

Their reunion in September 1981 in Central Park. That concert was made into a live recording and a TV

Joni Mitchell now returning to rock

By DEBI MARTIN
Cox News Service

AUSTIN — Joni Mitchell fans who wonder if she's gotten lost in jazz's complex circuitry, will find her new album a return from the maze. "Wild Things Run Fast" includes musical elements acquired during Mitchell's six-year journey into the jazz terrain, but the territory is marked with a new twist.

"Now I'm interested in rock again," Mitchell said this week. "The new album is a synthesis of ideas. Part of the concept was to anchor down the rhythms a little more — they've been flying around through my jazz excursion. In the 'Mingus' project I was into a Jackson Pollock zone — lines in the air over white space, but there was no anchor. It was all very abstract expressionistic."

Like a painter who experiments with a variety of visual styles, Mitchell has dabbled her aural paint brush in three distinct wells of music.

First there was her "Blue" period, 1968 to '71, when she wrote romantic, impressionistic songs, simply orchestrated with an acoustic guitar.

With the release of "For the Roses," her musical canvases began including the punchy textures of rock 'n' roll, but rock's minimalism didn't satisfy her drive toward complexity.

In 1975 she began fusing jazz's sophisticated, subtle rhythms into musical collages that became progressively more abstract. "Mingus," released in '79, was her most surrealistic portrait.

"People expect me to be this melancholic damsel in distress and when they see me having a good time they wonder if I'm on some kind of Mae West joke-ride," she says. "I think the show we're doing now is a balance of emotion — there's lightness."

It's no wonder Mitchell's fans expect her to be a heavy in concert. The one constant element throughout her musical evolution has been the motif of love in her lyrics. Whether the album is jazz-oriented, rock or folk, songs about romance dominate her discography. Her earliest songs were deeply personal, transparently exposing her sores from failed relationships. And when her music became more abstract, so did her lyrics. Now, on "Wild," Mitchell's verse still bubbles with feeling, but it's cooled with sober reflection from a distance.