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BURRELLETS

Michelle Shocked: Music first, politics second

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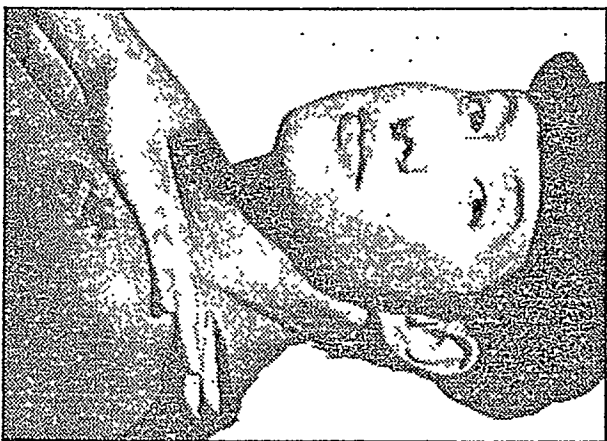
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PROVIDENCE — Early in her show at the Living Room last night, Michelle Shocked delivered a succinct summation of her current philosophy: "If I can't dance, you can keep your revolution." So Shocked's show was an upbeat, horn-drenched affair that kept the overt politics at a minimum.

Shocked, wearing a black tank top and a cap, was backed by a fine band, particularly the crack two-man horn section of Jim Pollock (sax) and Max Haskett (trumpet), who managed to sound like considerably more than just two players.

Shocked opened the show with a driving, bluesy version of *When I Grow Up*, followed with *God Is A Real Estate Developer*, with its big horn fills and honky-tonk piano.

Next Shocked took some time to talk to the crowd, managing to link New Orleans keyboard master Professor Longhair and radical Emma Goldman while explaining the virtues of hip swinging and wild arm-waving as a cure for life's problems.



SHOCKING THOUGHT: "If I can't dance, you can keep your revolution."

To prove her point, she launched into *The Greener Side*, a tune that had her sa-

shaying across the stage. *Gladdewater* maintained the jaunty mood, with its trebly lead guitar and tinkling barrelhouse piano.

But Shocked knows the virtues of mixing things up, so she moved to *Looks Like Mona Lisa*, a quieter reflection on Da Vinci's mystery woman, sung over synthesized strings. Then it was some early jazz with *Silent Way* and *Cement Lament*, muted trumpet. *Streetcorner Ambassador*, in the same musical vein, hides its acid comments about the homeless behind its jazz phrasing.

The whole mood changed when Shocked did *Graffiti Limbo*, a song she wrote after a young man, arrested for writing graffiti in New York City, died in police custody. Here you could see Shocked's anger, like a glimpse of concrete wall beneath the party decorations. Her singing was tough, intense, and bearing down on the words "When there ain't no justice" an accusation flung at the murderers. It was a lot less fun, but considerably more powerful, than the rest of the show.

Shocked reminisced about hitchhiking from Texas to California before playing 5 a.m. in *Amsterdam*, then brought her father up on stage for a duet on mandolins.

Captain Swing returned in a big way as the band returned for *Sleep Keeps Me Awake*. Using a small model boat, Shocked tried (and failed) to explain sailing technique in her introduction to *Must Be Luff*, which describes romance in nautical terms. *If Love Was A Train* rocked the club as sax player Pollock wailed his solo standing on top of the Living Room bar.

Shocked, who didn't take the stage until almost midnight, finished up the 75-minute set with *Anchorage*. She seemed ready to return to the stage, but the show was running late, and the Living Room had to close.

Opening act Poi Dog Pondering was a pleasure in its own right. A happy-sounding bunch, Poi Dog's bouncy music sounds as though it's being played for pure fun in a park on a sunny afternoon, as the band reaches into an instrumental grab bag to put its tunes together with fiddle, accordion, flugelhorn, trombone and various percussion implements.