



Instead of entertaining in clubs like the Raven Gallery in Southfield, Chuck Mitchell now tours college campuses.

From clubs to colleges —folk singer's adapting

By Kathy Parrish
Staff writer

Chuck Mitchell used to sing at colleges between club dates.

Today, the folk singer does clubs between college engagements.

"Now I do clubs on the way someplace. I used to do schools on the way," said the Rochester native. Mitchell freely admits he's given up some fantasies ("like instant success") in the transition.

But the decline of the coffeehouse, such as Southfield's Raven Gallery, left Mitchell and many other folk singers without "homes." But the demise of the coffee house circuit also brought new challenges for the versatile entertainer.

He expanded his concert and classroom program, which takes him to colleges and universities as a performer-in-residence. He is also writing poetry, concentrating more on his music and is proud that at 46 he still attracted 166 people one night to Southfield's Folk-town series.

"THAT'S A joke compared to the Rolling Stones at the Silverdome, but it's good in my business," explained Mitchell. He performed at the Focus: Hope benefit before the holidays and at Cooper's Arms Cabaret while in Rochester visiting his family.

"I started at 29, when most musicians are washed up. But I've done reasonably well. And now that I know what it takes, I will continue to do reasonably well."

Doing reasonably well wasn't quite what Charles Scott Mitchell had in mind when he changed professions 16 years ago.

The 1954 Rochester High School graduate, who has a bachelor's degree in English and drama from Principia

College, was a staff writer for the Great Cities Project. Great Cities was designed to improve education for culturally deprived Detroit children.

BUT IN 1955, after serving a "lengthy apprenticeship" in saloons and coffeehouses like the Chessmate and the Raven Gallery, he began singing full time.

"I was spending more energy entertaining weekends than at my writing job," recalled Mitchell.

He had also considered going after an advanced degree in education. "But that looked like six to eight years of studying. I thought I could become a music star in two to three years," said the entertainer, adding a hearty "ha ha."

Almost immediately, he met and married Joni (Anderson) Mitchell, whose singing career skyrocketed while he maintained a steady following.

"I was too diverted by things like fixing a car. There are all kinds of things that can keep you from becoming an overnight success," he said.

WHILE THE couple divorced in 1968 and he has since remarried and divorced again, Mitchell is still asked about his first wife. The curiosity once irritated him so much that he had a rider on his contract forbidding media mention of her.

Today, though, his biography mentions the famous folk singer and he speaks highly of her ability. "It doesn't bother me anymore," said Mitchell.

"I'd be a stone liar, though, to say I wouldn't enjoy the degree of success she has. But she went after it."

For 15 years, he worked in clubs across the United States and Canada, most of which are now closed. He now travels mostly in the Midwest.

"I used to be a national artist but ain't anymore," said the singer, who believes home video posed too great a challenge to coffeehouses. He made his last appearance at the Raven Gallery in 1980, just before it closed.

"COFFEEHOUSES WERE about intimacy — close-up looks at people. That's what video now offers," explained Mitchell, who believes people went to clubs rather than attend movies. "It's the opposite of seeing the Rolling Stones in the Silverdome."

He believes the other coffeehouse drawing card — alternative music — resulted in the music's recent resurgence in some places.

"Since the Reagan administration, I'm beginning to think of myself as an alternative artist," said Mitchell. Lately, he has added protest songs to his repertoire of folk, British traditional, ballads, American musicals and poetry.



A new year means memories as much as resolutions for folk singer-guitarist Chuck Mitchell.

Staff photos by David Frank

Holocaust memories kept poetry alive

By Shirlee Iden
staff writer

"Why do you have blue writing on your arm, Zada?"

Though not an unusual question for 4-year-old Shana Subelsky to ask her grandfather, it underscores what growing up was like for Barbara Subelsky, Shana's mother.

"I know my parents were different, unlike my friends' parents, but when I was younger, I didn't quite understand why," the Southfield homemaker says.

Little Shana's grandfather, Sam Hornung, responded to her question by telling the child that the markings were there so that if he got lost, he'd be put back where he belonged.

For Mrs. Subelsky, that kind of answer, one that evades the grim truth, was familiar from her own childhood. As the child of Holocaust survivors growing up in America, she's heard it all before, always lingering for the part of the story left untold.

Her parents, Sam and Ella Hornung, were both caught up in the Nazi terrors in Europe in the 1940s, and both were interned in concentration camps.

"My father was married before and had two children," Mrs. Subelsky says. "His wife and children were all killed."

A barber by trade, Hornung also served as a nurse since barbers served medical functions by custom at that time.

"When I realized that my father had pretended his wounded or ill friends were dead, covered them up, and allowed them to escape sure death at the hands of the Nazis, I began to think of him as a hero," she says.

BORN IN DETROIT Mrs. Subelsky attended Schultz Elementary School in the northwest part of the city.

"Growing up, I'd go over to my friends' homes and soon I realized my parents were different," she says. "My mother and father spoke broken English, but mostly they stuck to Yiddish. They had those blue numbers tattooed on their forearms, and they were older than parents of my schoolmates."

"If it rained, my mother would be anxious about me and come to get me at school. I recall teachers saying, 'Your grandmother is here. And I didn't have grandparents or other relatives either.'"

As she matured, Mrs. Subelsky realized the difficulties her parents had faced and the obstacles overcome when they immigrated to a strange new country to begin all over.

"My father came here with nothing and, knowing no one, built a good business and made a life," she says.

The Hornungs have three other children, a son who

lives in Israel with his wife and two daughters; and a pair of twins, 29.

Mrs. Subelsky is married to Mark, also a native Detroit. They live in Southfield with Shana and a son, Jason, 10.

"About five or six years ago, I began to dwell on the horrors my parents had been through," she said. "I thought about how I could show them I understood even though their experiences had always been a taboo subject."

A CONTEMPLATIVE loner who likes to sit and record her thoughts on paper, she began to write about her feelings as a child of Holocaust survivors.

"After a while, it began to fall in place, to come out in a kind of order — in poetry," she says. "One day, I read my poetry to my parents and we all cried together."

Since then, she has written other poems, but always on the subject of the Holocaust. One called "Holocaust Lament: A Hanuka Thanks" was published in a local newspaper.

"I think about my childhood a great deal," she says. "About how my parents always stressed education and got along with limited wardrobes and no help in the house."

At age 8, she recalls her parents started her on classical piano lessons the cost of which required a sacrifice on their parts.

"For a long time, I just thought about these things, but now I write my poetry and I also belong to Children of the Holocaust, a group of people like me whose parents survived," she explained.

Mrs. Subelsky has shared her poems with members of the Holocaust survivors' group who understand it in a way that others cannot, she says.

"WE TALK about relating to our parents, about the future generations and about being on guard so that it can never happen again," she explains.

The Subelsky children are being educated at Beth Yehudah School in Southfield and are learning Orthodox values.

"Jason and Shana are getting a phenomenal education," she says. "Everyone knows everyone else at the school and they care, too. They're learning a lot about their Jewish heritage."

Questioned about what the Holocaust was, 10-year-old Jason responds: "It was the Germans fighting and killing Jewish people for I don't know what reason."

Mrs. Subelsky's poems question also. They question why a youngster should grow up without grandparents to love and why unknown persons "blindly fed puppets with a Swastika sign," should have harmed her family.

Of the six million who died, her writing points out that "There are six million more, who have died, inside."

echo park school

Learning at Echo Park means small classes where individual needs are easily met, and children are accepted at their own level of development; where they are encouraged to be curious and creative in an atmosphere of freedom within a rich natural environment with special grounds, well equipped playground and where nature and science will still be an important part of our curriculum. We are happy to announce our present plans include expanding through the 5th grade.

• KINDERGARTEN • FIRST AND SECOND GRADE
• PRE-SCHOOL • MOTHER-TODDLER

GROW WITH US!

We plan to add a grade each year.

32220 FRANKLIN ROAD
Just S. of 14 Mile Road in Franklin Village
PHONE 851-1866