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PLAYER & LISTENER

No. 20 Sept.-Oct. 1979 $1.25

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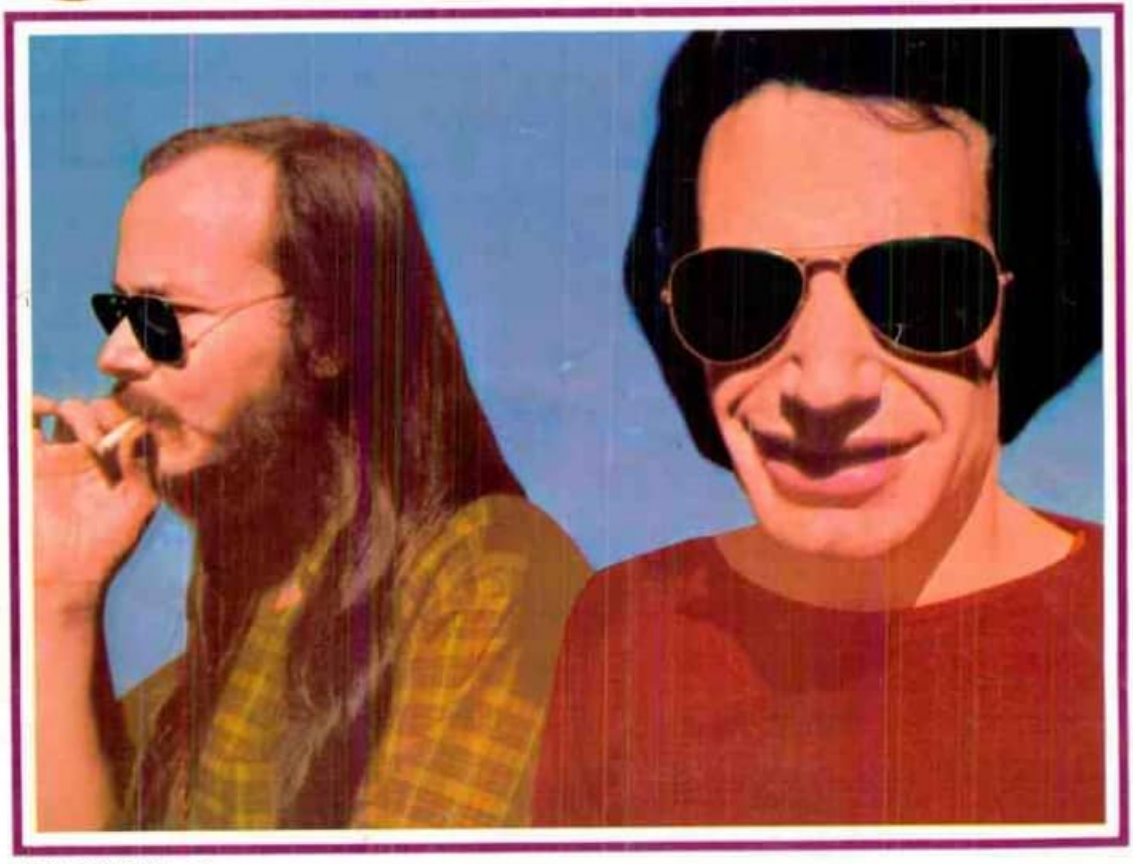
Living in the Studio

STEELY DAN



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NO. 20, SEPT.-OCT. 1979

Steely Dan is the most advanced and creative rock band of the seventies. In a rare interview, Jon Pareles asks Becker and Fagen about their songwriting, recording methods, jazz influences, early history and more. Producer Gary Katz sits in.

Living in the Studio isn't easy. You've got to be on-time, in-time, at the right time all the time. Session-guitarist David Spinozza and pianist Clifford Carter talk about what it takes to get in and stay in.

Making It is never easy, but there's a lot of very simple things you should know about the record business and how it works to make it easier. Miles Lourie and Karin Berg interviewed; John Leopard reports.

Table of Contents

Columns & Departments

Features

Studios

Cover Photo By Deborah Feingold

RECORDS

Robert Fripp — *Exposure*, Polydor PD-1-6201

Fripp, like Eno, is committed to new music using an electronic medium, but their approach is an intuitive triumph of humanism over technology.

Exposure is an idiosyncratic rock masterpiece, an aural collage and musical puzzle pockmarked with black holes of pain and mystery than can engulf interpretation. Yet *Exposure* is amply endowed with the vestments of mass appeal as Fripp balances his incurably arty tendencies with personal transfigurations of rock music. Fripp is trying to define a new genre: informed by the new wave's elliptical irony and primitive emotional directness; conversant in the various streams of contemporary experimental music; reconciling the formal aspirations of art rock with the chain-saw textures of heavy metal. Fripp's heavy metal dances are more in the spirit of Jimi Hendrix, Cream and John McLaughlin's Mahavishnu Orchestra than that of Ted Nugent and Van Halen, but his music indulges in neither bloated virtuosity nor loutish, jism-headed sexism. Fripp eschews the role of soloist as individuality gives way to a group concept; Fripp orchestrates and channels the talents of his collaborators, unearthing heretofore unknown veins of gold in drummer Michael Walden and vocalist Daryl Hall, and providing suitable settings for singers Peter Hammill and Terre Roche; Fripp's guitar is employed as conceptual glue in the tightly composed songs, and his textural flourishes (like the skysaw guitar on "Chicago" and the oceanic Frippertronics motifs that occur throughout tne album) can be likened to Les Paul's earlier developments in electronics. The lyrics of Fripp and poetess-therapist Joanna Walton portray people in a state of extremis and entropy — there is an overwhelming sense of mass psychosis. Odd-metered power chord excursions represent the manic constraints of society, while bittersweet ballads release tension and illustrate the transience of relationships. Fripp's aural cut-up techniques might put-off listeners, but there are enough musical peaks (like Terre Roche's tsamuri feminist war whoops on the disco-mysterioso title tune, and the sheer terror of "NY3") on *Exposure* to offer hope for alternative directions in rock. —*Chip Stern*

Philip Glass — *Einstein on the Beach*, Tomato 101.

The more I listen to this music the more I begin to enjoy it and the less important my reservations become — and I have a bundle of them. Repetition-music seems drastically impoverished compared to its roots in Bali *mantra* and *dhikr*, as if the thinking mind alone were trying to do the work of mind, heart, body, blood, spirit, soul and flesh, a foolish reduction of vitality to a principle, of a forest to a jail. It also seems silly for a creative musician to spend more than a year of his creative life composing it. John Cage had the right idea when he started it going in the forties and then forgot about it, Stockhausen was smart to have no more than chance meetings with it, jazz was too thoroughly alive to have any need of it — so what if classical music doesn't know what to do after Webern — and no one ever paid any attention to Lamonte Young, who did the most to establish it as an ongoing style.

And yet, and yet, here it is again. Ten years after the civilized world discovered and then abandoned Terry Riley, here it is again, first Steve Reich's dessicated *Music for 18 Musicians* on ECM and now two releases from Tomato, the four record complete set of the full *Einstein* score and the one record sample reviewed here. I can recommend the sampler more or less without reservation. It's full of vitality and major triads, has as much sheer velocity as anything on record and there are enough echoes of Bach and other polyphonists to keep the body warm (heavily systematized music always works best when its emotional roots are sunk in the sacred memory of another idiom). The electronic keyboards are loud, onrushing and fundamental; the reed textures are intriguingly varied within the restrictive s[illegible] of the cycles; and the vocalists, narrators excepted, sing numbers or the syllables of *solfeggio*. I'm interested by this music, and I stay interested even though I'm only partially satisfied by it. I'm sorry I missed *Einstein's* stage production, a four hour extravaganza that toured Europe extensively, but only played for two nights in America. No doubt plans for a revival are afoot now that the music has been released and is in vogue. I'll catch it if I can.

As for some of the more pretentious claims made for this music, that it induces trance for instance, or imprints its patterns on the neurons of the brain and stimulates unsuspected centers of pleasure, Glass himself has best answered them by pointing out that Western music has usually been based upon the creation and satisfaction of expectation and desire. Once that mechanism is dispensed with, the listener is eased out into unfamiliar terrain. Occasionally something new will happen to him there. To call it trance is to say that one has to take refuge from the unexpected in the exotic. One does not. — *Rafi Zabor*

Woody Shaw — *Woody III*, Columbia JC 35977.

Woody Shaw, cornet, flugelhorn; Carter Jefferson, Rene McLean, James Spaulding, reeds; Steve Turre, Curtis Fuller, trombones; Onaje Allen Gumbs, George Cables, piano; Clint Houston, Buster Williams, bass; Victor Lewis, drums; and others.

Once again Woody Shaw, the stellar, young brass artist, takes his stand, and delivers a superlative modern jazz recording. In spirit, synthesis and execution, *Woody III* is undeniably first class. The tunes are inviting and sparkling and the blowing is of the highest order, as one would expect with giants like Shaw, Fuller, Gumbs, Cables and Jefferson participating. Overall, a very well balanced program that reveals clearly the state of the art in today's music.

A three-part suite, "Woody I, II, and

III," is side one. Using a larger 11-piece band, Shaw's writing is direct yet intricate and he employs the outside instruments, the flutes and bass trombone, to advantage. "Woody I" has a chant-like melody that rests on a two-part foundation: a swing section and a freer, suspended portion. Shaw's cornet unleashes a zesty, ringing sound with notes that sail through the air like small golden disks. In a double-time passage, his outpouring resembles a flurry of bubbles, bouncing off each other but always rising. Carter Jefferson's solo shows him to be a more authoritative and eloquent spokesman on each new outing. "Woody II" has a tense theme, like rush-hour traffic that resolves into Williams's sinewy bass solo, with its jabbing, punchy phrases. Woody reveals his continued affection for Coltrane and we welcome the biting sound of Spaulding in some fleet moments. Turre is facile and strongly on the beat. "Woody III" is a ballad, with a pastoral opening of flugelhorn, piano and bass, then additions of bass trombone and flutes lending a delightful openness. Shaw's sound here is cozy and full.

The other side has a soaring blues that singles out, really doubles out, altoists McLean and Spaulding; a beautiful quartet work, "Organ Grinder," with George Cables, that you'll want to play again and again; and a live rendition of the 32 bar, two-chord opus based on "So What." Jefferson and Shaw simply on fire this time. What a band!

The liner notes are by Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones) and they're as together as this date. Check it out. — *z.s.*

Joni Mitchell *Mingus*, Asylum 5E-505
Joni Mitchell, guitar & vocals; Jaco Pastorius, bass guitar; Wayne Shorter, soprano sax; Herbie Hancock, electric piano; Peter Erskine, drums; Don Alias, congas; Emil Richards, percussion; Wolves, background vocals.

The qualities we would associate with Charles Mingus and Joni Mitchell are present only by inference on *Mingus*. Mingus was thinking more like a collaborator than a leader. Mitchell also had never taken a collaborator before, and she was obviously honored and humbled to work with the legendary bassist-composer. This degree of respect and homage is evident throughout *Mingus*. Her paintings point to a master-apprentice, father-daughter relationship; she depicts Mingus as a Zeus-like figure glaring down from the clouds and as a warm, cuddly, teddy-bear (which is slightly misleading — Mingus was a grizzly bear not averse to expressions of rage and violence). But there is a sense of pain and striving to *Mingus* as if Mitchell knew that she wasn't quite able to realize the grand expectations of their project.

On the musical level, Joni Mitchell presented Mingus with a conceptual challenge. Her music had orignally been built on a pedal-point — those droning, raga-ish guitar chords — over which she'd modulate in a conversational vibrato. Since *Court and Spark* Mitchell has pursued a jazz direction, her vibrato becoming less pronounced. The spacious melodies that Mingus wrote for Mitchell challenge her to modulate in a more scalar, linear manner, to make greater use of dynamics, and to evolve a floating, more spontaneous style of phrasing. Mitchell, for her part, was concerned with finding a comfortable vehicle for their collaborations ("*My* version of jazz" as she put it in *Rolling Stone*), and she disposed of earlier sessions before finally teaming up with Herbie Hancock, Jaco Pastorius, Wayne Shorter and Peter Erskine.

As a result, the music doesn't work as a Mingus album *or* a Mitchell album, but sounds more like Weather Report with a vocalist. Like those of early Weather Report ("Waterfall" and "Tears"), the harmonies and melodies are interchangeable; washes of electric piano, globular soprano saxophone obligatos, conversational electric bass, and a rotating percussive backbeat alternate as the main focus or combine into one elongated group melody. Mitchell's rhythm section is cannily protective and understated on the atmospheric ballads ("A Chair in the Sky," "Sweet Sucker Dance," and "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat"),

particularly bassist Pastorius who provides a constant stream of counterpoint (sometimes suggesting a funkified version of Mingus's characteristic rhythms of six against four), and covers up for Mitchell's lapses of time and pitch. Mitchell sings with a mentholated lyricism, strolling way behind the beat, then swelling and purring in a manner that indicates close scrutiny of Miles Davis (like the long cry that precedes the final chorus in "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat"); and though she can't touch their vocal virtuosity, at several moments she suggests the slurring quality of Betty Carter and the octave dips of Sarah Vaughn. Mitchell seems most comfortable on "The Dry Cleaner From Des Moines," a punchy, brass-inflected chart; Mingus's blues melodies elicit bold elliptical leaps from her voice and force her to dig in hard rhythmically.

"Maybe I've never really loved/I guess that is the truth/I've spent my whole life in clouds at icy altitudes/And looking down on everything," Mitchell once sang. Moving from seduction to seduction, relationship to relationship, Mitchell would detail her own experiences and impressions, keeping her freedom to act as an observer. Thrust from first person narratives to third person panegyrics, and compelled to follow the contours of Mingus's melodies and rhythms, Mitchell's lyrics are far from profound. "Sweet Sucker Dance" reveals something of the tension Mitchell felt in working with Mingus; "A Chair in the Sky" is an empathetic portrait of Mingus's final days; and their brief vocal duet on "I's a 'Muggin" is a snippet of what might have been. But she tends to idealize Mingus, who was a compulsive, explosive personality — anyone who had followed Mingus over a long period of time would've witnessed incidents on the bandstand that preclude romanticizing him. Mingus was a giant, warts and all. He never did anything halfway — if he made a fool of himself, he made a damned fool of himself. In other words, Mitchell doesn't deal with the dark side of Mingus's nature, and her perceptions of him (and jazz) on "God Must Be a Boogie Man" and "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat" are epitomized by her affected pronunciation of 'music maaan' on the later (shades of 'jewellllls' on "For Free"). The tolling chorus of wolves on Mitchell's dirge "The Wolf That Lives In Lindsey," with its imagery of life as a storm without moral judgments and justice, comes closest to evoking a real sense of loss, more so than the intrusive tape excerpts of Mingus's voice.

How well Mitchell's over sentimentalized but sincere efforts will appeal to her audience, or Mingus's, I can't guess, and I'm not placing any bets on how well, if at all, she'll be able to carry it off in concert. Yet the fact that *Mingus* is closer to Weather Report than to Mitchell or Mingus, and that some of it is a failure doesn't really matter. What's important here is that Mitchell has put her reputation on the line to bring a sense of Mingus to a larger audience, and has disregarded safe formulas in favor of artistic growth. I suspect that Mingus must be pleased by the nerve that Joni Mitchell has shown in swimming the currents of his thought before she could even tread water. — *Chip Stern*

Barry Altschul — *Another Time/Another Place*, Muse MR 5176. *Barry Altschul, drums; Arthur Blythe, alto sax; Ray Anderson, trombone; Anthony Davis, piano; Brian Smith, Dave Holland, bass; Abdul Wadud, Peter Warren, cello; Bill DeArango, guitar.*

This very intelligently organized album has kept me listening to it for the last couple of months. It features four dissimilar pieces for four different ensembles and one brief drum feature for Altschul. The most completely realized piece on the date, and the one to which I listen most frequently, is Anthony Davis' "Crepescule: Suite for Monk," which makes fresh use of a number of Monk tunes and to my mind is more successful than anything on Heiner Stadtler's more ambitious but also more academic *Tribute to Monk and Bird* of last year. "Crepescule's" most impressive moment comes with the use of "Epistrophy" as an attenuated background figure behind fast rhythms — it sounds gigantic, saurian, fundamental — and there is also some excellent alto work from Blythe, who appears only on this cut, and a brilliant solo from Davis, who continues to evolve into one of the giants of the coming decade. The second piece on the album is Davis' ethereal "Chael," a trio for Davis, Altschul and Wadud. It seems to break down about two thirds of the way through after a reprise of the main theme, but since it seems to improve with each hearing and to grow more articulate, more poised, more concise, I'm willing to give it another few months before I make up my mind for sure.

Holland has contributed the long "Pentacle" for two celli, two basses and percussion. The percussion seems inessential and the piece only comes clear about halfway through, when it forsakes dissonance for modality and Holland comes forward for a solo, but once again it's a piece I keep coming back to, because it's so ambitious and accomplished. It's also something I'd like a chance to hear live. The album concludes with a cut featuring the allegedly "working" quartet of Altschul, Smith, Anderson and Davis: good con-

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