



**MUSICIAN:** You wrote a pretty funny letter to Musician about Rickie Lee Jones.

**MITCHELL:** Oh...I can just see me when I'm an old woman, writing nasty letters-to-the-editor all over the country.

**MUSICIAN:** She made a crack in Musician about Linda Ronstadt trying to sing jazz, and you wrote that jazz wasn't a private sidewalk; anybody who wants to can walk there.

**MITCHELL:** She said that Peter Asher had appeared at a concert of hers, and she knew for sure that night that he would go and tell Linda to do a jazz album because jazz was now hip. What she didn't know was that Linda had this idea to do those albums with Nelson Riddle all on her own, had *no* support. Peter was chewing his arm up to the elbow thinking, "Oh God, this is terrible, this could kill her!" Just like *Mingus*. It was very risky.

**MUSICIAN:** Losing another one to jazz.

**MITCHELL:** Yeah. This did not look like a good move. She did it purely on her own impulse. It was something she wanted to do. It was completely her own idea and her own artistic motivation. So at first I tried to write the letter from that tack, and then I thought of Geraldine Campbell when I was a kid. She used to chase me with a hatchet if I crossed in front of her house. If I'd go up the back alley she'd be there saying "This is my property. You can't cross over it!" And I thought, man, it was like Rickie was *possessing* jazz. It was there before her, it'll be there after her. I was dabbling in jazz and being persecuted for it by the time she had some public success with it. And I'm not the innovator of it, I didn't invent it. It's all a totem pole.

**MUSICIAN:** Well, just to take this completely to National Enquirer level, do you feel Rickie Lee has lifted stuff from you?

**MITCHELL:** No. I can feel she's influenced by me, but she's made it her own. First picture I saw of her, though, I thought, "Where did they get that picture of me?" She was smoking a brown cigarette, she has a turned up nose and a long space above her lip which makes our faces there kind of similar, and her hair was long and sandy and she had this beret on. I used to wear a beret all the time. I didn't see the name at first and I thought, "Oh no! They've put out a Greatest Hits or something." And then I looked and it said, "The Real

Thing." And I thought, wait a minute! We don't look that much alike but this one photograph, the way it was angled and all these little details, looked exactly like me.

But in her music she's got her own synthesis. I hear a lot of Tom Waits, I hear a lot of Laura Nyro, I hear myself. I hear various influences. Some early black rock 'n' roll girl singing. I *don't* hear that much jazz. That's what I don't understand. I don't think of her as a jazz singer. I don't know where she gets that idea she's a jazz singer. Any more than I am or Laura is. We're not. That's kind of a traditional form. It has some kind of modality and chord structures we all borrowed from, but I don't think you could call any of us jazz singers.

**MUSICIAN:** I think what Rickie Lee is thinking of is more what a novelist would pick up about jazz; the wet streets and smokey saloons.

**MITCHELL:** I know, it's more environmental. Because when I did the album with Charley (Mingus) an article came out and she got really mad at me in it. And I thought, well, maybe she played in a lot of clubs and got a lot of comparisons to me and wants to kill mommy or something. At this point she probably hates me just 'cause she heard my name a lot. Well-meaning people used to say to me, "Gee, you sound just like Peter, Paul & Mary."

Anyway, she said that she could sing jazz and I couldn't because I didn't walk on the jazz side of life. And I thought, "What does that mean? Do you have to shoot up to like this music? What is 'the jazz side of life'?" Who's to say? She doesn't even *know* me. She doesn't know if I'm straight or....

**MUSICIAN:** Maybe you are on the jazz side of life.

**MITCHELL:** Maybe I am.

**MUSICIAN:** For all we know you're the Charlie Parker of the 80s.

**MITCHELL:** For all you know I'm a bad junkie with a spit shine on my shoes. ☐