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to be kept secret.

— Thomas Sabulis

Joni Mitchell Mingus Asylum

Her intent was pure; i.e., to pay homage to a prolific trail blazer, Charles Mingus, who died earlier this year. Although hardly a jazz dilettante, Joni Mitchell seems to have waded into this specially composed music until she was in over her head. An excellent pop singer,

she is no match for the Betty Carters or Sarah Vaughans of the jazz genre and she demonstrates that deficiency here. Her performance is mannered, overly respectful and the vocals set to Mingus' unorthodox flights of fancy just don't wash. Give her high marks for assembling topflight jazz musicians for the session — Jaco Pastorius, Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock, Peter Erskine, Don Alias, Emil Richards and real howling wolves, a breed also employed by Paul Winter. "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat," ironically Mingus' tribute to saxophonist Lester Young, partially redeems the album, thanks to a worthy attempt at lyricizing by Mitchell ("When Charlie speaks of Lester/You know someone great has gone/The sweetest swinging music/Had a Porkie Pig hat on . . ."). The most salable items in the album, however, are the recorded excerpts from informal dialogues between Mingus and Mitchell and studio hijinks. There's a ribald response by the composer to the question, "How old are you?" interpolated in "Happy Birthday" sung by his wife and fellow musicians, a duet with Mitchell on the '30s novelty, "I'se a Muggin'," and brief, solemn observations by the bass player. It was a nice try.

— *Ernie Santosuosso*

Mary McCaslin
Sunny California
Mingus

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