# Albums

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**JONI MITCHELL: 'Don Juan's Reckless Daughter' (Asylum BB 701)**

ANALYSING a Joni Mitchell double album in 400 words after a weekend's exposure is about as sensible a proposition as reviewing 'War And Peace' on the strength of 10 chapters or explaining Shakespeare's tragedies on the back of a postage stamp.

But it's not such an impossible task with 'Don Juan's Reckless Daughter' as it might have been, because it doesn't have the layers of flesh to peel that say, 'Hejira' or 'The Hissing Of Summer Lawns' had. It's a step towards simplicity, a step I don't particularly like.

The musical essence of 'DJRD' is probably closer to 'Hejira' than any other Mitchell opus, mostly because of Jaco Pastorius' flying bass which is used as a lead instrument, though more blatantly than on the last album.

At first glance it seems a more complex Mitchell because it has **frills.** One side uses an orchestra prominently, and there are lengthy musical explorations. There's even a binga banga bonga drum passage which takes up most of side three. Neither device is used stupidly or pretentiously, but the ideas wear thin, particularly the drum thumpings.

*JONI MITCHELL: step towards simplicity*

But this is more overstatement than anything else — the sublime subtlety of 'Hejira' is absent now, replaced with what, for Joni, amounts to trickery.

Lyrically, Mitchell is on something of a downward spiral. She peaked with the shivered obliqueness of 'Summer Lawns', and now seems to struggle a bit for subjects to embellish.

'Love' is part of 'DJRD', of course, in fact much of the album is occupied by songs worryingly close to 'Blue Motel Room' on 'Hejira', ie slightly twee (I never thought I'd call Joni twee!) though quite touching love songs, the best of which is 'Talk To Me', which sheds new light on Joni's usually sophisticated persona — "I didn't know I drank such a lot till I pissed a tequila anaconda the full length of the parking lot."

There's the obligatory song about how much the diamonds and pearls lady likes to go out and rock 'n' roll ("not mine those fashion gowns" is something Joni's been begging people to believe for three albums or so).

The theme of what's left of the album is dreams. 'Paprika Plains' which takes up the whole of one side is a dream about that old chestnut, the Red Indian problem. 'The Silky Veils of Ardor' which contains some unusually embarrasing images — not the least of which is the title — ends the album with the lines: "In my dreams we fly", a phrase which appears bubbling out of Joni's mouth on the inner sleeve. 'Dreamland' on side three explores personal paradise, 'Otis And Marlena', a narrative on the old hags of Miami explores geriatric hell — "Dream on . . . dream on . . . dream on . . . dream on . ."

Of course, 'Don Juan's Reckless Daughter' is a very good album, Joni Mitchell would never produce anything less. But the three previous albums were each an aspect of perfection, and this shows Joni pitfalling and regressing, if only very slightly.

Maybe it's just a lull, maybe that fat life has finally got to her. Jesus please let it be the former, or this decade is going to lose one of its last great originals.

++++ **TIM LOTT**

**STEVIE WONDER: 'Anthology' (Motown M9-804A3)**

OKAY KIDZ, it's fax and figures time again.

One triple album set. That means 40 tracks yes. Now, the numero uno song is a little ditty entitled 'Thank You (For Loving Me All The Way)' which was recorded in October 1962 when Stevie was Little and about three years old.

It traces his sixties soar and early seventies roar. Like there's 'Uptight', 'Blowin' In The Wind', 'I Was Made To Love Her', 'Shoo Be Doo Be Doo Da Day', 'For Once In My Life', 'My Cherie Amour', 'Yester-Me, Yester-You, Yesterday', 'Signed, Sealed, Delivered' and on and on and on. And on in fact to December 1971 with 'Do Yourself A Favor'.

This all retails at £6.99.

It's bloody marvellous.

A portrait of the artist as a young man, I think.

+++++ **BARRY CAIN**

**U-ROY: 'Rasta Ambassador' (Virgin V2092)**

"THIS IS U-Roy in the control tower . . . ." Top originator toaster speaking to you. His third Virgin album — and the best talkover set I've heard this year.

Appetites for 'Rasta Ambassador' were whetted earlier this year with the release of the 12" of 'Small Axe' (with rhythm track by the Gladiators); demonstrating that neither Prince Tony Robinson's production handling nor U-Roy's venerable toasting touch had waned. The 10 slices of mighty dub out of Harry J's Jamaican studio more than live up to the promise of that disco cut.

Here you have backing from the Gladiators and the ubiquitous JA team of Robbie Shakespear and Clinton Fearon (bass), Sly Dunbar (drums) and Ranchie's guitar. Powerful, forward rhythms spurred on by U-Roy's alternately monotonic rhymings and high - pitched yelps and exhortations.

He's reworked some earlier dubs, as on 'Tide Is High' and 'Wear You To The Ball' and the new toastings are fired with a fresh and convincing enthusiasm; hypnotic intensity, even.

The originators aren't ALWAYS BEST — this Originator is. Tirelessly and elegantly excellent . . . I won't hear any different. +++++ **JOHN SHEARLAW**

**BURNING SPEAR: 'Live' (Island ILPS 9513)**

THE CONCERT, the union and the reunion which worked . . . definitely. And only a mere seven weeks ago at that.

Winston Rodney — now the heart and soul and living reality of Burning Spear — live at the Rainbow, in an album that captures everything of the enrapturing, smouldering excellence of that occasion. Backed by Aswad and his own JA horns men Rodney laid claim to a stature and importance as an artist that, with but few reservations, could easily rival Marley.

The packed and responsive audience were involved — and they **did** but know it — in a reggae communion of the soul. The simple emotive intensity of Spear's honey - and - smoke voice, his remembrance of suffering through his songs and the triumph of love and peace.

Yeah, all that . . . and it worked. He chants and croons 'Slavery Days', 'Man In The Hills' and 'Old Marcus' ending exhortingly (on side one) with 'Black Soul' and — tantalisingly and beautifully — with 'Throw Down Your Arms', finally.

Red and green and gold was the colour of the Rainbow, as Winston Rodney said. This is both a superb introduction and a happy memory . . . and a giant brimming talent. +++++ **JOHN SHEARLAW**


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