

By JIM STINGLEY
(Staff Writer)

You hear Chuck Mitchell once and you have to go back a second night — just to convince yourself that the young man performs and sings as delightfully as he really does.

The second time you hear him, you are struck with two questions: 1. Why is he on the coffee house circuit? and 2. Why isn't he stepping the legitimate theater's musical stages?

Mitchell, who closes a 30-day booking July 31 at The Flick, 5813 Ponce de Leon Blvd., Coral Gables, answers the questions thusly:

"First, the coffee house route is the last remaining circuit where you can air your act and possibly be seen by someone who counts in the entertainment business," he says.

"Theater? Well, I love it and I'm just hoping I can get to it soon."

Mitchell's act at The Flick leaves little doubt that the theater will be soon coming. He closes the show there and that's a hard enough trick, considering the polished performances handed down in front of him by Ron Kickasola, Barbara Christopher and satirist Mike Smith.

Lithe and as charmin' as Puck himself, the 30-year-old Detroit bachelor gives his audience that old time delight — a one-man show.

When he steps on stage, you get the feeling he's grinning down at you and saying, "This way, Mr. First-nighter!" and from that point on it's sample time of a delicious bag of entertainment candy.

It could be a dramatic number, such as Brecht-Weill's "Sailor's Tango," a song demanding both a theatrical and musical application. The audience is absorbed in this story of a sailor and his pride and of his ironic acceptance of death, once death has become inevitable. His boldness and

brashness dissolve within you when he utters, "Christ, I'm scared of the dark."

Then you are shaken back to laughter as Mitchell goes into a Flanders and Swann whimsical specialty "The Hippopotamus Song." And you join in the chorus "Mud, mud, glorious mud" as though some Pied Piper were tickling you along.

From there you are brought to a ballad or love song from any period of time — usually songs dealing in bittersweet realistics like your sweetheart's leaving and you don't care (but you really do.)

Then Mitchell playfully jolts you away from those thoughts with a randy-dandy patter of Ragtime ("I keep ragtime in my bag because it's a challenge — It's one of the almost purely American musical forms allowing rhythmic improvisation but requiring a great deal of discipline").

By now, you are aware of what sort of show Chuck Mitchell presents. And there is more. He performs an accompanied recitation of 16th century poet John Donne's "Song," and does many, many other classical bits of drama, love and humor.

Mitchell, who has his MA in English Lit and is a Korean War veteran who wrote for Stars and Stripes, puts it this way:

"There are certain songs that demand the audience watch me. There are others where the audience and I must be together. Most important is tailoring yourself to the audience and being honest to them and to yourself. I do so many different things because I am involved with them and believe they play an important part of my life.

"I try to achieve a level of competence," he says, "and go up from there. But never below it."

Must unusual about Mitchell is his singing experience. He and a guitar and a song and an audience first became acquainted only four years ago, when he began singing in De-

troit bars on weekends away from his job with the Ford Foundation. At that point he was working on "The Great Cities Project," a Foundation probe into the problems of educating lower class children.

His first job on the singing circuit was in Toronto, just three years ago. He had done modeling, some television acting and played in a summer stock run of "The Rose Tattoo" with Viveca Lindfors and directed by Lloyd Richards.

Today, Mitchell has played every major coffee house in the Eastern United States and all of Canada. Critics love him because he brings in a fresh breath to what has been termed "declining structures called coffee houses."

His popularity has caught him up in the eyes of many important show people who have large plans for the Mitchell personality.

There's another thing that must be said about young Mitchell's performance. He doesn't just stand in front of a mike and sing. The lad is alive on stage, using movement and expression to make each song he sings more real.

And there's something that sort of takes him into your heart when, after an act of drama and laughter, of ragtime and randy, Chuck closes with the lights lowered and the simple, truthful song called, "Let's Get Together."

The handsome performer leaves the stage and minstrels his way smoothly and quietly through the audience and then exits. His voice handles the lyrics in a strong, but tender manner. One of the verses goes:

"Soldiers die and empires fall, and you my friend will pass. When the one who left us here, returns for us at last. We are but a moment's sunlight, fading on the grass. So, come on people, smile on your brother. Everybody get together and love one another."

And that's part of what Chuck Mitchell's made of.