

Mitchell's album offers jazz tribute

By Sherri Blank

Review

"Mingus" by Joni Mitchell is the best kind of tribute one could give to the recently deceased jazz bassist Charles Mingus.

The album is the result of a curious collaboration between the white female folksinger and the legendary black jazz musician.

Mingus, intrigued by

Mitchell's music, composed the last six melodies of his life for her to write lyrics to and sing. Mitchell worked on the monumental project for a year and a half and completed all but the song "God Must be a Boogie Man," before Mingus' death in January.

Mitchell has created an album to be treasured, but one which won't be worn out on a turntable. It is not

an easy record to listen to because she and Mingus place many demands on their audience. The melodies flow in all directions and several tempos run through a song at the same time.

"Mingus" marks a culmination of three album's worth of musical experimentation for Mitchell. It is a major step for an artist like Mitchell to abandon her audience and previous musical direction. "The Hissing of Summer Lawns" only hinted at jazz while retaining bits of "Court and Spark," her last commercially successful album.

And then there was "Hejira" and "Don Juan's Reckless Daughter," both criticized by Mitchell's fans.

"Mingus," however, is a turning point for Mitchell. The album is completely jazz and features top musi-

cians such as Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock and Jaco Pastorius.

Mitchell plays her voice like an instrument, hitting seemingly unreachable notes and scattering on a few of the songs. Her guitar playing is strong, and perfectly suited to jazz music.

The songs range from the bluesy "Sweet Sucker Dance" to the upbeat and humorous "Drycleaner from Des Moines." The album's concluding song, "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat," tells of the discrimination against black jazz musicians in the past.

It is an ironic ending because jazz has come full circle; it is not limited now to black men in smokey clubs.

Through Mitchell, Mingus' often misunderstood music lives, and is being introduced to those people who would never consider listening to it before.