



A DIFFERENT POINT OF VIEW

wrote some music that had no easily discernible beat.

Joni Mitchell has often stretched the borders of her chosen idiom, rock, with mixed results. A year and a half before Mingus died last January (of Lou Gehrig's Disease) he asked Mitchell to write lyrics for some of his melodies. The album resulting from this collaboration signals the arrival of a confident jazz singer whose tribute to Mingus is both spirited and moving.

Mitchell's interest in jazz was apparent in the earlier *Hissing Of Summer Lawns* album. Her skill in handling horns and keyboards added up to more than a novice's flirtation with jazz techniques. *Edith and the Kingpin*, from that album, is beautifully balanced, with long, sustained horn tones and a vocal line incorporating many of the stylistic devices of jazz singers like Carmen McRae. Now, with *Mingus*, Mitchell has freed herself from the often restricting rock beat. *The Wolf That Lives in Lindsey* is interesting largely because of the rhythmic flexibility, which adds a fine dramatic element to this story about "The darkness in men's hearts." The wolf calls in the background function as effective ostinato patterns. They are not just some obvious, tricky sound effects.

The real surprise about this album is the natural quality of the lyrics, which seldom sound like they were added "after the fact." Often the words are disarming in their references to Mingus the man — "...One that keeps trying to trust and getting himself betrayed...God must

be a boogie man." "Manhattan holds me to a chair in the sky, with the Bird in my ears and boats in my eyes — goin' by." This is Mingus the dying man, without a trace of the lyricist's pity. (Charlie "Bird" Parker, the great saxophonist, influenced Mingus). The only trite lines — "Next time I'll be bigger, I'll be better than ever. I'll be resurrected royal, I'll be rich as Standard Oil" — reflect a struggle to fit words to awkward melodic lines.

The instrumental backing on *Mingus* is exceptional. In *The Dry Cleaner From Des Moines*, the explosive horn section really swings. Wayne Shorter's sax and Jaco Pastorius' bass guitar at the end of *Sweet Sucker Dance* should convince most skeptics about the authenticity of this jazz venture.

The last Mitchell album was *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter*, which often sounded incoherent. It hardly rated *People* magazine's Worst Record of the Year Award, however. *People's* "geniuses" often seem to be chosen for their gaudy life-styles.

Joni Mitchell has taken a step that few rock artists ever have the courage or inclination to take. More often singers and composers step backwards, like Paul McCartney with his "silly love songs," uncomfortable to those of us who admired his innovations with the Beatles. Mitchell moves on.

Robert Ellis is a classical and popular pianist and composer who lives in Ouray. He recently performed as soloist with the Aspen Community Chamber Orchestra.

EDITOR'S NOTE: After putting up with Dave Marsh's opinion in the *Rolling Stone* Album Review column for just about two years, it's time we let someone else voice their opinion. If you would like to share your views with other music lovers, send them to *Entertainer* Editor, Box 668, Grand Junction, 81502.

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Mingus — Joni Mitchell (Asylum Records)

Charles Mingus was an unusual jazz bassist and composer, a little restless artistically and not inclined to deliver perfunctory jazz improvisations. He experimented with rhythmic surprises such as breaks and stop-times, and he