

RECORDS

Joni Mitchell salutes Mingus with fine album

BY GUS WALKER

Joni Mitchell, Mingus (Asylum 5E-505)

The album carries the following information: "Charlie Mingus died in Mexico, January 5, 1979, at age 56. He was cremated the next day. That same day 56 sperm whales beached themselves on the Mexican coastline and were removed by fire."

This reviewer knows nothing about the musical relationship between Charlie Mingus and Joni Mitchell. It must have been special though, because shortly before his death he wrote the music to six songs for her to record. She put lyrics to four of them, composed two more, and interspersed with bits of Mingus' recorded conversations they are her tribute to the late bassman.

The production is Miss Mitchell's jazziest to date and in true Mingus fashion the all-star accompaniment provides collective improvising rather than distinct melodies. Her backers include John McLaughlin, Herbie Hancock, Stanley Clark, Phil Woods, Jaco Pastorius, Gerry Mulligan, Jan Hammer and a chorus of wolves.

Miss Mitchell's vocals are icy and piercing throughout most of the album, warming occasionally for the bluesy *Sweet Sucker Dance* and *Goodbye Pork Pie Hat*, a tribute to the late Lester Young, and bouncing easily through the swinging *Dry Cleaner From Des Moines*.

Mingus heard her perform every song for the album except *God Must Be A Boogie Man*, which she wrote after reading the first four pages of Charlie's autobiography.

She was already awed by Mingus' talent, and the coincidence of his death and the beached whales moved her deeply.

She responded with an album that's really more than a tribute because it will bring a sampling of Charlie Mingus to a broader audience.

• • •

Neil Young & Crazy Horse, Rust Never Sleeps (Warner Bros. RS 2295)

Neil Young continues to prove he is perhaps THE worst singer in the rock business, this time with the soundtrack to a film documentary of his last tour. There is nothing in his new album to prove he is lyrically superior to others. The cleverest thing about it is that the music begins as folk rock and ends up new wave.

Along the way listeners are treated to some of the poorest songs Young has ever penned. *My My, Hey Hey*, just about sums up his lyrical prowess. *Thrasher* is a too-lengthy Ian Andersen/Bob Dylan take-off that takes a distant back seat to Jackson Browne's *Before The Deluge*. Young becomes the Junior Sample of rock and roll when he rhymes llama with Texarkana on *Ride My LLama*. Side one closes with *Sail Away*, his John Denver contribution.

Side two sports pure trash with *Welfare Mother* and *Sedan Delivery* beginning his punk/new wave sound. Finally, Young outdoes himself by reversing the title of the opening cut and giving us the profound message of *Hey Hey, My My*.

Why, a guy would have to be a fool to put together an album such as this!

• • •

Carole King, Touch The Sky (Capitol SWAK-11953)

This album was the result of Carole King's longing to record with musicians usually found backing Jerry Jeff Walker. When coincidence made it possible, she

went to Austin and Jerry Jeff went to great lengths to assure her the proper backing by Dave Perkins, Bobby Rambo, Leo LeBlanc and Ron Cobb to name a few.

Miss King, who helped blaze the trail for female composer/singers, wrote the material for this album with the aid of a guitar instead of her usual piano.

• • •

Willie Nelson and Leon Russell, One For The Road (Columbia KC 236064)

Leon and Willie may look like a couple of real scrounges on the cover of this album but the music they turn out is strictly first class.

Because both are gifted with the musical ability to transcend categorization, an album such as this could come into being. On cowboy songs, pop standards or rock and roll, the musical settings provided by Russell are appropriate for Nelson's vocal moods.

• • •

David Bennett Cohen, Rock 'N' Roll Guitar (Kicking Mule KM 153)

Kicking Mule, the label that features many exceptionally entertaining and instructional albums of folk, blues, ragtime and experimental guitar, gets in some rock licks with David Cohen's release.

Cohen's previous musical ventures include nine albums, two film scores, composing and performing music for stage presentations and being a member of two bands: Country Joe and the Fish and The Blues Project.

Few guitarists will become a Jeff Beck or Cheap Trick's Rick Neilson by simply listening to Cohen's instructions, but there's no doubt the record can serve as a basis for the intricacies of rock and blues playing.