

Rickie Lee is not without her own harshly critical inclinations, although they are largely reserved for her female contemporaries in the recording industry. She has taken a number of outspoken potshots at Linda Ronstadt, Phoebe Snow and especially Joni Mitchell.

"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 background and vagabond upbringing. The magazine editors about her broken home, private life, and a family tree full of round characters. Some have whetted their appetites for her past



RICKIE LEE WITH
SOMETIME BEAU
TOM WAITS



vations in a gentle, kindly tone, any p supplanted by a spontaneous onrush of the for the difficult legacy she and her husband offspring.

"You should understand that my husband entertainment background and it was impossible to have a try at it himself. His father was a vaudeville dancer named Peg Leg Jones. He and we have scrapbooks of his clippings and all the best theaters around the country. Mr. Jones' mother, a chorus girl, was a vaudeville dancer. Peg Leg put his infant son into orphan institutions, eventually leaving him in the South.

They grew up in the Richland County, Ohio. "It's probably still in the family. My mother put her father passed away. He was in the World War I in the Battle of I was never the same after that, she died. My mother remarried, but she couldn't guess. She's still living, but of course I'm not in contact with her."

"I met Mr. Jones when he was a soda jerk at the Sheraton Plaza Hotel in Chicago. He was twenty-four, just out of the

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the outer bar into the main room to watch the 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

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

"The Jazz Side of Life"
Archives Jacques Benoit

