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**BURRELLES**

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# Folk singer successfully swinging into new persona

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By **TIM CARMAN**  
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**T**HE SCENE WAS incongruous Thursday night at the Tower Theatre: Folk singer and political activist Michelle Shocked, wearing her traditional black muscle shirt, jeans and cap, stood amid a sextet of bushy-haired musicians.

The gaunt 28-year-old woman who had toured previously with only a guitar and a voice was now circled with two

hornmen, a keyboardist, guitarist, bassist and drummer.

## Music review

Not to mention four huge balloons that hung from the ceiling, and 600 warm and appreciative fans.

Say hello to Captain Swing, a full-bodied, blues wannabe with a band that can make those dreams

come true. Shocked certainly has suffered the slings and arrows of not a few folks for her awkward transition into swing, and the singer seemingly apologized several times Thursday for her new direction.

She shouldn't have. During a 75-minute, 20-song performance, Shocked appeared, and sometimes even sang, nervously, but time and again she was able to fall back on the one thing that has rarely failed her: talent. The opening show of her nine-week *Captain Swing* tour was expertly arranged, meticulously performed and occasionally even inspiring.

Anyway, why is it so strange that Shocked is redefining herself again? She's been living a wanderer's life for years, moving in and out of relationships and addresses like taxi cabs, aimlessly looking for something with which she could le-

gitimize herself. She's doing the same thing now with her career.

Political rhetoric came naturally went she first took to music. She was a squatter who could blame all her problems on a faceless and omnipotent object called "The Government. Once she became comfortable (read: a successful artist), she could turn to ideas and idioms that, more than likely, spoke to her more emotionally. Hey, we all change, and we all have our contradictions.

With that bit of cheap psychoanalysis said, let's look at her concert in strict musical terms. It was, as Shocked herself said, "the best of both worlds." You got both Shocked in her *Captain Swing* persona, and Shocked in her sensitive and political folk singer persona. Both had their moments.

As a blues beller, Shocked is still in development. Her blues shout-

ing on "Too Little Too Late" was mainourished, but other times, such as on the full-throated, R&B treatment of "Don't You Mess Around With) My Little Sister," she was relaxed and in full, flavorful voice.

Strangely enough, when Shocked rearranged " (Making the Run to) Gladewater" for full instrumentation, you quickly realized she has been — consciously or unconsciously — writing music with an ear toward the big-band blues for awhile.

Shocked systematically stripped the band down until, midway through the concert, it was only Shocked and her guitar. And then she stripped it down some more, until it was just Shocked offering a heartfelt rendition of "The Battle of Penny Evans."

Where will Shocked go from here? Who knows? But isn't that what makes life exciting?