

Special Issue: Photographer Bruce Weber Goes Wild

Interview

May 2000

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Page 118 Charlize Theron, photographed with her cocker spaniel, Denver. Shirt and jeans by Helmut Lang.

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THE COVER: Paul Rudd and Moby the Japanese

golden koi photographed by Bruce Weber in New

York. Hair by Gerald DeCock for Artec Purehair.

Makeup by Gucci Westman for Artists by Timothy

Priano. Styling by Bill Mullen. Special thanks to

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by Prada.

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JONI MITCHELL BY INGRID SISCHY

A MAJOR COOL CAT—WITH FOUR FOUR-LEGGED COLLABORATORS

INGRID SISCHY: Your latest album includes several standards from the 1940s and '50s. Have you always liked music from that era?

JONI MITCHELL: Well, I never thought I'd get to participate in that music, but it is the music I grew up on. So I chose songs from that era.

IS: How did you ensure that the album wasn't merely an exercise in nostalgia?

JM: I wanted to make a record that was a kind of synopsis of what I like best in twentieth-century music, but I also wanted it to have an element of the modern. I wanted it to have a classical quality, but I also wanted it to be cutting-edge jazz.

IS: Did your decision to do this album now relate to how you feel about the current state of pop music?

JM: In a way, I'd gotten to the point where I didn't like anything on the radio. I hadn't really liked anything in the last twenty years, because in the '80s, when videos came along, the female began to be depicted basically as a hostile deadpan shrew in stiletto heels who wore black lipstick and ground men into the sidewalk. The early '80s was the most unromantic period ever in terms of music. Some may like it. Some even think it got realer, but I think it lost something. I'm a kind of realistic romantic, I guess, but I do believe in the good heart. Then Foreigner came out with "I Want to Know What Love Is," with a video that was quite different from the trend. I loved that song. Anyway, the business has changed so much and the feminine stance in song now doesn't interest me as much as some of the '40s and '50s women.

IS: What do you mean?

JM: Although a lot of the best-known songs from that era were written by men, the women who sang them tended to smile a little when they sang. That gave them a warm tone. They stood up in front of the bandstand and they were kind of decorative and they didn't talk much. They had a passive role in it, but that passive role had a grace and a dignity and a femininity and a warmth. But I do agree that a lot of the songs written for them

were woman-as-doormat songs.

IS: How did it feel to do an album mostly of other people's music?

JM: If I had written songs this time, I think I'd probably have written about how sick the culture is, and I didn't want to write that, I didn't want to hear that, I didn't want to sing that. So the writer in me blocked, out of necessity. I told my inner writer to shut up. I just wanted to be a singer. I wanted to borrow from Gil Evans and from Miles, who was always my major music beacon. Even though my music doesn't sound like that, it's very influenced by them. My father understood the difference. He said, "It's a beautiful record, Joan, but the saxophones didn't sound like that back then." I said, "I know they didn't."

IS: Though this album is of older music, it says something about contemporary romance. What exactly?

JM: I think that romance, at least as depicted in my industry, has gotten less and less considerate. I frankly like my love affairs served up with kindness. And I think it's criminal if that's an old-fashioned idea.

IS: Have you always felt that way?

JM: Yes. I'm not of the stay-and-torture-the-poor-sucker school.

IS: All of these ideas and feelings contributed to how you produced the album, but was there a moment, or event, that crystallized the decision?

JM: I'll tell you what really started it. Don Henley had a benefit here in L.A. They put together an orchestra, sixty pieces, and rounded up ten female singers, myself included. We all got to sing two songs. I sang a duet with Björk so she and I got three. One by one, women in beautiful evening gowns stood up like classic old band singers and sang with this big orchestra and it delighted us all. The experience of singing live with that big a band is very powerful and exciting beyond words. When Charlie Parker got his taste of playing with classical orchestras he could barely stand to play anything else.

IS: The time has come for me to segue from your album to your cats.

JM: I love my cats.

IS: Tell us about them.

JM: Pansy is distinguished by the black mark down her face. The round red one, a real butterball, is Mojo; he's a short-haired Abyssinian. Nietzsche, our house philosopher, is leaner: He's silvery gray. El Cafe is the little runty one. She's got a white blaze on her throat and a kind of Jack Benny look on her face.

IS: Before I ask you to give us a little story about each one, I wonder whether you've always had cats.

JM: No. My mother was too house-proud, because cats are hard on furniture and they piddle and scratch here and there. My mother was also a farm girl and cats were not indoor things: They were for the barn. But I knew every cat in my neighborhood.

IS: Do you like your cats around when you're working?

JM: Not when I'm painting, because they bang the brush and they wipe their tails. They get between you and the canvas and then they get paint all over themselves and the furniture: They turn into big paintbrushes.

IS: How about when you're working on music?

JM: Then I love to have them around and they love to be around. Nietzsche, in particular, is very vocal. As soon as the guitar stops, he starts talking. But the moment the guitar starts up again, he stops. I wrote a song inspired by Nietzsche called "Man From Mars." The night I started, Nietzsche disappeared for eighteen days. I wrote the song in seventeen days, and on the eighteenth day he came back. When I played the song for him, he stood on his hind legs and danced, so he recognized it somehow. What had happened is that I was outside at night, calling, trying to hear his voice, and in so doing I heard far into the distance in my neighborhood. I'd never listened to my neighborhood as closely as I did when he was gone. Especially the (more Mitchell page 161)

CREDITS

PRINTING AND PROCESSING

Cover and pages 26, 34, 50, 58, 60, 62, 66, 70, 72, 73, 76, 82, 84, 88, 89, 92, 96-99, 104, 106, 114, 115, 118-121, 124-127, 138, 139, 141-159: Print Zone

STYLING

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ANIMALS

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Pages 34, 72, 123-125: Livestock for Reel and Little Critters Corral
Pages 54, 60, 138, 139, 152-155: Dave McMillan of Worldwide Movie Animals
Page 66: Space Puppies from Rumpus.com
Page 80: Sam the Himalayan from Animals for Advertising

MODELS

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Pages 146-147: Fatimah/IMG Models (left) and Sara Jordan/Page.305
Pages 148-14: Noah Landfield and Daynia McDonald/Next Management
Pages 150-151: Matt Janke/Click (left) and Andrew Anderson/Click

LOCATIONS

Cover and pages 65, 76, 80, 140-151, 156-159: photographed at Boylan Studio's New York City
Pages 34, 72, 123-125: Dennis Devaugh's farm, Davie, Florida
Pages 26, 54, 58, 60, 62, 106, 118-121, 126-127, 138-139, 152-155: The Paramour, Silverlake, Los Angeles

ILLUSTRATION

Page 140: Ron LeGates

PROPS

Page 141: The Marie Antoinette cake by The Cupcake Café, New York

MORE MITCHELL . . .

(continued from page 134) mix of it—the little sounds that are way in the distance. I put all that into the composition, creating a kind of tone poem. Nietzsche seemed to recognize himself in the mix of sounds, or recognize something, because he responded to that track: He singled it out.

IS: How about El Cafe?

JM: When I got El Cafe I was married to Larry Klein. We went to this place in Kauai called El Cafe. It was a Mexican restaurant and we left just about closing time. We went out on the stoop and there were a couple of dogs prowling around. Then Klein said "Look." And I saw the tiniest kitten with a lot of attitude, a look that El still has. She was four weeks old and runty at that. She'd been abandoned by her mother and was living out of the dumpster behind El Cafe. She's about fifteen now. She is a really smart cat, very light and very circusy.

IS: What's Mojo's story?

JM: The little fat one? I rescued him from a pet store in New York. He was very, very sick, and they made me sign papers that if he died they weren't responsible. He's like a dog. He jumps into the bathtub with me.

IS: Last but not least: Pansy.

JM: Well, I was up in Canada, where I have a little house. And on Thanksgiving Day I saw Pansy, looking just like the flower. She was a tiny kitten, running across a busy highway. She belonged to a woman who was an alcoholic, who was on a bender. I saw Pansy trying to cross this busy highway to visit the dog she used to live with. I ran out into traffic, stopped the cars, grabbed the kitten. I took her home and discovered that she was very ill. She'd eaten something with lungworm and had contracted it. I called my vet in L.A. and they said that lungworm can be cured in sheep. I thought: If you can do it in a cash crop, you can do it with a cat. So I nursed her; it took about three months to get her well.

IS: Have all four cats heard the new album?

JM: Yeah. They seem to like it. It's soothing. They think that there would be less road rage if people had it on in their cars.

Joni Mitchell, photographed with her cats El Cafe and Mojo.

MORE RUDD . . .

(continued from page 157) **DL: Obviously you weren't hunting. I could never get with shooting things and killing them.**

PR: No, especially in a setting like that.

DL: Can I ask you a very different kind of question? For this entire interview have you been nude?

PR: Not completely. I am wearing a neckerchief, but that's about it. It's just so hot here in the desert.

DL: Good to know. So tell me about your upcoming movie of *The Great Gatsby*.

PR: It's tentatively scheduled to air on A&E in the fall, a joint production with the BBC.

DL: Which character do you play?

PR: Nick Carraway.

DL: Did you ever think, while you were growing up in Kansas and reading *The Great Gatsby* in high school, that you'd play this guy?

PR: Oh no, I could never have imagined that. I actually never read the book until I was about 21.

DL: Were you an acting geek in high school?

PR: Not really. I didn't see *Pippin* at age four and know what I wanted to do.

DL: We haven't talked about *The Cider House Rules*. Wasn't it great to be in a movie that was up for so many awards?

PR: I don't believe in awards. I don't believe in the Oscars, the Grammys or the Blockbuster awards. The Tampy, my friend, is the only award that really rings true. When I won mine, I remember stumbling behind the podium, drunk out of my gourd, and screaming at the audience: "You people don't deserve *Whorehouse!*" Thirty-seven minutes later they had to pull me off.

DL: Speaking of which, we've been going on for at least thirty-seven minutes here.

PR: OK. Thanks for interviewing me. Do you feel like you know me more than you ever did?

DL: No. I've just reconfirmed my suspicions.

Donal Logue's performance in *The Tao of Steve*, which will be released in August by Sony Classics, won the Special Grand Jury Prize for Outstanding Performance at this year's Sundance Film Festival. Paul Rudd, photographed with Moby the Japanese Gold Koy, wears a jacket and shirt by Prada.



