

DAILY NEWS

NEW YORK, NY
DAILY 1,278,118

WEDNESDAY
MAY 2 1990

BURRELLE'S

BH

1880BA

REVIEW

Minor variations on a theme

By MATTHEW AUERBACH

ANY ARTIST WORTH her salt is always trying to expand the boundaries of her work, and Michelle Shocked is no exception. Saturday night at the Ritz, the acoustic-guitar-playing singer/songwriter appeared with a full band in support of her latest LP, "Captain Swing," an album of original songs placed in a "swing" (i.e., rhythm & blues rockabilly, New Orleans stride) setting. And while Shocked gets an "A" for the attempt, a little of this style went a long way.

Shocked's clear vocals and naughty stage persona were perfectly suited to this playful musical genre. The rumbly stomp of "When I Grow Up" and the ragtime-ish "God Is a Real Estate Developer" benefited from a nice

sax/trumpet mix. Her latest hit, "On the Greener Side" was made even more good-timey when Shocked, in her introduction of the song, informed the audience that she wrote it as a reaction to New Orleans piano legend Professor Longhair's cure for hemorrhoids ("just move your butt to the music").

The problem with all this was that nothing new was done with a familiar style, so after a few tunes, the novelty wore thin. The musicianship was fine, but predictable arrangements held no interest.

Not so on the solo end, where Shocked showed a gift for unashamed intimacy with songs like "Memories of East Texas" and her a cappella version of Steve Goodman's Vietnam War lament, "The Ballad of Penny Evans."

(Auerbach writes frequently on pop music.)



LAUGHTY: Michelle Shocked