

bop and free jazz. After a brief stint with Miles Davis, Rivers debuted with 1965's *Fuchsia Swing Song*, with Ron Carter and Tony Williams (both with Miles at that time), and 1966's more lyrical *Contours* with Herbie Hancock (yet another Miles band member) before the saxophonist-flutist took an unexpected turn. Now reissued as part of Blue Note's deluxe Tone Poet audiophile 180g vinyl reissue series (mastered from the original analog tapes), 1966's *A New Conception* consists of all covers, concentrating on interpretations of romantic ballads tied to great vocalists. Here, Rivers also featured a new quartet: Hal Galper (piano), Herbie Lewis (bass) and Steve Ellington (drums), no relation to Duke.

The seven selections start off with the breezy "When I Fall In Love" (popularized by Nat "King" Cole). Rivers enters charmingly with soaring flights on tenor, stretching out the melody, then setting up Galper (who passed away this July at age 87) for a lyrical turn in the middle before he flies back in for more melodic extensions and emotional, minimal passages towards the end. Ellington's masterful brushwork can be appreciated in the intro and outro sections. Via Tommy Dorsey and Frank Sinatra, "I'll Never Smile Again" has the leader swinging, again on tenor, before pulling out his soprano mid-way for a wild romp. "Detour Ahead" (sung memorably by Billie Holiday, then a decade later by Ella Fitzgerald) starts with Rivers' lithe flute performance before switching to soprano, then later to tenor for a blazing passage, sandwiching an elegant Galper piano solo. "That's All" (a Bobby Darin hit) features Rivers' graceful soprano playing throughout, over swinging piano trio accompaniment, with a brief, but effective, melodic piano solo from Galper midway through. The standard "What a Difference a Day Makes" starts with a wild, mostly unaccompanied tenor run before settling into and bouncing around the melody, then leaping into free territory with honks and screams, before Rivers switches gears to a gliding spotlight on soprano. The seven and a half minute "Temptation" (a Bing Crosby hit) features heavy improvisational stylings from Galper, creative, offbeat Lewis bass lines and Ellington's cymbal-heavy Paul Motian-like off-kilter rhythms, as Rivers charges wildly on soprano, then flute, eventually tenor, occasionally glancing off then re-referencing the original melody on each occasion. On "Secret Love", Rivers' flute playing coasts around some of the pianist's more elegant contributions to the session, going into free territory by the tail end.

A New Conception is an extraordinary display that makes you wish Rivers reimagined even more ballads before his '70s re-emergence.

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BOXED SET



Joni's Jazz
Joni Mitchell (Rhino)
by Franz Matzner

Joni's Jazz is a monumental collection (available as a 4-CD or 8-LP boxed set), befitting the stunning achievements over five decades of the Canada-born guitarist, pianist, vocalist and lyricist Joni Mitchell (who turned 82 last month). Curated with Mitchell's extensive input, the set explores the profound influence of jazz on her music. The 61 tracks include studio recordings, live performances, rare alternate takes and two previously unreleased 1980 demos ("Moon at the Window" and "Be Cool"). Though she is most often placed in the early '60s folk music revival milieu, this set not only brings to light her massive achievements *in toto*, but specifically highlights her prolonged engagement with jazz and blues, as well as mergers with Americana, rock and more. Featured are such jazz collaborators and luminaries as Chuck Berghofer, Brian Blade, Michael Brecker, Peter Erskine, Wilton Felder, Victor Feldman, Mark Isham, Plas Johnson, Pat Metheny, Charles Mingus, Gerry Mulligan, Jaco Pastorius, Joe Sample and Tom Scott, as well as, significantly, Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter (the latter with whom she had an ongoing musical relationship since 1977). The set's large cover image is actually a photo of her with Hancock and Shorter in 2022, when she received an honorary doctorate from Berklee College of Music.

For those already exposed to Mitchell's vocal acuity and stature as an inspired lyricist, the set provides a welcome historical timeline of her creativity. For those unfamiliar with the length of her career, or deep connection with jazz and blues, the set is well worth the modest investment, considering its scope and production. Most tracks have been remastered, lending enhanced clarity to the subtlety of Mitchell's art as she sculpts her unique blend of composition, instrumental capacity and difficult-to-rival lyrical insight. The compilation includes renditions of many jazz standards—"Comes Love", "You're My Thrill", "Summertime", "At Last", "Stormy Weather"—and showcases her evolution as a standards vocalist. Mitchell's investigation of many styles of music at times explores them in their traditional format and at other times melds them into something entirely and uniquely her own. Yet, what emerges most clearly is that in any context, one of her most remarkable and consistent abilities is as a lyricist. Dominating her writing is an immediately identifiable approach that paints with unusual imagery and syntax, while at times sewing together more established idioms.

Mitchell evokes a wide spectrum of human experience, from reflective to sadness; from playful to the dramatic; and with a particular gift, the deeper significance found in the most mundane of circumstances. In some ways, it is the latter ability that truly distinguishes participating in almost all her releases. The blend of this emblematic color palette with Mitchell's evocative voice, delivering her potent lyrics, is a truly unique sound that promises to guide listeners through peaks, valleys and fluid streams of sonic and psychological subtlety. Drawing from nearly every core album in Mitchell's discography—*Song to a Seagull*, *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*, *Hejira*, *Mingus*, *Turbulent Indigo* and *Both Sides Now*—it also includes guest appearances on projects such as Hancock's GRAMMY Award-winning album, *River: The Joni Letters*. Of other notable selections on the set: the title track from her 1971 *Blue*, "Marcie" (from her 1968 debut *Song to a Seagull*) and "Cold Blue Steel and Sweet Fire" (from *For the Roses*). The most recent track included is a live performance of "Summertime" from the 2022 Newport Folk Festival, which was her first full-length concert in over two decades.

Joni's Jazz is housed in a book-style format and includes liner notes with rare, unseen photos and original artwork by Mitchell, who is also, among her many talents, a painter (her original artwork graces the covers of many of her albums, including *Song to a Seagull*, *Ladies of the Canyon*, *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* and the self-portrait found on *Clouds*).

This prodigious work is the perfect introduction for those who aren't familiar with Mitchell or her body of work, or hadn't realized how much jazz has influenced her and, conversely, how much she has influenced jazz music and musicians in return. And for established fans, it serves as a treasure chest of music that will no doubt call for many repeat listens.

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