

POP MUSIC REVIEW

Michelle Shocked: The Gap Between Art and Attitude

By ROBERT HILBURN,
Times Pop Music Critic

Michelle Shocked, who headlined the Palace on Tuesday, is a Texas vagabond who has been hailed as everything from a Joan Baez with humor to a female Woody Guthrie.

In an age obsessed with technology and flash in pop music, Shocked favors plain attire (a black cap, black sweater and jeans) and plays her songs on a \$75 guitar she bought 10 years ago in a pawn shop. Even the lanky performer's songs are simple—at least on the surface.

Employing a folk singer's restlessness and innocence, she writes in her most affecting numbers about such everyday matters as old dirt roads, volunteer fire departments and kids' pranks.

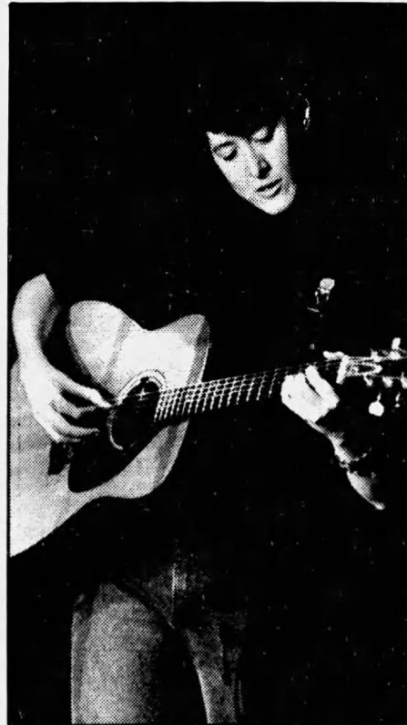
In last year's highly acclaimed album "Short Sharp Shocked" she turned those down-home images into wonderfully perceptive and original commentaries on people's aspirations—and the factors that sometimes crush or defuse those dreams. Like much of Guthrie's work, the commentaries are occasionally laced with a sharp social bite.

At the Palace, the freshness and warmth of the album's songs were especially endearing. How surprising then that Shocked's manner seemed far less generous and engaging.

While working hard at disarming the audience with a folksy informality (lots of shy winks and aw-shucks smiles), she seemed discouragingly programmed.

Many of the song introductions were word-for-word and wink-for-wink repeats

ROBERT GABRIEL / Los Angeles Times



Folk singer Michelle Shocked and her \$75 guitar take the stage at Palace.

of her set when she opened a few months ago for Billy Bragg at the Wilton Theatre. Even worse, there were signs of the ultimate protest singer's disease: a patronizing attitude.

Shocked explained to the supportive Palace audience that she now lives in London because she is disenchanted with the social apathy in her native land.

Rather than offer the charitable spirit of someone who wants to encourage people to be more understanding, she acted as if anyone who disagreed is an inferior being in need of scolding.

"This is a song about Vietnam," Shocked said sarcastically, in introducing an anti-war song by the late Steve Goodman. "That

Please see SHOCKED, Page 5