

VARIETY

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SECTION

a closer walk with

Joni



LEORA CASHE and the Ross Taggart Trio bring *Another Side Now: The Songs of Joni Mitchell* to Ashcroft Opera House Feb. 15. At left is Mitchell's *Clouds* album



WEST COAST QUARTET SETS FOLK-ERA HITS TO JAZZ

By MIKE YOUNDS
Daily News Staff Reporter

Leora Cashe is captive on a carousel of time and loving the ride.

The Vancouver jazz and gospel singer has come full circle with her fourth recording, *Another Side Now: The Songs of Joni Mitchell*, backed by West Coast jazz artists the Ross Taggart Trio. They're doing a mini-tour of the Interior, stopping at Ashcroft Opera

There's something very intimate about the way she sings.

Growing up the daughter of a minister in Mannville, Alta., Cashe's voice stood out in the church choir. In a kindergarten moment to remember, the local newspaper gave her a glowing review for her role in *The Flower Shop Window*.

When her older sister brought home Joni Mitchell's *Clouds* album she fell in love with the music. That would

It wasn't as though she was starved for success. She drew critical acclaim for her roles in *Anne of Green Gables* and *A Closer Walk with Patsy Cline*. Her 2001 debut CD *Tears of Joy* was nominated for best gospel recording in the West Coast Music Awards.

It was Tom Arntzen, the longtime Island jazz musician and aficionado, who persuaded her to make the leap to traditional jazz. He helped her put together her first demo, in-

Mitchell's muse is so beautiful to do this with because it has such an exquisite text and speaks on so many levels."

In the mid-'70s Mitchell moved to jazz as well, collaborating with jazz legend Charles Mingus before he died of ALS. The album, *Mingus*, was an artistic triumph but not the commercial success of her earlier work.

Not unlike Mitchell, Cashe finds its more important to follow an artistic path rather than a commercial one.

"The muse in my heart is the truth and it's more important to connect to that. When you look at Joni Mitchell, that's been important in her life."

Last year Mitchell released *Shine*, her first recording of new songs in nine years. On the same day, jazz great Herbie Hancock released *River: The Joni Letters*, a compilation of tribute tracks featuring well-known artists such as Norah Jones, Leonard Cohen, Tina Turner and a vocal contribution by Mitchell herself.

"Her audience has grown tremendously," Cashe said. "She is definitely getting respect in that genre now. I honestly think — if you take the Japanese view — that the longevity factor will kick in."

She is the voice that embodies the vast landscape of our Canadian consciousness. — Leora Cashe on Joni Mitchell's music

House Feb. 15.

"I really love her music," Cashe said from Vancouver. "Her lyrics speak huge colours and speak to us on a profound level. I think Joni Mitchell's music is coming into its own and it is part of the Canadian songbook."

Another Side Now offers refreshing jazz takes on songs from Mitchell's first four albums, recorded in her folk-rock period in the late '60s, early '70s. Cashe doesn't imitate the artist's legendary voice but sings instead in a lower key on hit songs such as *Carey*, *The Circle Game* and *Both Sides Now*.

"It's a tribute, and for me it's honouring a place in my heart that inspired me to sing. It's that heartfelt expression that, as a vocalist, really affects me.

prove to be both an advantage and a disadvantage later in life.

"In 1980, I went to school at Grant McEwan College in Edmonton and the only songs I knew were from Joni's repertoire, so those were the songs I sang. I went there to study jazz but I wasn't aware of Sarah Vaughan or Ella Fitzgerald."

Her friends cringed when she cut her hair in bangs, Joni-style, "but it was at that moment I had an epiphany."

Encouraged to find her own voice at school, she stopped singing Joni Mitchell songs but even when she graduated from jazz school she couldn't relate to jazz. For the next 10 years she sang R&B, gospel and musical theatre in the Lower Mainland and on the Island.

cluding a Joni track.

"It was then that he inspired me to do a whole album of tunes, but back then I wasn't feeling confident enough where I felt I could interpret in a jazz vein."

Five years passed before she entered a studio with the Ross Taggart Trio, one of the West Coast's foremost jazz ensembles, to cut an all-Joni album. The group is comprised of Taggart on piano, Darren Radtke on bass and Buff Allen on drums. Taggart and Allen are both Juno winners.

The groove is cool, "trad jazz," with Cashe's sultry vocals always in the spotlight, but the meaning is more important to her than the atmosphere.

"As a gospel singer coming to jazz, it's also the lyrics. Joni

