

Mingus pushes Joni to dip her toe in the lake of jazz

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The Globe and Mail (1936-Current); May 19, 1979; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Globe and Mail

pg. 35



Interview with **Joni Mitchell** aired tonight includes some tantalizing snippets from her new album.

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BY PAUL McGRATH

THERE IS little we can learn about **Joni Mitchell** that she hasn't already revealed in her music. For more than 10 years, she has been the most personal of female pop stars, confessing her weaknesses in every album as well as revealing her fear of her strengths. The Sweet Songstress of Saskatchewan almost defies interviewing; if you don't know what she thinks, then you haven't been listening to her closely enough.

Malka (formerly the treble end of Malka and Joso, now a freelance radio journalist), recently spent time with Mitchell at her California home, and the results can be heard tonight at 11:05 p.m. on CBC-FM.

It seems Joni's still a little lonely, scared and blue from time to time. She still has her ups and downs (as befits all poet-musician-painters) and she still feels that she wants to tell the men in her life, "Why don't you go find a normal girl and settle down?"

The interview is important more for the revelation of her immediate future than for picking apart the past. Mitchell's upcoming album (due to be released sometime in the next two months) involved jazz bassist Charles Mingus, and Malka's

interview carries with it small snippets (frustratingly tiny, actually) of material from the album and offers more insight into Mingus' character than Mitchell's. She was fascinated by the man and his legend (Mingus was known as an abrasive character who could "clear a room with his fists or his eyes").

Mingus discovered he was dying last year, and took on two projects. One involved discovering a closer relationship with whatever God he could come across, and the other involved his desire to collaborate with Mitchell (whose music, over the past three years, has become more and more dominated by another bassist, Jaco Pastorius.) Mingus' main contribution to the project was a series of tunes (Joni #1 to #6, he called them), to which Mitchell added lyrics. Mingus' disease (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis) had, by the time the project got to the recording studio, crippled his talented hands, so Pastorius handed the bass chores in his typical, astounding fashion.

Because Mitchell adds her personal stamp to whatever she touches, and because of Pastorius' continued prominence in her over-all sound, the new material is not as novel as could be expected from an unprece-

dent collaboration of this type. True, the melodies have a little wider range and a more legitimate jazz feeling to them than Mitchell could compose, but given Mitchell's peculiar vocal talent, what started out Mingus ended up sounding just like **Joni Mitchell**, moving forward once again into new territory. As she put it, Mingus forced her to "stick my big toe into the vast lake of jazz." It's a challenge that will do her some good.

Malka is not a great interviewer. While she asked most of the necessary personal questions, she also left Mitchell, on a couple of occasions, grasping at straws to answer silly questions regarding her feelings about Linda Ronstadt and Dolly Parton and their successes. She doesn't sell anywhere near the piles of records that Ronstadt and Parton do, which means simply that she doesn't play their type of music.

Another question, "Do you miss the fact that people can't whistle your songs any more," takes the prize for insensitivity. Malka obviously misses the accessible, tuneful Joni, and has trouble understanding the remarkable shift in Mitchell's perspective over the past five years. That's a big stumbling block, and Malka falls face-first over it.