



Embodied Expression in Joni Mitchell's Songs with Orchestra

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Figure 1. Expressive oppositions in Joni Mitchell's music



Physical, actual



Diagnosed with polio in 1953 at age ten

Paralysis

Otherness, Isolation, Distance

immobility ↔ mobility

mind ↔ body

the independent artist ↔ human connection, love



Social, virtual

Example 1. Joni Mitchell, "Blue" (*Blue*, 1971)

Freely

D: I

Bm: vi

This system shows the first four measures of the piece. The treble clef contains a melodic line of eighth notes. The bass clef contains a bass line of eighth notes. The key signature is two sharps (D major/B minor) and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo/style marking is 'Freely'.

Bm7 A/B Bm7 A/B Gmaj7 E9sus E D/E E

Blue, _____ Songs are like tat-toos. You know I've been to sea be-fore. _____

D: I V I V (B Dorian)

Bm: i

This system contains the vocal melody and piano accompaniment for the first two lines of lyrics. The treble clef has the vocal line with lyrics underneath. The bass clef has the piano accompaniment. Chord symbols are placed above the treble staff. The key signature remains two sharps. The tempo marking 'Freely' is implied from the first system.

D/E E Bm7 A/B E/A

Crown and an-chor me _____ Or let me sail a - way. (i)

D: I (B Dorian)

This system contains the vocal melody and piano accompaniment for the second line of lyrics. The treble clef has the vocal line with lyrics underneath. The bass clef has the piano accompaniment. Chord symbols are placed above the treble staff. The key signature remains two sharps.

D: V9 (maj7)
Bm: VII

Emergent narrative

“Acid, booze, and ass; Needles, guns, and grass; Lots of laughs...”

From a low point...

Chord progression: Bm7 A/B D/G A/G E9sus

Tempo: *rit.*

The score is in 3/4 time with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The treble clef staff features a descending melodic line with a red shaded area underneath. The bass clef staff features a steady eighth-note accompaniment with a blue shaded area underneath.

“Everybody’s saying that hell’s the hippest way to go; Well I don’t think so...”

Emerging with clarity...

Chord progression: D/E A/E F#m/E D/E A/E F#m/E

The score is in 4/4 time with a key signature of two sharps. The treble clef staff features a descending melodic line with a red shaded area underneath. The bass clef staff features a steady eighth-note accompaniment with a blue shaded area underneath.

“There is your song from me.”

Transfigured

Chord progression: D/E A/B E/B Bm7 B7

Tempo: *rit.*

The score is in 4/4 time with a key signature of two sharps. The treble clef staff features a descending melodic line with a red shaded area underneath. The bass clef staff features a steady eighth-note accompaniment with a blue shaded area underneath.

Example 2. Joni Mitchell, "River" (*Blue*, 1971)

a. Final verse

"It's coming on Christmas..." "I wish I had a river..." "skate away..." Coda
C major: I vi V G major F major D minor
A minor: (i VII)

b. Ending

from "Jingle Bells" (F major)

piano

D minor

Example 3. Joni Mitchell, "Cold Blue Steel and Sweet Fire" (For the Roses, 1972)

a. Verse (0:09)

voice

C Gmaj7/C Csus 2 Gmaj7/C Csus 2

Cold blue steel out of mon-ey, One eye for the beat po-lice.

guitar reduction

guitar tab

D	---	X	---	0	---	0	---	0	---	0
B	---	h1	---	3	---	5	---	7	---	8
G	---	0	---	0	---	0	---	0	---	9
D	---	h2	---	4	---	5	---	7	---	10
G	---	0	---	0	---	5	---	7	---	0
C	---	0	---	0	---	0	---	0	---	0

parallel shift: +2 +2

G F G B \flat G F G F G B \flat G F D

Sweet fire call - in', "You ___ can't de - ny me, Now you know what you need." _____

guitar reduction

D	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X
B	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X
G	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X
D	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X
G	---	1to7	---	5	---	7	---	10	---	7	---	5	---	1to7	---	5	---	7	---	10
C	---	1to7	---	5	---	7	---	10	---	7	---	5	---	1to7	---	5	---	7	---	10

-2 +2 +3 -3 -2 +2 -2 +2 +3 -3 -2 -3

Dual oppositions in the verse

“Cold blue steel”

Outward subjectivity

The real world

Rhythmic groove

Vocal follows highest note in guitar

Centered on C (lowest guitar string)

Drones on low C and high D

Subdominant

“Sweet fire”

Interiority

Shadow of Lady Release

Sensuality

Vocal follows lowest note in guitar

Centered on G (upper guitar strings)

Open fifth “power chords”

Tonic

a. Verse (0:09)

voice

C Gmaj7/C Csus 2 Gmaj7/C Csus 2

guitar reduction

guitar tab

D		---	X	---	X	---	0	---	0	---	0	---	0	---	0	---	0	---	0
B		---	h1	---	X	---	3	---	5	---	7	---	8	---	9	---	10	---	12
G		---	0	---	0	---	0	---	0	---	0	---	0	---	0	---	0	---	0
D		---	h2	---	X	---	4	---	5	---	7	---	10	---	12	---	14	---	17
G		---	0	---	0	---	0	---	0	---	0	---	0	---	0	---	0	---	0
C		---	0	---	0	---	0	---	0	---	0	---	0	---	0	---	0	---	0

parallel shift: +2 +2



G F G Bb G F G F G Bb G F D

guitar reduction

D		---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X
B		---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X
G		---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X
D		---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X	---	X
G		---	1to7	---	5	---	7	---	10	---	7	---	5	---	1to7	---	5	---	7
C		---	1to7	---	5	---	7	---	10	---	7	---	5	---	1to7	---	5	---	7

-2 +2 +3 -3 -2 +2 -2 +2 +3 -3 -2 -3



b. Chorus (0.44)

Chord progression: C Bb/C C G C D/G F/Bb C/F

“Come with me I know the way” she says, “It’s down, down, down ___ the dark lad-der.”

The image shows a musical score for guitar. The top staff is the treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. The bottom staff shows the guitar accompaniment with chords and fingerings. The lyrics are written below the top staff.

Guitar fretboard diagram for the chorus:

D	5	3	5	0	3 to 5	3 to 5	7	10	5
B	5	3	5	0	3 to 5	3 to 5	7	10	5
G	5	3	5	0	3 to 5	3 to 5	7	10	5
D	5	3	5	0	3 to 5	3 to 5	7	10	5
G	0	0	0	X	0	0	7	10	5
C	0	0	0	X	0	0	7	10	5

-2 +2 +3 -5



Example 4. Joni Mitchell, “Down to You” (*Court and Spark*, 1974)

Ev-'ry-thing comes ___ and goes ___ marked by lo - vers and styles of clothes.

D D/G F#m7 G G/A D (sus2)

The image shows a musical score for the song "Down to You" by Joni Mitchell. It includes a vocal line in treble clef with lyrics, a piano accompaniment in treble and bass clefs, and a guitar chord chart above the piano part. The key signature is D major (two sharps) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "Ev-'ry-thing comes ___ and goes ___ marked by lo - vers and styles of clothes." The guitar chords are: D, D/G, F#m7, G, G/A, D (sus2). There is a -7 fret marker above the G chord.

Formal outline

	Intro	E	
0:33	Verse 1	D (major pentatonic)	<i>Everything comes and goes</i>
1:19	“The pickup station”	D (minor pentatonic)	<i>You go down to the pick-up station</i>
2:00	Verse 2	D (major pentatonic)	<i>In the morning... Love is gone!</i>
2:30	Orchestral interlude	C	
4:37	Verse 3	D	<i>Everything comes and goes</i>
5:10	Ending	E	<i>It all comes down to you.</i>

Example 5. Joni Mitchell, "Paprika Plains" (*Don Juan's Restless Daughter*, 1977)

a. Intro

The musical score for the Intro is in 4/4 time. The right hand begins with a *sfz* (sforzando) chord, a C sus2 chord. The left hand has a whole rest. In the second measure, the right hand plays a descending eighth-note line (G4, F4, E4, D4) while the left hand plays a chromatic descending bass line (F3, E3, D3, C3). The third measure features a *mp* (mezzo-piano) dynamic with a triplet of eighth notes (Bb4, A4, G4) in the right hand and a sustained bass line (C3, B2, A2, G2) in the left hand.

C sus2 chord

Left and right hand disengage. Chromatic descending bass.

b. Verse beginning (0:32)

The musical score for the Verse beginning is in 4/4 time. The vocal line starts with a *rit.* (ritardando) marking, followed by a *a tempo* marking. The lyrics are: "It fell from mid-night skies. ___". The piano accompaniment features a *rit.* marking and a *a tempo* marking. The right hand plays a series of chords (C, F, C, F) while the left hand plays a simple bass line. The tempo returns to the original *a tempo*.

Root-position tonic harmony emerges. Left and right hand realigned.

c. Verse ending (2:07)

The musical score for the Verse ending is in 4/4 time. The vocal line has the lyrics: "I'm float-ing off, ___ I'm float-ing off ___ in time. ___". The piano accompaniment features a complex texture with multiple chords in the right hand and a descending eighth-note line in the left hand. The tempo is *a tempo*.

Voice aligned with bass.

"Arrival" tonic $\frac{6}{4}$

d. Part 3 (bass enters)

♩ = 126
 The rain re - treats like troops to fall on o - ther fields and streets. Mean - while they're sweet - talk - in' and name - call - in' and brawl - in'

♩ = 126
mf

♩ = 126
mf *LEGRITTO*

2 3 4 5 6

♩ = 126
 on the fring-es of the floor. I spot you through the smoke, with your eyes on fire from J & B and coke. As I'm

mf

mf *LEGRITTO*

mf *LEGRITTO*

8 9 10 11 12 13 14

com - in' through the door. I'm com - in' back... I'm com - in' back... for more...

mf

mf *LEGRITTO*

f

mf

f

mf

pp *LEGRITTO*

p

pp *LEGRITTO*

p

e. Final chord with bass solo

The musical score is arranged in a system with the following parts from top to bottom: Piano, Sop. Sax, Bass, Vln. 1, Vln. 2, Vla., Vlc., and D.B. The time signature changes from 3/4 to 4/4 at the beginning of the piece. The Piano part features a complex texture with multiple voices and a final chord. The Sop. Sax part has a melodic line in the first measure. The Bass part includes a solo section marked 'Solo - Ad lib' and 'mp' starting in the 4/4 section. The string parts (Vln. 1, Vln. 2, Vla., Vlc., D.B.) are marked 'p' and feature a canonic texture. The score concludes with a final chord for all instruments.

Final emergence of root-position tonic. Canonic string texture. Bass solo: a final gesture of independence.

Example 6. Joni Mitchell, "Amelia" (Hejira, 1976). Guitar reduction

Intro

Dm C/E F B^b F B^b F C Dm C/E F B^b/F

Ascending trajectory I

C	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	5
G	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	5
E	---	1	---	3	---	5	---	6	---	5	---	6	---	5	---	1	---	3	---	5
C	---	2	---	4	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	2	---	4	---	5
G	---	7	---	5	---	7	---	5	---	7	---	5	---	7	---	0	---	2	---	4
C	---	2	---	4	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	0	---	2	---	4

Verse

I was driving across the burning desert... *When I spotted six jet planes...*

G C2/E G B^b E^b/G B^b C

+3 parallel shift

C	---	7	---	7	---	7	---	7	---	10	---	10	---	10	---	10	---	10	---	0
G	---	7	---	7	---	7	---	7	---	10	---	10	---	10	---	10	---	10	---	0
E	---	7	---	8	---	7	---	7	---	10	---	11	---	10	---	10	---	10	---	0
C	---	7	---	7	---	7	---	7	---	10	---	10	---	10	---	10	---	10	---	0
G	---	7	---	9	---	7	---	7	---	10	---	12	---	10	---	10	---	10	---	0
C	---	7	---	9	---	7	---	7	---	10	---	12	---	10	---	10	---	10	---	0

Leaving six white vapor trails across the bleak terrain.

A m B m G C2/E C

+2

C	---	7	---	7	---	7	---	7	---	7	---	7	---	7	---	7	---	7	---	0
G	---	7	---	7	---	7	---	7	---	7	---	7	---	7	---	7	---	7	---	0
E	---	8	---	10	---	7	---	7	---	8	---	8	---	8	---	0	---	0	---	0
C	---	9	---	11	---	7	---	7	---	7	---	7	---	7	---	0	---	0	---	0
G	---	9	---	11	---	7	---	7	---	9	---	9	---	9	---	0	---	0	---	0
C	---	9	---	11	---	7	---	7	---	9	---	9	---	9	---	0	---	0	---	0

It was the hexagram of the heavens, it was the strings of my guitar. *Amelia, it was just a false alarm.*

C E5 B m A m G F B^b/F F

V Descending trajectory

I

C	---	0	---	10	---	8	---	8	---	7	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	5
G	---	0	---	10	---	8	---	8	---	7	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	5
E	---	0	---	11	---	9	---	9	---	7	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	5
C	---	4	---	11	---	9	---	9	---	7	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	5
G	---	4	---	11	---	9	---	9	---	7	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	5
C	---	4	---	11	---	9	---	9	---	7	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	5	---	5

Example 7. Joni Mitchell, “Both Sides Now”

a. Clouds, 1969

Sounds a whole step higher than written

E A(9) E Emaj7 A(9) E B7sus E B7sus B7 E

Rows and floes of an - gel hair, and ice cream cas-tles in the air, —

Open E guitar tuning, capo 2

An ascent deferred...

then attained

so man-y things both sides now

b. Both Sides Now, 2000 (reduction)

Freely

A 7sus

Strings: Quiet ostinato
patterning continues →

Rows and floes of an - gel hair, and ice cream cas-tles in the air,

c. Live performance at the Newport Folk Festival with Brandi Carlisle (2022)

C Dm7 Em7 Fmaj9 Cmaj7 Fmaj9 Cmaj7 Fmaj9 Cmaj9 G/B Am7

(with piano) Rows and floes of an-gel hair, and ice cream cas-tles in the air, —

Example 7. Joni Mitchell, “Both Sides Now”



c. Live performance at the Newport Folk Festival with Brandi Carlisle (2022)

C Dm7 Em7 Fmaj9 Cmaj7 Fmaj9 Cmaj7 Fmaj9 Cmaj9 G/B Am7

(with piano) Rows and floes of an-gel hair, and ice cream cas-tles in the air, —



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