

MONDAY  
MAY 7 1990

2 BURELLES PO

# Michelle Shocked a sincere contemporary artist

By Alicia Ansstead  
NEWS Feature Writer

Generally I shun rock concerts. The last one I went to was in the 1970s when Peter Frampton was touring after his "Frampton Comes Alive" album and was playing in Washington, D.C. But when I heard that Michelle Shocked was playing at the Portland City Hall Auditorium on May 4, I decided to end my moratorium on concerts and go. Michelle Shocked, you see, is my newest musical hero, and I knew that any concert of hers would be like a back porch bluegrass pickin' party. And, girlfriend (as

we Southerners say), what a party it was.

The show began with soloist John Wesley Harding, a British guitarist whose songs of cynicism and wit only mildly entertained the audience.

After Harding, Poi Dog Pondering, a Texas based band, came onto a dark stage and began simulating train sounds. To the light of a single glowing globe, they began their song "Big Walk," from the album "Wishing Like the Mountain and

Thinking Like the Sea" (1990). Finally the lights came up, and presented the eight-piece band that included the unusually rich sounds of a violin, accordion and congas. (Later in the show, the band also used marimbas, a mandolin and a trumpet.)

Small groups of people dashed to the front and danced by the stage to the songs that combined rock, calypso, classical and bluegrass styles. The songs (written by Poi lead vocalist Frank Orrell) were largely from the "Wishing" album and spoke of relationships, life lessons and good times. The sound and message were hopeful, uplifting, unpretentious and intelligent in a way that many contemporary musicians aren't anymore.

Finally, Michelle Shocked leapt onto the stage, grabbed her guitar, and began her soulful show with "When I Grow Up I Wanna Be An Old Woman." Afterward, she invited the audience to take to the aisles and dance. And for the most part,

they obliged. "That's more better," she said and quoted Emma Goldman as saying "If I can't dance, then you can keep your revolution."

Playing selections from "Short Sharp Shocked" (1988) and "Captain Swing" (1989), Shocked and her band Captain Swing showed that music is, indeed, about feeling. When not playing her mandolin or guitar (which was nearly as big as she was), she waved her long swan-like arms to the funky beat, and smiled willingly, broadly, and charismatically into the audience whom she called "friends." Shocked's father made a guest appearance and played a mandolin duet by Norman Blake with his daughter. Shocked also played one solo song, "Memories of East Texas."

But for the most part, the focus of the evening was down-home Texas swing. And whether Shocked was strumming or dancing or telling a story, she was swinging. There's no question

that she and her friends are part of a contemporary grassroots musical movement that is for and about diversity, unity, sincerity and good times.