

Album reviews

By Chuck Graham
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That troubador of beach bums, **JIMMY BUFFETT**, continues to grow in the spotlight. His new album, "**VOLCANO**" (MCA Records MCA-5102), proves he has a lot more creativity than his flakey, superficial attitude would indicate.

Both "**Fins**" and "**Survive**" are strong enough to challenge any song presently atop the hit singles chart. Then there is the timely calypso-styled title track with its disparaging reference to Three Mile Island. Along with another of Buffett's poignant songs about aging heroes, "**Sending the Old Man Home**."

Most of the lyrics have a Caribbean setting, but are done with a loving concern for landlubbers. Buffett sings of the open sea with the same ardor that the Eagles sing about the open road.

JONI MITCHELL: "MINGUS" (Asylum Records 5E-505) — Only someone with Joni Mitchell's affection for complicated art would ever want to attempt such a project as putting words to the compositions of Charles Mingus. Apparently he sensed this, for it was Mingus who suggested Mitchell write the lyrics for some new music he had written.

This album succeeds because Mitchell has refused to compromise Mingus, too. If anything, she makes him more obscure. For this special recording, the late bassist (who was born in Nogales, Arizona) wrote "**A Chair in the Sky**," "**Sweet Sucker Dance**" and "**The Dry Cleaner from Des Moines**." A Mingus classic, "**Goodbye Pork Pie Hat**" was selected by Mitchell.

She also does two of her own works, "**The Wolf that Lives in Lindsey**" and "**God Must Be a Bogie Man**," which was inspired by the first four pages of Mingus' autobiography, "**Beneath the Underdog**."

The cuts are interspersed with snatches of conversation with Mingus, a couple of sentences here and there about feeling lucky and hoping to live a long life. This is a little disconcerting at first, but it ultimately works to make the album more human.

None of the pieces is done as straight jazz with long improvisational lines.

Each is recorded as a completely thought-out, balanced and blended painting. Mitchell's conception of the music has a starkness, a detached intellectual quality, that is pushed further along by the eerie electronic keyboard effects of Herbie Hancock. Wayne Shorter's sax improvisations offer the strongest mainline jazz connection.

The music borrows from jazz and pop to create some new kind of abstracted art form that becomes more intriguing as the album gets repeated plays. There's much more here than Mingus music with words. It is the best album Mitchell has done in years.