



Records in REVIEW

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Charles Mingus — **PASSIONS OF A MAN**
(Atlantic SD 3-600; three records)

Charles Mingus — **ME, MYSELF AN EYE**
(Atlantic SD 8803)

Joni Mitchell — **MINGUS** (Asylum 5E-505)

Bassist and jazz composer Charles Mingus died in January at 54 of Lou Gehrig's Disease. He is remembered well in these three albums.

None are for the casual listener, for Mingus was a musician's musician. His challenges on his audience were great. But even if you just pretend to understand his music, there are rewards to be had in each of these albums.

"Passions of a Man" is subtitled "An Anthology of His Atlantic Recordings." These are small-combo pieces. They show Mingus had moments of accessibility. Like Wisconsin weather, though, you just wait a short time and his works evolve into something entirely different, frothy and trying.

"Me, Myself and Eye" is chiefly ensemble music. Thirty-odd friends gathered with Mingus in the last year of his life and energetically recorded old and new works. Degree of difficulty: 9.6 out of 10.

The most dramatic of the albums is Joni Mitchell's. Don't expect anything anywhere near her sweetly folksy "Both Sides Now" of years past, for Mitchell is vastly changed — even from her intellectual albums of recent years.

In collaboration with Mingus (he the music, she the words), she has come up with an album which seems horrendous at first listen. But wait.

If you give it a chance, if you listen three, four times, there is much merit in it.

Her jazz singing is slow and deliberate. It is tough to latch on to meanings, and you do need background in what Mingus was about. Once the puzzle pieces fall together, you can savor what Mitchell accomplished.

Melancholy ("A Chair in the Sky") is mixed with droll humor ("The Dry Cleaner From Des Moines"). The range of thoughts and emotions touch many a base.

Also, there is a unique sound at times in the backup playing. It's a creamy, electronic thing that, frankly, you don't know whether it's a bass or a horn. But you do know it's distinctive and nifty.

Mitchell is going to lose lots of her old fans with "Mingus." Already intensely individualistic, she has moved on to higher climes to gain respect among a select company of serious listeners.

Her album is illustrated by four of her modern paintings. They are in keeping with the testing tone of the music.

Queen — **QUEEN LIVE KILLERS** (Elektra BB 702; two records)

On one hand, this album has all the spark, energy and drive of a live concert.

On the other, it shows that Queen live is quite different than Queen in the studio. Queen's faithful followers may be disappointed to discover some of the band's nifty embellishments (like creamy, big-scope choruses) are missing.

Live versions of "We Will Rock You," "Bicycle Race" and "Bohemian Rhapsody" are shadows of their studio selves.

Lead singer Freddie Mercury proves himself to be a top-rank rock vocalist, though.

Mitsuyo Nemoto and Keiko Masuda — **PINK LADY** (Elektra 6E-209)

Can Japanese disco idols Mie (Mitsuyo) and Kie (Keiko) make it in America? Maybe.

Their sound is certainly slick and catchy. Behind the gloss, though, you can tell their English is not so hot. But since when did the disco crowd listen to words?

"Pink Lady" is a fluffy frolic.

Emmylou Harris — **BLUE KENTUCKY GIRL** (Warner Brothers BSK 3318)

At times a "crossover" singer — blending country and pop — Emmylou Harris goes pure, standard country here.

The disc is filled with sweet sentiment, a country staple. While impressively performed, with Miss Harris in glowing form, the tunes may leave you sad.

Assisting are such pop-country notables as Linda Ronstadt, Dolly Parton, Tanya Tucker and Don Everly.

Spyro Gyra — **MORNING DANCE** (Infinity INF 9004)

On rare occasions, a jazz tune comes along that catches the mass audience's fancy. Such is the case with "Morning Dance," the joyful title cut that buoys Spyro Gyra's second album.

It is the spirited steel drum sound that gives the tune its special life. The effect comes from David Samuels, who is not a member of the band.

While other tunes on the disc do not reach the heights of "Morning Dance," they are pleasant and amiable. Jay Beckenstein's bright sax is featured throughout.