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"It's a genuine place where I'm coming from when I write or sing my songs. They're certainly more lyrical and genuine and less full of crap than any of the other girls I see singing songs these days in their disco wet suits or whatever. How many female singer/songwriters are very active now? Three — Joan Armatrading, Joni Mitchell and me. And Joan is so good, it's a flip of the coin in terms of success. I wonder, 'Why me and not her?' Her music seems more accessible than mine."

Why is she so hard on Joni Mitchell?  
"Because of my expectations of her. She sings jazz but she's not jazz, she's not a jazz artist. She doesn't come from jazz roots. Consequently, for me it comes off like Barbra Streisand singing a pop song. Barbra can sing the fuck out of a ballad and nobody can touch her, but when she comes out and does 'Stoney End,' hell, why don't we get Olivia [Newton-John] instead? She can do it just as good. I respect somebody's need to expand, but at the same time you ought to take into consideration what you do well."

"I get compared a lot to Tom Waits, and I can understand it only from the point of view that we're both writing about street characters. Our writing and our singing styles have nothing in common, I think. But we walk around the same streets, and I guess it's primarily a jazz-motivated situation for both of us. We're living on the jazz side of life, the other side of the tracks, and it's a real insecure, constant improvisation."

All this is told to me with great reverence and tenderness, but also with considerable trepidation. The evening before, I had picked Rickie Lee up at her hotel and we discussed over dinner whether she could bear to go through this process at all. "Once you give up a piece of your life to people in print and let them all take a close look at it, you can never take that information back," she said nervously. "You can never re-create that privacy." She also admitted that she had been deliberately obstructive and/or deceptive in many of her previous interviews. "If you talk to magazines, that becomes important to you. Then you're vulnerable and it'll fuck you every time. I think that whenever I'm vulnerable to anybody or anything, it'll hurt me."

There is a great curiosity concerning Rickie Lee Jones' stories about her supposedly threadbare childhood and vagabond upbringing. The magazine editors about her broken home, private life, and a family tree full of musical talent. Her parents have whetted the appetite for her past.

RICKIE LEE WITH SOMETIME BEAU TOM WAITS



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last show. After about a half-hour, we go back to the bar and take a small table by the door, where the musician and another male pal of his join us. We all chat about nothing special over several rounds of beer, until Rickie suddenly asks the guitarist if he'd like to go with her the day after

RLJ : Lorsque j'écris mes chansons ça vient d'un truc en moi qui est réel et sincère. Elles sont certainement beaucoup plus lyriques et authentiques et moins remplies de conneries que celles de toutes ces autres nanas, que je vois chanter ces temps-ci avec leurs fringues disco mouillées-moulantes ou que sais-je encore. Combien y a-t-il de chanteuses auteures-compositrices qui comptent vraiment en ce moment ? Trois — Joan Armatrading, Joni Mitchell et moi. Joan est tellement bonne, mais c'est juste la façon dans la pièce retombe par terre qui détermine le succès, en fait. Je me demande, pourquoi moi et pas elle ? Sa musique est tellement plus accessible que la mienne.

Rolling Stone : Pourquoi être si dure envers Joni Mitchell ?

RLJ : C'est à cause de ce que j'attends d'elle. Elle chante du jazz mais c'est pas du jazz, elle n'est pas une artiste de jazz. Elle n'a aucune racine par rapport au jazz. Par conséquent, pour moi ça revient à du Barbra Streisand qui chante une chanson pop. Barbra peut chanter une putain de balade et personne ne lui arrive à la cheville, mais quand elle débarque et qu'elle fait "Stoney End", bon sang, mais pourquoi on met pas Olivia (Newton John) à la place ? Elle peut le faire aussi bien. Je respecte tout à fait le besoin de quelqu'un d'aller explorer ailleurs, mais en même temps il faut bien prendre conscience de ce que soi, on sait faire, qu'on fait bien. On me compare beaucoup à Tom Waits, mais je peux comprendre pourquoi seulement parce que nous écrivons tous deux à propos des gens de la rue. Notre écriture et notre façon de chanter n'a rien en commun sinon, je pense. Mais nous arpentons les mêmes rues, et il me semble, c'est avant tout un style de vie commun dont le jazz est la racine. Nous vivons vraiment du côté jazz de la vie, on a pas le même code de la route que tout le monde, et c'est pas facile, parce que c'est une improvisation permanente.

"Rolling Stone" interview of Rickie Lee Jones - August 8, 1979 -

"The Jazz Side of Life" Archives Jacques Benoit

