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Reckless Daughter

A Portrait of Joni Mitchell
by David Yaffe

Price: \$28.00(Hardcover)
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Rating: 0.0/5 (0 votes cast)

From the Publisher: An intimate new biography of Joni Mitchell, one of the greatest musicians of the twentieth century Joni Mitchell is a cultural touchstone for generations of Americans. In her heyday she released ten experimental, challenging, and revealing albums; her lyrics captivated people with the beauty of their language and the rawness of their emotions, both deeply personal to Mitchell and universally relatable to her audience. In this intimate biography, composed of dozens of in-person interviews with Mitchell, David Yaffe reveals the backstory behind the famous songsâfrom her youth on the Canadian prairie, her pre-vaccine bout with polio at age nine, and her early marriage and the child she gave up for adoption, up through the quintessential albums and love affairs, and all the way to the presentâand shows us why Mitchell has so enthralled her listeners, her lovers, and her friends. Yaffe has had unprecedented access both to Mitchell and to those who know her, drawing on interviews with childhood friends and the cast of famous characters (Joan Baez, Judy Collins, Leonard Cohen, David Crosby, and more) with whom she has crossed paths and influenced, as well as insightful analyses of her famous lyrics, their imagery and style, and what they say about the woman herself. Reckless Daughter tells the story of Mitchell and also of the fertile, exciting musical time of which she was an integral part, one that had a profound effect that can still be felt today on American music and the industry.

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About The Author

David Yaffe
David Yaffe was born in Dallas, Texas, in 1973. He is a professor of humanities at Syracuse University and a 2012 winner of the Roger Shattuck Prize for Criticism. His writing has appeared in many publications, including The Nation, Harper's Magazine, The New York Times, Slate, New York, The Village Voice, The Daily Beast, and Bookforum. He is the author of Bob Dylan: Like a Complete Unknown and Fascinating Rhythm.

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What We Say

Let's be clear. Joni Mitchell is NOT the greatest female singer-songwriter of all time. She is NOT one of the most influential

female guitarists of all time. She is NOT one of the most important female artists of all time. She is quite clearly one of the greatest singer-songwriters, guitarists and recording artists of all time, full stop. Adding on her gender to that praise is to limit the scope of her remarkable accomplishments. Writer David Yaffe knows this well. He knows even better that the whip-smart, prickly Mitchell would rightly take offense by such a designation. Yaffe delivers a serious biography that tells of her childhood and proceeds album by album through an illustrious career. He is clearly in Mitchell's corner but not afraid (or not too afraid) to clearly lay out when Mitchell may have been in the wrong or unnecessarily holding a grudge. She may be her own worst enemy in her private life but she was equally uncompromising in her music -- and that's what matters. Mitchell isn't within a mile of the boorish or hateful behavior of Miles Davis, Pablo Picasso and other artistic peers (she doesn't have many) but she's clearly a handful. So what? Genius makes its own rules, even if that doesn't excuse them. All that said, the book is dutiful more than fun, if only because her private life wasn't so much fun. Without ever reducing songs to certain people and places and times (be it David Geffen's inspiration on "Free Man In Paris" or Mitchell inspiring Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young's "Our House"), Yaffe details the real-life context to songs that have long since transcended "Oh, that was about the time I fought with..." to become classics. As an ardent fan, I enjoyed the seriousness of purpose. And I doubt a better biography will come along. But unlike Dylan's memoir (which stands outside his music as its own strange thing) or Springsteen's confessional (which informs our appreciation of his music, especially the early years) this book is a good addendum. It adds zest to the list of musicians who played on her albums since we appreciate more fully who they are and how they served Mitchell's vision. But her real testament remains the music and happily this book sends you back to album after album, realizing anew what an amazing body of work she has produced. -- Michael Giltz

What Others Say

"Joni Mitchell's gift was so enormous that it remade the social space around her. As David Yaffe's new biography, "Reckless Daughter: A Portrait of Joni Mitchell" (Sarah Crichton Books), suggests, it is no small burden to possess something as valuable as Mitchell's talent, and it meant that this girl from the Canadian prairie would be in the world, whether she liked it or not . . . Yaffe, who teaches at Syracuse, charts these encounters with a sure hand, and is a brilliant analyst of how Mitchell's songs are made." —Dan Chiasson, The New Yorker "Dazzling . . . A shimmering portrait of one artist's life, illusions and all." —Booklist (starred review) "The essential biography of Joni Mitchell." —Now Toronto "Reckless Daughter is a bewitched, bothered, and bewildered portrayal of one of the most beautiful and enigmatic artists of a beautiful and enigmatic period of American life. It is touching, mystifying, and revealing in equal parts." —Mary Gaitskill "Joni Mitchell, an artist of innervating and daunting complexity, originality, and importance, could have no better biographer than David Yaffe. He knows the music like the serious musician he is, knows the poetry like the literary scholar he is, and is equally attuned to Mitchell's tortured soul. On top of all that, he seems to have interviewed everyone important in Mitchell's life, from her first husband to Leonard Cohen. Reckless Daughter is nothing less than the definitive statement on the life and work of an artist who defies definition." —David Hajdu, author of Love for Sale: Pop Music in America "It's so easy to get Joni Mitchell wrong, or to leave out the most important things, or to miss the point altogether. Reckless Daughter is the definitive correction to all the errors, a sharp yet sprawling look at one of the most brilliant musical artists of modern times. David Yaffe grasps the nuances—of the music, the poetry, the intellect, the madness. He gets it. He gets her. I couldn't get enough of this fine biography." —Meghan Daum, author of The Unspeakable: And Other Subjects of Discussion "David Yaffe is an artful and incisive critic who writes with such grace and clarity. With Reckless Daughter, he makes a figure as iconic as Joni Mitchell feel wholly new. This portrait is loaded with revelations, both spiritual and actual. I thought I understood something about Mitchell—the way her tough and tender songs move, her sweetness and rebellion—but Yaffe understands everything. What a book." —Amanda Petrusich, author of Do Not Sell at Any Price: The Wild, Obsessive Hunt for the World's Rarest 78rpm Records

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