



**Marty  
Racine**  
Pop Music

## Bragg, Shocked intriguing pair

**E** <sup>7880</sup> **7880** **ENGLISH** socialist Billy Bragg walked through the land of free enterprise such as it exists and at last report was still kicking after spouting his leftist, anti-Thatcher rhetoric Saturday night at Rockefeller's in his first Texas appearance.

Even his saxophone player back home was prudent to avoid big bad Texas, Bragg told the crowd not so facetiously. After two Houston cancellations, Bragg finally appeared with his pianist, Cara Tivey.

Out on the street, club doorman Mr. Jesse wasn't taking kindly to Bragg's overall set of ethics. "I'm ready to get him off stage," he huffed.

Talk about gumption. Bragg even had the temerity to *headline* over Michelle Shocked, the Dallas native/London resident folk singer making her own Houston debut.

But together (I missed third act Mon Contel), the two, who have toured together sporadically the past few years, combined for one of the most intriguing, intelligent shows this club has produced in a long time.

A boisterous but mostly attentive crowd helped.

After engaging in a slightly more healthy lifestyle the past three weeks, the critic returned to clubland delighted with Saturday's unusual options.

The evening began early at Club Hey Hey,

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# Racine

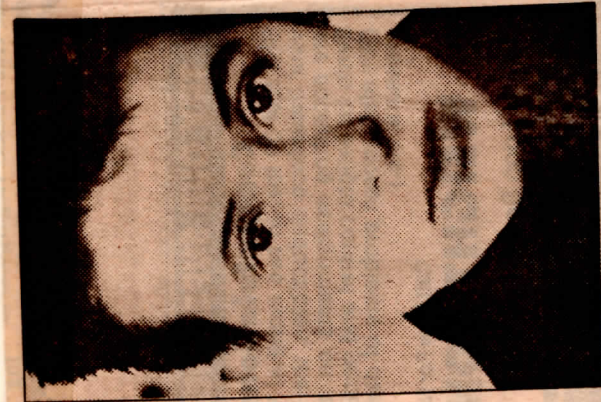
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celebrating its first anniversary with a grand "private" party that looked public enough as a prelude to the night's featured performer, Miss Molly. Employees were doubly excited with their first look at a San Francisco Examiner story on the club, and the champagne flowed and toasts were exchanged. The club also offered a free buffet, T-shirts and commemorative mugs.

■ We dropped by the Red Lion for Freddie Krc's return to his hometown as leader of Freddie Steady's Wild Country, which this night consisted of Freddie on acoustic rhythm guitar and vocals and a sideman on electric lead.

This was pure Texas folk-country, in a Jimmie Dale Gilmore vein, and he should be encouraged to return, perhaps with a full-blown band. Then it was back to Rockefeller's. I had anticipated Michelle Shocked for a month, and I was not disappointed.

Thin with long arms and an anguished face that lit up with a thousand expressions, Shocked wore beatnik black. With a black cap, she had that beatific young folkie look that Bob Dylan portrayed on his very first (self-titled) album for Columbia



Michelle Shocked

in 1962. The resemblance, probably not intended, is uncanny. And if she's not the Dylan of today, she can be the next Joan Baez, with a songbird's voice that can growl on the mean parts, a limitless bag of material, and a conviction behind every song.

She sparred with the audience easily, doing her Angry Young Man songs and her Angry Young Woman's songs, hoping "I'll offend some of you," and putting even her own rape (true story) in a political context by saying "getting raped because you're

a woman is almost the same as getting lynched because you're black." But unlike folk singer Tracy Chapman's appearance here two months ago, Shocked opened up to the crowd and entertained. She's as much an entertainer as a singer, the two a product of storytelling.

She brought out her father, "Dollar Bill," from whose record collection she learned as a kid, and the two did an instrumental mandolin breakdown.

She did a sultry version of *Fog-town*, about San Francisco and the only number to make both her *Texas Campfire Tapes* album and the professionally produced *Short Sharp Shocked*.

She sang a chilling *The L&N Don't Stop Here Anymore*, sending a surge down my back; an angry and poignant *Graffiti Limbo*, about (the lack of) justice; and a warm *Anchorage*, about an old Dallas friend now up in the "largest state of the Union."

Shocked is an original with a great talent and a grasp of emotions and issues beyond her years. "Pop" music is all the richer for her arrival.

■ Bragg was able to follow with his own strong showing. Shocked joined him on his first song, *I'm Waiting For A New Deal*, then he took command of the stage. He blurted out a dirty word, "socialism," just to get that out of the way, then launched into a series of political wisecracks and extemporaneous jokes that

landed with expert timing.

Accompanied occasionally by Tivey but always by his own electric guitar, on which he punched out stirring chord progressions, Bragg easily segued into his music, hitting the mark with *Waiting For The Great Leap Forwards*, *The Short Answer*, *Valentine's Day Is Over* and others from his new *Workers Playtime* LP, plus *Which Side Are You On*, *It Says Here*, *The Milkman of Human Kindness* (by request) and *Honey, I'm A Big Boy Now*. His voice, though lacking the pure resonance of Shocked's, was powerful, his guitar strumming purposeful, his convictions on his sleeve.

Conviction of the sort is lacking in pop, but Bragg eased it in the back door through his wonderful stand-up routines. It is important to recognize that his "socialism" is British in nature, but that in his hilarious jibes at the current American election campaign and behind the funny one-liners at Quayle's expense, Europeans caught between East and West as a theater for missile sites, have a huge stake in U.S. politics.

But if his heart is pure, the one line that cannot go unchallenged is Bragg's assertion that "capitalism is killing music," which appears on *Workers Playtime* and which he repeated in concert.

That's just not true, my thoughtful friend, but like you stated at the top of your set, don't tell me what to do and I won't tell you what to say.