

Arts & Entertainment

THE MICHIGAN DAILY

Wednesday, December 8, 1976

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Tony Bird: Musical views of Africa



Daily Photo by BRAD BENJAMIN

Tony Bird

By MIKE TAYLOR

TONY BIRD, an exceedingly talented musician from Central Africa, was in town Monday afternoon — courtesy of his record label, Columbia. Accompanied only by his own acoustic guitar, he sang a few songs from his debut album, *Tony Bird* (Columbia PC 34324), on WCBN-FM. Afterwards, he spoke with the Daily.

Bird's album is a fine one. A true original in every way, his voice is high and rich, and his music has a vast array of influences, from the blues to folk to African music. His songs are filled with superb imagery; he writes about his home from various points of view, including nature, human relationships, and political situations.

Dedicating it to Ann Arbor, Bird who is white) sang "Song of the Long Grass". Ostensibly about nature's cycles, it actually refers to the prospect of a revolution of liberation in apartheid South Africa.

HE ALSO performed "Athlone Incident", a narrative more obvious in its political intent. It is based on truth — a hitch-hiking Bird is dropped off in Athlone, a black town just outside of Cape Town, and fears for his life:

"In a sea of downtown faces/ I suffered all their scorn
Their anger came from places/ That most whites have never known
And I staggered on through jungles/ Of sullen hissing snakes
And I cursed the law that breeds/ A man of bitter hate"

On the album, the backing for this song is reminiscent of Joni Mitchell's most recent outings, and the voice gets somewhat lost in the clutter. Done live, however, Bird's voice became very intense, and the song became much more emotional.

EXPLAINING the song, Bird said he is bothered by the "white complacency" he sees in South Africa, "a police state".

"The limiting of the black man's freedom is the limiting of the white man's because contact between them is so limited," he explained. "Neither side gets a good deal."

After singing "Wayward Daughters", a beautiful song about the gap between parents and their children as they leave home

for good, Bird agreed that its tune is not unlike some of Dylan's best ballads.

On his album, "Outeniqua" is a majestic celebration of Africa's natural beauty, filled out with a lush background choir. Singing the song solo, Bird gives it a much more emotional treatment, grimacing often during the performance. He characterized the tune as "African country music".

BIRD SAID he likes playing with a band, "but it's got to be a good one". Because "Africans have a way of their own in playing their instruments", he would like to play with some African friends of his on his next album. Columbia had hired most of the musicians for this one.

Although he feels his first is a good album, Bird thinks it could have been much better had Columbia allowed him a freer hand in its production. He would have preferred a more acoustic sound, with his voice and guitar closer up front.

"MY VOICE needs a lot of space," he said. "You lose the effect when there's so much going on."

He claimed Dylan's producer, Don De Vito had wanted to remix the album, but Columbia wouldn't let him. Fortunately, Bird feels Columbia understands him better now, so he has high hopes for his second album, which he thinks should be recorded and released within a few months. "The songs are there", but the recording, which he would like to do in the U.S. (*Tony Bird* was recorded in England), won't begin until his promotional tour ends.

IN THE early stages of his career, Bird hitch-hiked from one folk spot to another in Rhodesia and South Africa, playing almost exclusively to all-white audiences. This bothered him, but he had to accept work wherever he could find it. As the album has been released in South Africa, he's worried that he might not be allowed back, something that he nevertheless accepts as possibly inevitable.

Due to scheduling problems, Bird's only opportunity to play in Ann Arbor this first time around was on the radio show. He hopes, however, to come back in a few months to play the Ark.

Bird has more than enough talent to make it, his second album should be a treat, and his next visit to Ann Arbor will be an event.



Daily Photo by BRAD BENJAMIN

The cast of "How To Succeed in Business Without Really Trying" held dress rehearsal last night. The above scene is a coffee break.

Arts Briefs

MINI-COURSE

The University of Michigan will offer a **Mini-Course, No. 410**, entitled "Learn to Read" which is organized by Dr. John Hagen. The class will meet Fridays at 9:10 a.m. between January 21 and April 8. Registration for the course is through Drop-Add. For permission to register or more information contact Sharon Carlson at 341 Victor Vaughn or call 763-11227.

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The Next Man			

NEW LP TAKES ON MOODIER STYLE:

Joni Mitchell departs on 'Hejira'

By KURT HARJU

FROM HER EARLIEST songs, Joni Mitchell has displayed an extraordinary capacity for understanding the role change plays in people's lives. On her newest album, *Hejira* (Asylum 7E-1087), she has put into words the distance and closeness she feels towards others and herself as a result of a demanding wanderlust.

As dramatic a departure from her previous three albums as *Blue* was to her first three, *Hejira* (which means Mohammed's flight from Mecca and symbolizes other, similar escapes) is Mitchell's attempt to come to terms with her erratic ways of discovering and abandoning lovers while constantly moving from place to place. But now, at least, it's she who makes the decision to leave.

On this new work, Joni has transcended the jazz-rock influences of Court and Spark and the L.A. Express (and the folk nature of her music before then) in favor of a style that is completely of her own making. Her stint with Dylan's Rolling Thunder Revue last year must have had an impact, for she is asserting herself more as an individual performer again with less reliance on a group sound.

FEW SONGS here have more than three musicians performing them and Joni (for the moment) has all but given up playing the piano. It makes each tune less distinct from the others than in the past but that's part of her plan. The album is basically a series of moody ballads — some fast and some slow — that gradually build in feeling and meaning so, by the end, the listener has gone through one encompassing experience rather than nine separate ones.

She sets the tone of the LP with the assertion, on the opening "Coyote," that she's "a

prisoner of the white lines on the freeway" and sums it up on the closing number by speaking of "the refuge of the roads." In between, she compares her lost but free soul with Amelia Earhart's, recounts a disillusioning encounter with blues great W.C. Handy and analyzes a wide variety of different relationships.

But, make no mistakes about it, she has learned (and is now presenting) her lessons well enough to realize that going in a new direction doesn't always turn out for the better. Yet, she refuses to be held back by the pain she might have to face later on. In the title song, she notes:

I'm so glad to be on my own...
I know — no one's going
To show me everything
We all come and go unknown.

IT'S A WRITER, almost cynical, outlook for this bright-eyed dreamer from Canada to have but Mitchell has come to adjust to and be happy with the fact of being alone. In the powerful "Song for Sharon," she admits Love's a repetitive danger You'd think I'd be accustomed to

Well, I do accept the changes

At least better than I used to do but also willingly confesses that all she really wants in her extensive travelling "is to find another lover!"

Every piece has its own chemistry working for it while sharing an interrelated common ground of images and themes with the other eight. Complex and flowing, they show an returning emphasis on the acoustic guitar and her innovative vocals. She keeps the jazz and rock passages to a minimum in order to heighten their effect when she does use them.

During her February concert

Youngs' haunting harmonica on "Furry Sings The Blues" and Larry Carlton's intricate electric guitar riffs, to her experiment with three different types of bass playing (the most notable being Jaco Pastorius' contribution on "Refuge Of The Roads"), it's one musical treat after another. Likewise, the album's artwork is a direct outgrowth of the material contained within.

At Hill Auditorium, Mitchell sang a new song called "Don Juan's Reckless Daughter." In it, she identified as she does more fully on this LP, with being a restless lover who is following "a path with a heart." It is often a lonely way but, as she has shown once more, it is sometimes the truest one to take.

The performances and production are superlative even by the standards set by her recent releases. From Neil Youngs' haunting harmonica on "Furry Sings The Blues" and Larry Carlton's intricate electric guitar riffs, to her experiment with three different types of bass playing (the most notable being Jaco Pastorius' contribution on "Refuge Of The Roads"), it's one musical treat after another. Likewise, the album's artwork is a direct outgrowth of the material contained within.

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