

Don Juan's Reckless Daughter

Music

Joni Mitchell (Asylum BB 701)

Don Juan's Reckless Daughter is Joni Mitchell's first album in 14 months and perhaps her most courageous effort since the great "*Court and Spark*" effort of four years ago. On that album, in association with Tom Scott and the LA Express, she produced a strikingly successful fusion of traditional folk and jazz which has since provided the basis in many ways for the music of artists like Joan Armatrading and Janis Ian.

Since then there have been 3 relatively tame efforts the live *Miles of Aisles*, the transitional *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* and the freewheeling and rambling repetition of *Hejira*. On those three albums Joni Mitchell was rapidly increasing her musical sophistication, while simultaneously searching for a new medium through which to observe contemporary American society and herself. Her latest effort goes some way towards solving that identity crisis.

Don Juan's Reckless Daughter leans heavily, at least musically, toward a contemporary jazz idiom. The players — Jaco Pastorius and Wayne Shorten from Weather Report, Chaka Khan of Rufus and Latin-jazz supreme Airto — are all jazz players of immense ability. The resulting music is a tapestry of often vibrant colouration and great depth and intensity. The pieces are most spacious in arrangement and make effective use of multi-layered acoustic guitars, giving each passage greater tone and texture. Gone are the uncluttered and clean sounds of *Court and Spark*. In its place is a more sophisticated multi-faceted sound which is at once infinitely more suggestive and mysterious.

Lyrical too, the changes are noticeable. The woman continues to observe

the world through her encounters with it. She still records her travels, her friendships and her loves, as well as the processes of change, yet here there is no attempt to unravel the mystery. Rather she offers the listener a few clues.

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The songs are a travelogue of the mind. Montages of places, people and emotions. The basis of each of the songs is still personal, yet there is now a distance which previously did not intrude into the statements.

The images too are different — harsher and naked. They are less accessible and seem at times too far withdrawn into the artist's own sensations to be coherent. All in all, the effect is darker and more disturbing. There is an infinite sadness in her voice as she croons the album's closing statement.

"We'll have to row a little harder/ If just in dreams we fly/ In my dreams we fly!"

Don Juan's Reckless Daughter is, for all its courage and skill, a patchy work. Its failings lie basically in Joni Mitchell's inability, as yet, to make full use of this dramatic musical setting and an inability to harness her musicians' collective talents in a way that maximises their contribution to the songs. On this album, the tracks are often too long and too loose to have the desired effect. The musical excesses, particularly on the instrumental passages, are frequent. And in fact, even the songs are, though good, far from her best. But nevertheless, the album remains an interesting and stimulating effort. This is one, I think, to file away under 'I' for interesting, but watch out for the next one, for if she does indeed pursue the directions hinted at here, the next one could well be something very special.

Satyajit Das

