awry: the second half of each verse repeats the gesture of elation, but the words are no longer joyous. The poet now views her former joy with a jaded eye. The same music is used for both takes, the buoyant and the disillusioned. Not only that, but the emphatically rising gesture is followed every time by downcast gestures. First the voice peaks on A♯ only to fall dramatically by a major seventh ('and fea*ther cany*ons'; note Joni's poignant glissando over this interval in verse 2 on 'and if *you care*'). Next, at the end of phrases 2 and 4, the bass line breaks out into a bluesy riff in the Dorian mode, whose E♮ and A♮ tug dissonantly and depressively at the otherwise uniformly major key.

The beginning of the chorus provides a spell of relief from all this tonal gravity. For four measures, the guitar interpolates dominants released from the sway of the F♯ pedal. The voice, leaping and hovering in its highest range, mostly avoids the tonic. In the chorus's second half, though, the singer sinks back to her low alto, and the sovereign pedal returns. The end of the chorus is made up of two cadential phrases, in both of which the vocal line moves down to the tonic. The first phrase is a straightforward plagal cadence, but the second is pungently displaced. In fact, the voice arrives at the tonic too early, while the guitar has only reached the dominant. The voice's cadential note is thus dissonant for two full measures as the guitar picks out a humble cadenza (see Example 12). The emphasis in this final cadence is on the harmonic element (C♯^{7}sus) of the greatest tension and constraint within the song's bland scheme. To further the sense of constraint, Joni arranges for the guitar cadenza to peak in a chord bounded by F♯ on both sides. The voice is planted in the middle of this chord, on a third F♯. When the harmony finally resolves to I, the voice has only enough energy to turn over in a spent, anticlimactic roulade. Joni is treating tonality perversely in this song, using cadential movement as a downer, and using a surfeit of tonal centre as a symbol of tedium and disenchantment. To get the full effect of this virtuosic achievement, one need only compare Joni's ver-



Example 12

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sion to the Judy Collins cover, in which the astringent, landlocked tonal nuances are swept away in a sugary barrage of primary colours.

* * *

In closing, I want to offer some general comments on the harmonic categories and their use in Joni's music up to the present. I have tabulated the five categories as they are represented in the first five albums. To give some idea of their subsequent fortunes, I also include four selected albums from later periods (see the Table).

Songs in which a single mode predominates form the second largest category in Joni's career, numbering over fifty. There are two songs in Dorian, from the early period, and a handful in Aeolian throughout her career. Mixolydian becomes rarer as a base after the early period: she revisits it in 'People's Parties' (*Court and Spark*), 'Turbulent Indigo' (*Turbulent Indigo*), and 'Chinese Café' (*Wild Things Run Fast* – in this D Mixolydian song the ♭VII is gradually transformed into a second key centre, CM, for her nostalgic quotation of 'Unchained Melody'). The major mode makes strong appearances in *Ladies of the Canyon* and *Blue*, then becomes scarce for a while, to return as a favoured choice in the 1980s and 1990s. (Note that I refer to a predominantly, not purely, major mode. Joni usually mixes modes to some degree; thus the boundaries between the first and second categories are not always cut-and-dry.) An interesting subgroup of major-mode songs are those in which Joni sets up a forceful polarity between the tonic major and the relative minor. She first tries this out in 'Willy' (*LC*) and 'River' (*Bl*) (both songs are in CM/Am), and explores it extensively in *Night Ride Home* and *Turbulent Indigo*.[14]

Polymodality is the most common and most enduringly fertile harmonic scheme in Joni's work. Counting for more than sixty songs, it never loses its fascination. Beginning with *For the Roses*, polytonality grows in importance, eventually appearing in a remarkable thirty-some songs.

In contrast, chromaticism and pedal points appear to have exhausted their interest after the early period. They disappear altogether save for two experimental songs in which Joni brings each technique to a climax. 'The Jungle Line' (from *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*, 1975), noted for its importation of Burundi drumming as a rhythm track before such borrowing was the fashion, works with a two-part contrapuntal texture. The synthesised bass is extremely restless, moving mostly by tritone and half-step, and traversing the chromatic aggregate save for one pitch. Though each verse returns three times to an A♭ bass vamp (by way of a Locrian scale),[15] the song's harmonic fabric is best described as atonal. Both chromaticism and pedal points figure in 'Paprika Plains' (from *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter*, 1977), which runs to sixteen minutes, an entire side of an LP on the original release. The song's three-verse structure is interrupted by a vast instrumental interlude, whose farflung harmonic wanderings are characterised by a strikingly liberal use of dissonance. Equally striking is the fact that Joni prints parenthetical, unperformed lyrics to correspond with the instrumental passage. This quite extensive interpolation (seventy-two poetic lines, in a metric scheme unrelated to the rest of the song) gives voice, like some Yeats of the desert, to a protean collage of oracular imagery. All such formal and tonal expansiveness is counterbalanced in the verses by the use of marked (but intermittent) pedal textures. The pedal is threefold – a chord made up of C, D and G – appearing in many harmonic contexts and symbolising, among

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Table. Nine albums classified by harmonic category. In the first category, single modes predominate; 'M/m' refers to a strong polarity between major and relative minor. A 'polymodal' classification refers to multiple modes based on a single tonal centre; 'polytonal' refers to multiple tonal centres. Some songs are listed under more than one category.

Album	1. Modal	2. Polymodal	3. Chromatic	4. Polytonal	5. Pedal point
Song to a Seagull (1968)	'Night in the City' (G Mixo) 'Sisotowbell Lane' (D Mixo) 'Song to a Seagull' (C Mixo) 'Cactus Tree' (F♯M)	'I Had a King' (A) 'Michael from Mountains'(F) 'Nathan La Franeer' (G) 'The Dawntreader' (D)	['Michael from Mountains'] 'Marcie' (G) 'The Pirate of Penance' (D)		'I Had a King' (A) 'Song to a Seagull' (C) 'Cactus Tree' (F♯)
Clouds (1969)	'Tin Angel' (E Aeol) 'Chelsea Morning' (E Mixo) 'That Song About the Midway' (E Mixo) 'The Gallery' (F♯ Mixo) 'I Think I Understand' (E Mixo) 'Both Sides, Now' (F♯M)	'The Fiddle and the Drum' (B♭)	'Roses Blue' (G) 'Songs to Aging Children Come' (B)	'I Don't Know Where I Stand' (D–F)	'Both Sides, Now' (F♯)
Ladies of the Canyon (1970)	'Morning Morgantown' (AM) 'Conversation' (F♯M) 'Ladies of the Canyon' (D Mixo) 'Willy' (CM/Am) 'The Priest' (G Dor) 'Big Yellow Taxi' (EM) 'Woodstock' (E♭ Dor) 'The Circle Game' (BM)	'For Free' (C) 'The Arrangement' (A) 'Rainy Night House' (D)	['Morning Morgantown']	'Blue Boy' (C–G) [not strongly centric]	'Conservation' (F♯) 'The Priest' (G)
Blue (1971)	'Little Green' (BM) 'Carey' (D♭M) 'California' (EM) 'River' (CM/Am) 'A Case of You' (D♭M)	'All I Want' (D♭) 'My Old Man' (A) 'Blue' (B) 'This Flight Tonight' (A♭)	['My Old Man']	'The Last Time I Saw Richard' (G–A)	'All I Want' (D♭) 'A Case of You' (D♭)

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Album	1. Modal	2. Polymodal	3. Chromatic	4. Polytonal	5. Pedal point
For the Roses (1972)	'Barangrill' (E♭ Mixo) 'Electricity' (B Mixo) 'You Turn Me On' (E♭M)	'Banquet' (E) 'Lesson in Survival' (A) 'For the Roses' (B♭) 'Blonde in the Bleachers' (A) 'Woman of Heart and Mind' (B)		'Cold Blue Steel and Sweet Fire' (C–G) 'Let the Wind Carry Me' (F♯–A) 'See You Sometime' (F–C) 'Judgement of the Moon and Stars' (D–A–B)	'For the Roses' (B♭)
Court and Spark (1974)	'People's Parties' (D Mixo)	'Court and Spark' (E) 'The Same Situation (A) 'Just Like This Train' (C) 'Raised on Robbery' (C)		'Help Me' (A–D) 'Free Man in Paris' (A–C) 'Car on a Hill' (F♯–A) 'Down to You' (D–E) 'Trouble Child' (C–G)	
Hejira (1976)	'Coyote' (CM) 'Hejira' (BM)	'A Strange Boy' (D) 'Song for Sharon' (E♭) 'Blue Motel Room' (C) 'Refuge of the Roads' (C)		'Amelia' (F–G) 'Furry Sings the Blues' (A–D) 'Black Crow' (E♭–G♭)	
Wild Things Run Fast (1982)	'Chinese Café' (D Mixo) 'You Dream Flat Tires' (D Aeol) 'Man to Man' (D Aeol)	'Wild Things Run Fast' (C) 'Ladies' Man' (D) 'Moon at the Window' (D) 'Be Cool' (D) 'Underneath the Streetlight' (A) 'Love' (E)		'Chinese Café/ Unchained Melody' (D–C) 'Solid Love' (D♭–A♭–F)	
Night Ride Home (1910)	'Night Ride Home' (CM) 'Cherokee Louise' (DM/Bm) 'Slouching toward Bethlehem' (DM/Bm) 'Come in from the Cold' (D♭M/B♭m) 'Nothing Can Be Done' (AM/F♯m)	'Passion Play' (D) 'The Windfall' (A) 'The Only Joy in Town' (D) 'Ray's Dad's Cadillac' (D)		'Two Grey Rooms' (D–G)	

other things, an indigenous American drumbeat. Once again the tonal techniques are expressive of thematic dichotomies between the centred and the unbounded. Just as the chromatic orchestral rhapsody is signalled by a visionary, expansive movement in the text ('I'm floating into dreams'), the long jazzy postlude, with its apotheosis of the pedal chord, follows a contraction back to earth, the present, and the bonds of human company ('I'm floating back to you').

As we have seen, Joni Mitchell's harmonic palette is multivalent, subtly shaded, and highly distinctive, with effects that are always integrated into memorable, well-reasoned poetic conceptions. She creates novel structures from the most commonplace resources, and incorporates bold experimentation into engaging, exuberant grooves. While many other songwriters of her time have been inventive within traditional tonal syntax, Joni's work is impressive for its extended exploration of alternatives to the diatonic field and the major/minor system. The sophistication of her compositional craft places her at the pinnacle of achievement in the field of popular song.

Acknowledgement

Many thanks to Gary Day for graciously preparing the musical examples.

Endnotes

1. For particularly harsh examples, see Stephen Holden's review (1976) of *Hissing*; Janet Maslin's review (1978) of *Don Juan*; and Michael Watts's review (1977) of *Don Juan*. Useful collections of review excerpts can be found in Hinton (1996) and Luftig (2000).
2. For those critics, Joni had insufficient jazz credentials; she herself has pointed out the obverse problem – namely, that the project was *too* jazzy for much of her fan base, and that she was 'excommunicated from the air waves' (Stern 1995, p. 24). A full account of Joni Mitchell's critical and popular fortunes, as affected by fashion, gender preconceptions, her resistance to cut-and-dry stylistic categories, and the clash of her artistic ideology with her commercial milieu, would be an undertaking all to itself.
3. 'I've said it many times – a hundred years from now, people will look back and say, Who was the greatest singer-songwriter of this time? And in my ever so *un*humble opinion, it'll be Joni' (Crosby and Bender 2000, p. 200).
4. In the early period under discussion, for instance, there are only eight such songs (all of them in major mode): from *Song to a Seagull*, 'Cactus Tree'; from *Ladies of the Canyon*, 'Willy' and 'The Circle Game'; from *Blue*, 'Carey', 'California', 'River' and 'A Case of You'; and from *For the Roses*, 'You Turn Me On (I'm a Radio)'. In the period from 1973–9, there are none.
5. For examples of more holistic analysis, see Whitesell (1997), reprinted in Luftig (2000, pp. 237–50).
6. Interview with Cameron Crowe (1979), in *The Rolling Stone Interviews, 1967–1980: Talking with the Legends of Rock and Roll* (New York: St. Martin's, 1981), pp. 376–91; see p. 381.
7. Songs with a Mixolydian base include, *SS*: 'Night in the City', 'Sisotowbell Lane', 'Song to a Seagull', *Cl*: 'Chelsea Morning', 'That Song About the Midway', 'The Gallery', 'I Think I Understand', *LC:* 'For Free', 'Ladies of the Canyon', *FR:* 'Barangrill', 'Electricity', and the song 'Urge for Going', written and recorded in the early period but only released in 1996 on the *Hits* album.
8. Lyrics can be found in Mitchell 1997a. Except for *FR*, the published guitar/piano/vocal scores to the early albums are extremely unreliable. Careful transcriptions and tabs for some of these songs were recently published in the songbooks to the *Hits* and *Misses* albums (Mitchell 1997b, c). The chord notations in this essay are my own transcriptions. They follow standard fake-sheet practice: the symbol D/E stands for a D triad over an E bass.
9. The extended triads are ready to hand on account of the non-standard guitar tuning for this song. For an exhaustive catalogue of Joni's tunings, see James Leahy's guitar tunings page at www.jonimitchell.com
10. In assigning dual keys to such songs, one should not disregard the modal character of

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each tonal pole. Thus the keys of 'Let the Wind Carry Me' could perhaps be more fully described as F♯ Aeolian/A Aeolian. But Joni's modal usage here is, as so often, ambiguous or mixed. The lack of any dominant in the verses, for example, allows the keys to be read as either Aeolian or minor. Furthermore, the first line of the interlude, incorporating an F♯m chord into the Am field, momentarily creates an A Dorian quality. For this reason I have resisted being too specific about naming modes in the present category.

11. An excellent transcription of this song can be found in Mitchell 1973.
12. 'Both Sides, Now' has been recorded by more than 150 different artists, from Bing Crosby to Cleo Laine to Kiri te Kanawa. See the discography lists at www.jonimitchell.com and www.allmusic.com
13. This song shares a tuning, key, and similar chord progressions with 'Cactus Tree' and 'Conversation' (*LC*) – though the effects she aims for in the three songs are quite different. A detailed arrangement of 'Both Sides, Now', based closely on Joni's performance (but not an exact transcription), is printed in the *Hits* songbook (Mitchell 1997b).
14. Two other songs from *LC* exploit such a polarity: the polymodal 'For Free' (CM/Mixolydian/Am) and the polytonal 'Blue Boy' (CM/Am–G Mixolydian).
15. The intervals of a Locrian scale correspond to those from B to B on the white piano keys.

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Selected discography

Joni Mitchell, *Song to a Seagull*. Reprise 6293. 1968
Clouds. Reprise 6341. 1969
Ladies of the Canyon. Reprise 6376. 1970
Blue. Reprise 2038. 1971
For the Roses. Asylum 5057. 1972

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