

muz-hack / Joni Mitchell Charles Mingus Mingus

by David O'Flaherty

Charles Mingus is a late, great, jazz bassist who recently died of cancer. But before he died, he collaborated with Joni Mitchell for a final statement. Perhaps his worth can be summed up with a quote from the album's inner cover. "Charles Mingus, a musical mystic, died in Mexico, January 5, 1979, at the age of 56. He was cremated the next day. The same day, 56 sperm whales beached themselves on the Mexican coastline and were removed by fire. These are coincidences that thrill my imagination."

In an attempt to preserve Mingus' character, Mitchell has interspersed personal tapes of Mingus in informal set-

tings. Those used on side one add little effect to the music and are hard to decipher in the party-like atmosphere.

The first song on the album is Mitchell's "God must be a Boogie Man," a poke at the almighty God and the cruel joke he played on his only begotten son, Jesus. The music is in a spacey, 1940's jazz club style, as is most of the album. There are a few strange guitar-knocking string banging accents, some which work and some which are annoying. Featured on this song is a great solo by bassist Jaco Pastorius (Weather Report).

"Chair in the Sky" is a Mingus tune with lyrics by Mitchell about a slowly dying Mingus, retrospectively in a Manhattan apartment.

Saxophonist Wayne Shorter (Weather Report) plays short and tasty, giving character to the lines of the lyrics. An example is when Joni sings, "I'll be resurrected royal, I'll be rich as Standard Oil," followed by a sarcastically bitter laugh from Shorter's Sax. Herbie Hancock plays magnificently on this cut, as he does the whole album.

Mitchell's "The Wolf That Lives in Lindsey" is a rather annoying tune, with Joni un-tuning her low E string obnoxiously and repetitively banging the hell out of it. There's subtle, but effective, percussion and effective use of wolf howls, but Mitchell's guitar playing ruins the song. It is unfortunate for the lyrics of this tune are most engaging.

Mingus' only real appearance on the album is "I's a Muggin'," a five second long scat duet. Following this on side two is "Sweet Sucker Dance" by Mingus and Mitchell which switches from a

slow to uptempo swing. Shorter once again puts in some more tasty tasty licks, but Joni is too reserved on her scat vocals and Pastorius plays strangely, almost out of style at times.

The best song on the album is a funky modified blues called "The Dry Cleaner from Des Moines," a comical piece about a big winner in a slot machine paradise. Pastorius (who wrote a tight, piercing horn arrangement) is right at home on this uptempo piece. Shorter throws in some nice bop-like solos. Mitchell's singing is prime on this tune and she should scat like she belts this one out.

The album closes with Mingus' classic "Goodbye Pork-Pie Hat" (done by Jeff Beck among others) and lyrics by Mitchell. The words tell of the teaming up of Mingus and Lester Young and the prejudice the black man met in the bandstand days. The song flows well and Joni loosens up

a bit on scat, but not enough.

"Not enough" is the key phrase here. Mitchell's in a bit over her head on this album, trying to direct jazz greats in their own field. The album's a little too mellow and despite some moments, there's a sense of discomfort on the part of the players. Joni's not exactly a hot guitarist or a great scat singer (although not a bad artist), but she could do better in this direction with more practice and experimentation. It's not a classic in jazz, but at least she dove right into the world of jazz, which takes talent and a touch of courage.

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Stones have just about finished their new one, it should be out before Christmas... the Grateful Dead are recording in San Francisco with Gary Lyons producing. Lyons has worked with Foreigner and Wet Willie in the past and has just finished producing the new album from Aerosmith.

In the next few weeks look for new albums from the Eagles, "The Long Run"... Blondie, "Eat to the Beat"... Barry Manilow, "One Voice"... Angela Boffill, "Angel of the Night"... Elton John, "Victim of Love"... Ian Matthews... Rick Derringer... ELP, "In Concert"... The Outlaws... Melissa Manchester... Joe Jackson, "I'm the Man"... the Police, "Regatta De Blanc"... Sly and the Family Stone, "Back on the Track"... and Nicolette Larson, "In the Nick of Time".

Thanks to the Sampler on ICB-FM for information.

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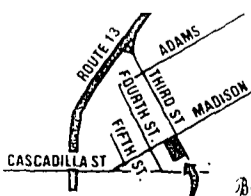
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