

STARART: A lot more to life than rock and roll

BY STEPHEN GODFREY

When there are plenty of songs around saying the musician's life is just sex, drugs and rock and roll, how many outsiders know enough to dispute it? The image of the pop star as a misunderstood, poor little rich boy/girl is not nearly as strong as one involving endless parties and big-bucks tours.

A new book called Starart shows another side. It contains the artwork of six well-known pop stars: **Joni Mitchell**, John Mayall, Cat Stevens, Commander Cody (a.k.a. George Frayne), Ron Wood and Klaus Voormann. Starart shows their conventional paintings and drawings, and some less conventional art, such as the erotic scene John Mayall painted on the bottom of his swimming pool, or Klaus Voormann's doorknobs in the shape of outstretched hands for Ringo Starr's house.

All these musicians attended art schools. Wood and Mayall imply they concentrated on music simply because it paid better, and one realizes that for most of them, none of this art is mere dabbling. The book shows, often beautifully, that their artistic impulses don't stop at the end of a concert.

Starart was put together over a period of three years by Debby Chesher ("Yeah, it's pronounced just like the cat"), who readily admits she had inaccurate precon-

ceptions about the musicians she would find. When she heard that John Mayall had some work she should see, her first reaction after "Who's John Mayall?" was a worry about dealing with "some half-coherent, burnt-out musician." A glowingly healthy Mayall greeted her in his Laurel Canyon home. Wearing a carpenter's bag, shorts and a deep tan, he was in the midst of building a theatre next to his swimming pool. Miss Chesher spent a lot of her time revising her ideas.

On the other hand, Cat Stevens has been converted into a Moslem since the book first took shape, and as Yusuf Islam, has been living in London and not producing much music. Although he was willing to give quotes to go with his artwork, Miss Chesher chose not to include the kind of interview that accompanies the other artists.

Miss Chesher, who was born and raised in Calgary, has a background as a commercial artist (she spent a year in Toronto at Ryerson) and a photographer of rock concerts, experience which she needed to edit, design, and finally publish Starart. The idea for the book came to her during a down period after her move to Los Angeles. "I was lying on this foam-rubber mattress in this half-empty apartment of a friend in West Hollywood, and the idea came down



Joni Mitchell's Clouds (1969): 'This was an exercise in observation, a portrait done from a mirror over a period of a couple of weeks.'

like a lightbulb. Right away, I made up a list of people I wanted. Most of them are in the book."

Some of those who aren't on that list were people like Christine McVie of Fleetwood Mac. "She liked the idea a lot, but she had lost

most of her stuff with all her travelling." John Lennon was also considered. "He got as far as asking Klaus Voormann the spelling of my name so he could consult his astrologer. But I was happy with the people I had and decided not to pursue it." Working her way up to the superstars like **Joni Mitchell** — "I knew I was dealing with the big time when I had to deal with the manager's assistant before talking to the manager" — Miss Chesher collaborated with the musicians on a format with which they could all work.

The high quality of so much of the work is a real surprise. With artists like **Joni Mitchell**, whose paintings grace her album covers and whose work shows a really remarkable range, the art is used to provide insight into the music. In her quotes, Mitchell cultivates the parallels, even to the point of noting how the use of bands of color in her drawings was extended in the desire to add harmonic lines in her songs. The progress is made from the whimsical, detailed sunset and self-portrait of the Clouds album to the strong, austere work inspired by Georgia O'Keefe.

The fine drafting style of Klaus Voormann — a bass player who has worked as session musician with various artists from the Beatles to Randy Newman — is already well-known from his Re-

volver album cover for the Beatles, but much of his work has the elements of fantastic art and children's illustration. Cat Stevens is disappointingly limited in his style; everything tends to have the childlike simplicity of the Tea for the Tillerman cover. Ron Wood's drawing skills provide some first-rate portraits of friends, from Mick Jagger to John Belushi.

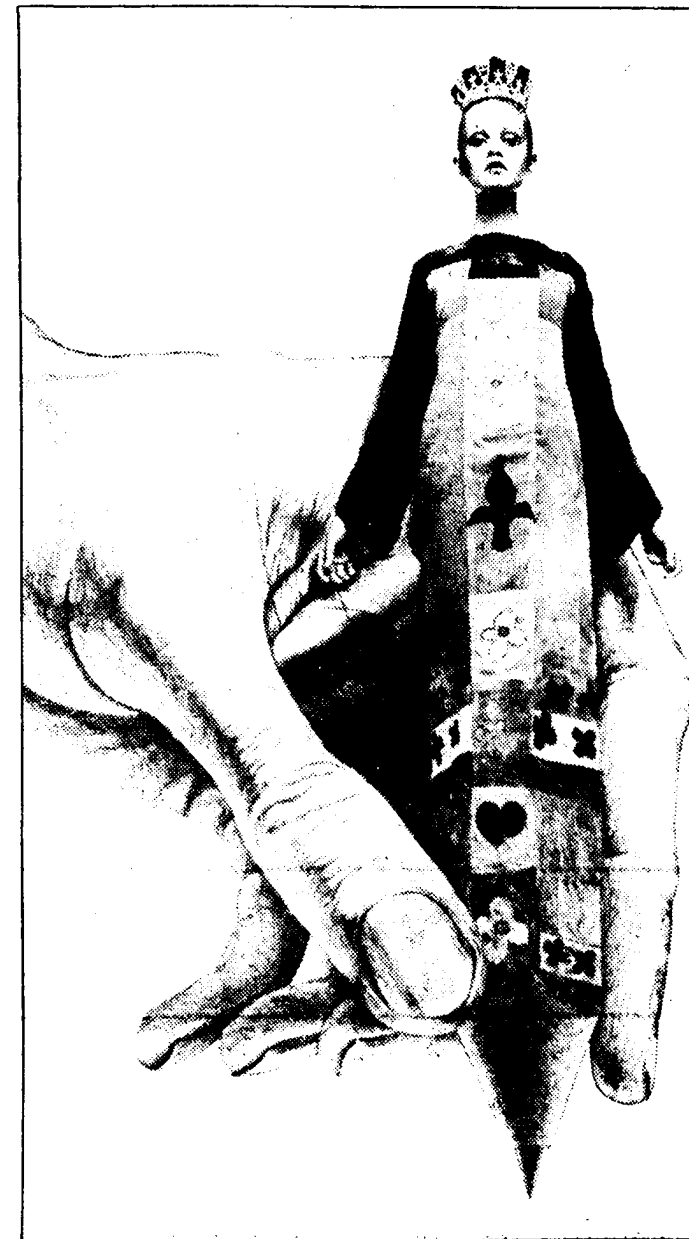
Miss Chesher has appeared on the Mike Douglas and Merv Griffin shows to promote the book. Play-

boy is doing a color layout in March, and other magazines are showing interest. The book, released a month ago, is selling well, which satisfies not only Miss Chesher but the artists involved.

"They're not going to get rich off this book," she says. "This book isn't going to sell like one of their albums. But it's satisfying to them that people take interest in their talent outside of music, and for reasons that have nothing to do with their names."



Mayall (left), Mitchell, Voormann, Wood and Frayne: the flip side of a rock star's life.



Sketch in Twiggy series Klaus Voorman did for Vogue magazine.