

JONI MITCHELL: "The Hissing of Summer Lawns" (Asylum) ::

The transition from great songwriter to bad poet is always a difficult one, and Mitchell's talent and good sense are putting up a fight. But any record that is more interesting to read than to listen to has got to be in a lot of trouble. Of course, interesting is a relative concept, so it must be remembered that Joni's biggest trouble is her current bunch of boyfriends, Tom Scott's El Lay pseudo-jazz coolcats — when Steely Dan needs a classy sax break, Phil Woods joins the session, while Mitchell resorts to Bud Shank, the creative paragon who vaunted his distaste for the boho dance with a hit version of "Michelle." Read against such music, the editorials in *Cash Box* would probably be good for a few kicks, and Mitchell's level of literacy is much higher than that; she's turning into an autodidactic West Coast Erica Jong. Representative couplet from "The Jungle Line," about the pervasiveness of African culture: "Floating, drifting on air-conditioned wind/Drooling for a taste of something smuggled in." That's not awful. But somebody should convince the artist that her

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pejoratives apply very well to El Lay coolcats, including floating poetasters who are losing their grasp on music.

B Minus.