

FESTIVAL ANTIGONISH

'a flawless performance...breathtaking'

Joni Mitchell: River skyrockets

By Corey Leblanc • The Casket • August 3, 2005

The season continues to sizzle with the ongoing hot line-up at Festival Antigonish Summer Theatre. Along with its family, late night and cabaret series, and everything in between that makes FAST so special, it has provided audiences with an eclectic mix of summer favourites for the local theatre goer.

It is often said that a great song usually tells a story, and **Joni Mitchell: River**, certainly takes the special music of the Canadian icon, and tells a **heart-warming** and sometimes **heart-wrenching** story to audiences.

The words were the easy part because the legendary Mitchell has wowed audiences worldwide for more than four decades with her **thought-provoking** music.

From the outset, when singers Raquel Duffy, Margot Sampson and Mark Uhre, take centre stage with their rendition of the 1974 – *Help Me* - **the production skyrockets** under the direction of Jean Morpurgo. The players in the piece deftly use the **beautiful Bauer stage**, highlighted by a couple of simple balconies. The three actors, along with musicians Dave Carmichael and Dave Christensen (keyboards), weave in and out, and even interact – basically telling a story – as they offer 29 of the icon's pieces including **Big Yellow Taxi** and **River**.

Carmichael, who plays 10 different guitars, provides a **flawless performance**. Often, he even becomes the target of the songs as the female singers perform. The Antigonish community was even part of the production, with many donating their instruments. He and Christensen, on keyboards and sax, are **breathtaking musicians**.

All three performers (Duffy, Uhre and Sampson) provided **wonderful performances**. Their talents as vocalists are **impeccable**.

It was also an accomplishment to present Mitchell's work without it becoming a karaoke-type setting or a night of imitation. The movement and **unique performance** of the pieces – "telling a story" – took care of that.

It would be an injustice, though, not to single out Sampson and her performance. Although not imitating Mitchell, because who could actually do that, the Bluenose actress was best **able to capture the spirit** of the Canuck songbird. She often had the audience **hanging on every word**.

The songs are the dialogue, and each piece, as is the legacy of the great Mitchell, tells its own story. And, luckily for FAST audiences, those stories are woven together to create a **two-hour fabric of arresting entertainment**.



Photo: Len Sheperd

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