



DAVID PINKERTON/Special to the Gazette

Michelle Shocked performs before a large audience at John M. Greene Hall last night.

Michelle Shocked changes her ways

By JOHN E. REILY
Special to the Gazette

NORTHAMPTON — Michelle Shocked wants to be more than a politically correct folksinger. A year ago at Springfield's Paramount Theater she performed solo on acoustic guitar and lectured about unions and the environment between nearly every song.

Last night at a nearly-packed John M. Greene Hall, Shocked brought a swinging six-piece band and kept the political raps to a minimum. "Marilyn Monroe came to me in a dream and she said, 'Girlfriend, don't preach to the converted ... entertain the troops,'" said Shocked, imitating Monroe's breathy whisper.

To change her folkie ways Shocked has been on a doctor-prescribed diet of Professor Longhair and Louis Jordan records and her new album is a rollicking, horn-laden treat called "Captain Swing." With her trademark, short-brim sailor's cap giving her a nautical look, she launched the show with swinging R&B tunes like "God Is A Real Estate Developer" and "On the Greener Side."

When she sang like a folkie, Shocked was immensely entertaining last night. She was a delight to behold with her long-legged grace, radiant smile and buoyant, boyish personality.

Shocked wants to throw a party where Emma Goldman can dance and she encouraged the nearly full house of 1,612 to stand up or at least boogie in their seats. "This is your party so come on and swing it," she urged.

Unfortunately, the show was poorly paced and just when the aisles filled with dancers, her back-up band left the stage and she went into the solo segment of the show. This portion was highlighted by a lovely sing-along on "Memories of East Texas," an

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overwrought but still powerful rendition of Steve Goodman's "The Ballad of Penny Evans," and a mandolin duet with her father, Dollar Bill, on the old fiddle tune "Jeff Davis."

The sax, trumpet, guitar, bass, drums and keyboards returned for the inevitable "Anchorage" (Shocked's biggest hit) and then the group really caught fire on "My Little Sister" and "If Love Was a Train."

For much of the night the rhythm section never got off the dime but by the end they were cooking. The show finished with "Strawberry Jam," a Shocked song about musical participation, and fruit preserves. "You can never buy a jar of the stuff that tastes as good as the stuff you make yourself," said Shocked.

The concert was a tripleheader that also included John Wesley Harding from Hastings, England, and Poi Dog Pondering from Austin, Texas. Wesley Harding Stace changed his name to match that of a Bob Dylan album and he just released a fine debut album called "Here Come the Groom." Performing solo on acoustic guitar, Harding demonstrated brilliant acerbic British wit reminiscent of Elvis Costello on tunes like "The Devil in Me" and a fantasy about a Beatles reunion in 1992 (including John Lennon) sponsored by Visa and Greenpeace.

Poi Dog Pondering is a musical tribe led by the lanky Frank Orral. They play a New Age beat style of music that features the excellent fiddle of Susan Voelz and the trumpet and accordion of David Crawford. The words have a sunny, barefoot optimism that borders on dippy but the tunes are pleasant and jovous with nifty counter-melodies.