



Joni Mitchell meets Mingus

BY MARK MILLER

So — this is what it was all about. The exact nature of the Charles Mingus/Joni Mitchell collaboration has been a mystery ever since the project was announced. Turns out, the music is his, the lyrics and performance hers alone.

The concept — hers too, no doubt — is a tribute to Mingus, who died before the last song was completed. The LP is, as a result, very much more her latest than his last. And it makes "sense" only when heard that way. Yet there are those who, because of the mystery of the build up, seem to think this should be heard as a Mingus record; for that reason it may be the first Mitchell album to receive close scrutiny from jazz fans. That means, alas, that they won't hear it in the logical sequence that her previous LPs provide.

In her notes to Mingus she acknowledges the assistance of several musicians who do not appear on the record but participated in her search for this music's appropriate spirit. Phil Woods, Gerry Mulligan and Mingus' longtime

drummer, Danny Richmond, are among those musicians. That Mitchell ended up using essentially the same cast as she had on her previous set (Don Juan's Reckless Daughter), Weather Report without Joe Zawinul, is an indication that she will tread in Mingus Territory — but only on her own terms.

But for the lyrics — which have a sharper and less personal tone — and the greater discipline, side one of Mingus could be side five of Don Juan. On Side Two, she moves carefully into jazz, where her lyrics are matched, even surpassed, by her singing.

If Dry Cleaner from Des Moines, (side two, cut two) is the record's potential hit single — a jumping, humorous piece in an otherwise generally downcast set — then her reworking of Mingus' tribute to Lester Young, Good-bye Pork Pie Hat, into her own tribute to both Mingus and Lester, is its masterwork. Pork Pie is the record's last track, positioned as if she wished to ease herself, and presumably her fans, fully into jazz. She made it. What's next?