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BURRELLES

Shocked, Poi Dog an undiluted mix

By JIM BEAL, JR.
Express-News Music Columnist

If there was a watchdog for Saturday night's Michelle Shocked/Poi Dog Pondering concert at the Majestic Theater, it was "communitly."

While the audience was small, maybe 400 enthusiastic souls, everyone seemed to know everyone else — and the performers worked as if they were at a house party.

Poi Dog Pondering, an eight-piece outfit that comes from Austin by way of the world, opened the proceedings with its Pacific Rim World Beat tribal municipal orchestra twang, rhythm and personality.

While wags and critics have taken shots at Poi Dog Pondering by calling the band "too cute" and "too precious," the group's Saturday set, which featured songs from the albums "Poi Dog Pondering" and the new "Wishing Like A Mountain & Thinking Like the Sea," came across as uplifting, joyous, engaging, clever and downright fun.

Poi Dog Pondering does seem like a gang of young hippies that just piled out of its VW van, but with instruments that run the gamut from violin to accordion to electric guitar to frying pan to mandolin cranking out a mixture of Celtic, Hawaiian, World Beat and rock 'n' roll, the group's songs can't be denied.

Shocked, like many Texas-bred musicians, masterfully defies categorization while serving up artistry straight from the heart.

Shocked took the Majestic stages backed by a powerhouse six-piece band that include a brass

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section and the hot hands of guitarist Nina Gerber.

Songs from "Captain Swing," Shocked's latest record, figured prominently in the first part of her set. "God Is A Real Estate Developer," "On the Greener Side," "Looks Like Mona Lisa (Smells Like Tuna Fish)" and "The Cement Lament" all got strong readings.

Shocked made her first big musical waves as an activist folkie with an acoustic guitar courtesy of a crudely recorded offering called "The Texas Campfire Tapes." Saturday night Shocked showed her words — and spirit — aren't daunted or diluted by the backing of a band.

The horns, keyboard, electric guitar and thundering rhythm section helped punctuate Shocked's lyrics and show just how comfortable Shocked is singing everything from jazz to rockabilly to pure folk.

But Shocked also hasn't abandoned her acoustic roots. The mid-point of the Saturday show found her alone at center stage with her words and guitar for four songs, including "Memories Of East Texas," "Gratitit Limbo" and "5 A.M. In Amsterdam."

Back came the band for more of "Captain Swing" — "Sleep Keeps Me Awake," "Must Be Luff" and the song that's bordering on being a hit — "(Don't You Mess Around With) My Little Sister."

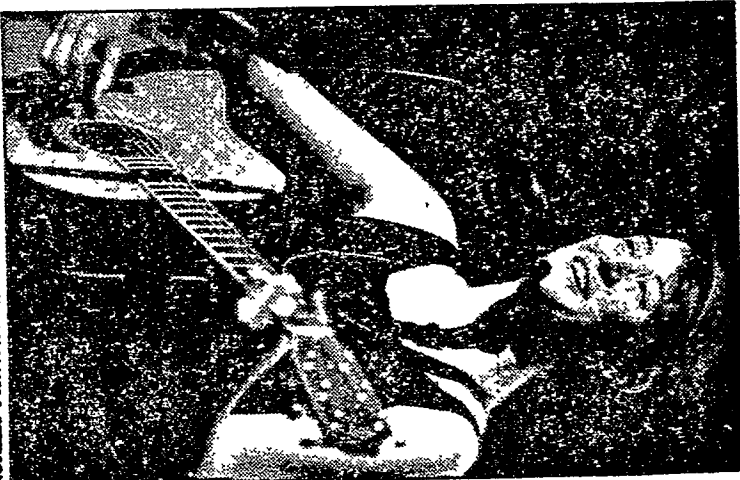


PHOTO BY JAMES S. PETERSON
Michelle Shocked turned in a four-song acoustic set halfway through her concert.

That the sentiments expressed by Shocked on "My Little Sister" are authentic was borne out when she brought out her sister Juliet to provide a kinetic visual aid.

For a grand finale Shocked and the band performed the do-it-yourself anthem "Strawberry Jam," a raucous ragtime gem that ended with Shocked's words, "Music, like politics, is too important to be left to professionals."