



Joni Mitchell's 'Mingus'— a change into something rich and strange

GG records

JONI Mitchell's 'Mingus' (Asylum SE-565) is not only the most important record she has made, it also marks a significant crossover.

The album is the result of melodies written for Joni by the great bassist Charlie Mingus, who died last January, aged 56. Mingus wanted Joni to write and sing the lyrics on a collaborative album but he died before he could hear the final product.

It might at first seem an unlikely combination of the black jazzman, burning with racial anger, and the white middle class pop-folk singer. But Mingus always had reached toward new boundaries; Joni has developed a close rapport with jazz and her lyrics are often more social poetry than pop words.

NEW NOTES By MIKE DALY

The musicians on Mingus represent the new jazz generation and are mostly familiar on Joni Mitchell albums: Jaco Pastorius (bass), Wayne Shorter (soprano sax) and Peter Erskine (drums) of Weather Report, plus Herbie Hancock (electric piano), Don Alias (congas) and Emil Richards (percussion).

There are six melodies, plus some 'rap' sessions recorded earlier with Mingus and friends. Two tracks are Joni's compositions. The first, 'God Must Be A Boogie Man', is a wry tribute to Mingus that contains some harsh comment: "Blind faith to care / Blind rage to kill..."

Joni's sharp acoustic guitar chords punctuate the free-swinging refrain of vocals and Jaco's mournful bass.

A Chair In The Sky is a slow, bluesy Mingus ballad, in which Joni's voice and Shorter's sax blend at times in uncanny unison.

The Wolf That Lives In Lindsey is another all-Joni track, complete with gongs and wolves eerily howling.

Sweet Sucker Dance swings along with the merest brush of percussion as Joni lifts through the airy melody, using her voice in what might have been a horn lead, scating at times. The rhythm hardens as the track progresses.

The Dry Cleaner From Des Moines has a rocking Caribbean pace, driven appropriately by Pastorius's bass. He arranged the dynamic brass sections. Over the top come Joni's voice and Shorter's sax, singing together.

Goodbye Pork Pie Hat is Mingus' memorable blues tribute to Lester Young. Here it is a free-swinging, slowly rhythmic tribute to both jazzmen, with piano, bass, percussion and breathy sax — an atmospheric setting for Joni's lyrics.

'Mingus' should appeal to fans of Joni Mitchell, Weather Report and Mingus himself, perhaps they now belong to the one group. Mingus influenced a significant number of musicians. Jino Mitchell may remember among them. As she told an interviewer recently:

"After this, rock'n'roll is like a melonoma."

WARREN Vache's 'Jill' (Concord CJ-47) is mellow mainstream, warmed by his cornet and flugelhorn, with easy guitar from Cal Collins. Marshall Royal's alto sax, Nat Pierce (piano), Phil Flanigan (bass), and Jake Hanna (drums).

The familiar run of cool standards includes Cole Porter's 'It's All Right With Me', 'S Wonderful', by the Gershwins and Sammy Cahn's 'It's You Or No One'.

Vache wrote the title track — a bossa ballad — for his wife Jill. He burns hottest on the last number, 'Too Close For Comfort', moving through bottom to top gear for a forceful finale.

YOU'll find 'Cal Collins In San Francisco' (Concord CJ-71), along with Monty Budwig (bass) and Jeff Hamilton (drums).

The pace is more varied than on his sessions with Warren Vache. Singing top runs on three Miles Davis numbers — 'Blue Haze', 'Miles Theme' and 'So What' — show his taste for meatier tempi and help to explain the 'Cincinnati Kid' title he earned at last year's Concord jazz festival, when he came up against the cream of jazz guitar talent.

He tosses off a light but convincing Blues Prelude but Laura, that over-recorded though still beautiful theme, is the result of Collins' performance. His supple fingers brush away the cobwebs,

leaving a precious, shiny gem of a ballad.

MARSHALL Royal's restrained playing with Warren Vache leaves one unprepared for his impressive 'First Chair' (Concord CJ-88).

The alto sax lead is backed by Collins, Pierce, Budwig and Hanna on eight superb tracks dominated by Royal's richly lyrical playing.

With unobtrusive bass and guitar, he solos through 'Little Girl Blue', demonstrating just how thoroughly the 'First Chair' title has been earned. The reference is, of course, to Royal's 20 years with the Count Basie Band.

"I just wanted a little, intimate, decent sound," says Royal — modesty from an elegant, expressive jazz musician.

ANOTHER musician to whom the term "elegant" could be applied is guitarist Laurindo Almeida, who performs in Melbourne next month (August 4 and 7 at Dallas Brooks Hall).

A foretaste is provided in Almeida's 'Chamber Jazz' (Concord CJ-84), a trio album with Jeff Hamilton (drums) and Bob Magnusson, whose amplified double bass achieves a horn sound at times with its sustained and merging notes.

The mixture of classical and Latin American themes, from Bach, Debussy and Chopin to Ernesto Nazareth, is an example of performing artistry and subtle arrangements.

A personal quibble is the dominance of Latin rhythms, especially when Almeida changes horses, mid-stream, switching from classical to the earther

rhythm. I find this musical schizophrenia slightly irritating, but realise that many find it appealing.

THE Melbourne Contemporary Jazz Art Duo is the worthy title adopted by pianist Tony Gould and Keith Hounslow (cornet, flugelhorn). They have contracted it to McJAD on their debut album 'Introducing McJAD' (AIJA001) which is a communal production, the first by Australian Independent Jazz Artists. Next up will be Brian Brown's quintet.

Each of the five tracks was a spontaneous improvisation recorded at first take. The blues is a constant theme but the most distinctive features are Houston's pungent stop-choruses and Gould's staccato chording.

This album will interest many jazz lovers and is a healthy break with conformist recordings.

BRIEFLY, 'Barbara Thompson's Jubilee' (MCA MAPS 9072) is a funky album from a dynamic British band, led by Barbara Thompson on reeds and flute, and including jazz veteran Bill Le Sage on vibes.

The music is African-influenced, with percussion prominent. Highly recommended.

'Morning Dance' (MCA INF 504) is by a delightful new group called Spyro Gyra. The album calls on the talents of several top US session men, including guitarist John Tropa. But appears to be led by Jay Beckenstein (sax).

The title track is the catchiest and, with radio exposure, could become a popular instrumental single. Per-



'Charlie Down In Mexico'. Joni Mitchell's painting of the jazz bassist, who died last January. The picture appears on the back cover of 'Mingus' — a new album by Joni Mitchell with her words and Mingus' music.

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Marshall Royal: US alto saxophonist earns his 'First Chair' with lyrical playing.