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Delightful songs of everyday things

Michelle Shocked
Dallas Brooks Hall
Wednesday January 3
Reviewed by Marcus Breen

Pop

THIS concert was a joy. Michelle Shocked's voice, her adept and relaxed guitar playing, her song writing, and her stories, her body movements, her broad smile, all contributed to an overwhelming sense of delight and absorption in life.

Shocked's songs range from the mundane — learning to drive a car, sweet potato pies, making strawberry jam and letter writing — to the overtly political.

Her protest song, *Graffiti Limbo* — about police brutality and racism in New York — worked because of the anger conveyed by the singer.

That Shocked looks and sounds so much like a folk singer is reinforced by the everyday subjects she colours with generous emotion.

It was a night when simple sensations, human intimacy seemed to reverberate through the audience. It was not all love and understanding, but it was certainly not sentimental folksy warmth for its own sake. It was sometimes stark, stripped of the surging joy of Shocked's recent recordings.

If anything, the concert was the American folk tradition seen in full bloom in 1990. Here was Peter Seeger, Woody Guthrie, Guy Clark, Bessie Smith and Huddie Ledbetter (Ledbelly), all present and accounted for.

Here too was the reawakening of a folk music revival that could have political repercussions in the future.

With Michelle Shocked, as with other solo singers, there is a belief that human warmth can still be generated from music and this music can then mobilise people. It is an important change from rock-and-roll entertainment to entertainment with a heart.

When Shocked's father "Bill", came on stage to accompany his daughter on mandolin, it was a further reminder that things are changing — that the generation gap of Bob Dylan's era of folk has been left behind and that all generations now unite to create songs that herald a better, more humane future.

■ Michelle Shocked will give another concert on Tuesday, January 9 at the Old Greek Theatre, Richmond.