

has created instantly recognizable Texas lot.

Music: Joni Mitchell

JONI MITCHELL — Rock performer appeared in concert Thursday night at the Sam Houston Coliseum. Opening act, The L.A. Express. Presented by Concerts West and KILT.

By **BOB CLAYPOOL**

Every time Joni Mitchell comes to Houston she brings along that achingly pure voice, a backlog of great songs, a fine backup band, and, last but not least, a tendency to get into a bit of a snit with her audience.

All of those things were present Thursday night in the Coliseum. She sang like an earth angel, and she and the L.A. Express provided some tasty music, and, yes, she did get irritated with the noise in the crowd and delivered one of her patented lectures (which always seem to be based on a kind of "If you don't behave, I'll take my ball and go home" idea).

The L.A. Express opened the evening with a 40-minute set of well-played jazz-rock. The band is no longer led by Tom Scott, but his absence didn't take away from the driving funkiness of the group. The new sax man, whose name is (this is an approximation, now) David Lowell, played some sharp, churning tenor and drummer John Guerin and guitarist Robben Ford also stood out. The Express has become something of a white Crusaders-type band, which is both their great-strength and weakness — the sound is a bit too predictable and laid-out at times.

Following the intermission, Joni came on with the band and presented a set that concentrated heavily on her more recent material.

She moved gracefully through things like "Free Man In Paris," "For the Roses," "Cold Blue Steel and Sweet Fire," "Shades of Scarlet Conquering" and "The Boho Dance" before the trouble came to a head.

It wasn't much, really — in fact, the large crowd was probably the best behaved one I've ever seen at a Coliseum rock show (which is, admittedly, usually reserved for the hard-core boogie bands). But, there were a few people talking, a few titters here and there while Joni, sitting at the piano, was trying to get through the soft and lovely "Boho." A laugh during the crucial last line made the difference.

She said, "It sounds to me like you guys would prefer boogie, wouldn't you?" Then, when that drew some applause, she added, "Okay, we're gonna cut off half the show!"

Despite the groans from most of the crowd, she switched to guitar and returned to doing material with the band. I don't know what, if anything, was cut, but her anger didn't hurt her singing. "Just Like a Train," "In France They Kiss On Main Street," "Shadow and Light" and "Trouble Child" were all magnificent.

She had a point, of course, getting upset like that. But then the Coliseum has never been a good "listening" hall. And, one wonders if her audiences in, say, L.A., are any quieter.