

JAZZ

Mitchell's 'Mingus' moving

Joni Mitchell — "Mingus" (Asylum 5E-505)

The attention that has been drawn to this record is nothing short of phenomenal.

Joni Mitchell, after all, is not one of the really big guns on the pop music scene and her albums are far from monster hits. But *Mingus* is something special, and its release has been long awaited.

Like many people, I was more than surprised when I read about this project which joined together the gentle Canadian-born "folk" singer (perhaps best known for her composition "Both Sides Now"), and the angry jazz legend, Charles Mingus.

Mingus, stricken by an illness that had already debilitated him and would take his life before the record's release, approached Mitchell with this venture. The combination of the two was so unusual that interest in it just exploded.

The final product produces a mixed reaction. Generally, jazz critics have been kinder to the album than their rock counterparts. In fact, the album does not fall neatly into either category.

It is an interesting record that requires more than a simple, single listening. Yet it does not measure up as any kind of final monument to one of the great figures in jazz

As a package, *Mingus* is impressive. Mitchell's paintings that adorn the album are powerful, the snatches of Mingus' voice between the cuts are appropriate and the overall musicianship is of a high level.

Yet ultimately the album reflects Mitchell much more than Mingus. Its mood is easy and gentle, but the anger and sexuality, so much a part of Mingus, are missing.

Backing Mitchell's evocative voice and guitar playing on the released album, there are several members of the group Weather Report (most notably Jaco Pastorius on electric bass and Wayne Shorter on soprano sax) and electric pianist Herbie Hancock.

While Shorter has his moments in the records, the main instrumental voice, in addition to Mitchell's guitar, is Jaco's distinctive bass. Musically, the results are attractive yet more than a little lacking in the dynamic intensity so closely associated with Mingus' work.

MITCHELL WROTE the words to all of the six tunes, and the music to two of them.

Her "God Must Be a Boogie Man" which draws on Charlie's session with a psychiatrist reported in Mingus' strange book "Beneath the Underdog" is a highlight.

While Mitchell's music blends well with the Mingus pieces, the second side of the album, which features three Mingus compositions, is superior to side one, with its feeling of sameness.

"The Dry Cleaner From Des Moines" is the number with the most punch, augmented as it is

with horns. And the bluesy, Mingus standard "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat" is outstanding.

All in all, *Mingus* is an album of sophistication and one worth hearing. Its a project that Joni Mitchell should be proud of.

A final note: Prior to this date some experimental recordings with more conventional jazz instrumentation were made. It might be an interesting comparison if these recordings were to find their way onto record store shelves.

Charlie Mingus — "Passions of a Man (Atlantic SD 3-600)

Passions of a Man is the three-record anthology of Mingus' years at Atlantic Records. The set consists of re-issues from 1957, 1959, 1961, 1973, 1974 and 1977.

While many fans of the great, late bassist-composer will already own the songs in this collection, as an anthology it serves a useful purpose.

Of course, much of Mingus' outstanding work is found on other labels (Candid, Impulse and Columbia) and thus the Atlantic collection cannot be definitive.

Perhaps the major gap is the absence of any work by the Mingus Quartet featuring Eric Dolphy. But withing such limits, *Passions of a Man* offers a fine and varied collection of the work of one of the outstanding jazzmen of our time. No one could play Mingus like Mingus could.

—NORMAN PROVIZER