



■ She wears a suit, an afro, a moustache, her skin is tinted a dark shade. If it wasn't for her teeth you wouldn't know it was Joni Mitchell. But it is — in photos both on the cover and inner sleeves. She has split herself in half — photos of her in black drag and photos of her as the familiar Snow Queen of rock. Joni's new album, "Don Juan's Reckless Daughter" contains both the old gentle folk-bossa nova and complex lyrics, and the ever increasing emphasis on jazz and Latin percussion.

"I'm an extremist as far as lifestyle goes. I need to live primitively sometimes, at least for short periods of the year." For this album, the extremes have merged. To quote one of her own lines, from "Dreamland," it's a case of "tar baby and the Great White Wonder." "I had difficulty accepting my affluence and my success," she has said. Maybe through seven minute conga/bongo instrumentals and black drag she's finding a way to cope and rediscover.

Her affluence, opposed to her soulful leanings, was perhaps best expressed on the Hejira song "Furry Sings the Blues" — where an old black bluesman is wary of the white goddess coming in to pick up some soul. She admits she's "rich and fay," but that she has strong feelings for his music. But it's back to her limo when the guy points at her and says "I don't like you."

On the new album, there is more effort to cross over, more cuts devoted to these themes (although naturally nearly half the album must involve reaching out or attempting



Joni's black drag

to reach lovers and strangers). About the only thing that remains constant in whatever she does, is her lyrics. Admittedly somewhat obscure at times, perhaps more than usual, Joni manages to hit with flash images ("black babies covered in baking flour," "loving without trusting-you get frostbite and sunstroke," "Paprika plains and a turquoise river snaking). The traumas and tribulations of love are still there to be sorted through.

While at this point "Hissing of Summer Lawns" seems a crystal gem of purpose and clarity, and "Hejira" remains relaxed in its introspection, "Don Juan's Reckless Daughter" is quite a mouthful, more rhythmic

than melodic, generally more dreamy and distant. But still there's a cut like "Talk to Me" where Joni confronts her need to analyze ("shut me up and talk to me!" — I'm always talkin' — chicken squalkin'). The song also contains the lines "I didn't know I drank such a lot — till I pissed a tequila anaconda the full length of the parking lot."

What sort of visual image do you get from that?

There's a wealth of material to sift through on "Don Juan's Reckless Daughter." It usually takes a while to digest it all. But no matter what direction Joni chooses, many listeners will continue to rise to her challenge. ●