

Did Michelle shock? No, she sang with wit and poignant beauty

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MICHELLE SHOCKED; opening act, John Wesley Har-
sing in concert at Kingsbury Hall; May 20; one show
only.

In case anybody still thought she was another "Tracy" Chapman — some dour singer/songwriter bent on changing the world — Michelle Shocked swung into Salt Lake Sunday night and put on a show that made her audience in Kingsbury Hall get up and dance.

Although she once had a reputation as a militant activist, Shocked has of late changed her tune, or at least her style. As she explained to her fans last night in her East Texas twang: "I had a dream in which Marilyn Monroe came to me and said 'Don't preach to the converted. Entertain the troops.'"

And so she does, giving the troops plenty of

raucous swing along with her clever, sometimes painful, lyrics. She still sings songs like "God is a Real Estate Developer" and "Graffiti Limbo" (the true story of Michael Stewart, a young black graffiti artist allegedly strangled by transit police in New York). But even these have a rollicking feel to them, punctuated by a big-band brass sound.

"If you can't dance, you can keep your revolution," notes the reformed Shocked, who cautions her audience: "Don't make the same mistakes I made."

Shocked, whose real name remains a guarded secret, became a sort of folk hero for her stand on the left side of various political causes, including the politics of the homeless and the squatters movement in Amsterdam. She renamed herself after being arrested at the Republican National Convention in Dallas

in 1984.

She never quite fit in in Gilmer, Texas, as she explains in the haunting "Memories of East Texas":

You know their lives run in circles so small

That they thought they'd seen it all

But they could not make a place

For a girl who had seen the ocean

But, despite her politics and her years spent away, her East Texas roots have stayed with her. Describing what it was like to learn to drive on those red clay back roads, the song says it all:

Thinking back on the roads I've come

Thinking I have not come that far

Most of her songs, especially those on her most recent album — "Captain Swing" — are heavily influenced by the blues, rockabilly and

swing of the same East Texas she once was so eager to get behind her.

Although her style is engaging and her look unique (in her short hair and black cap she looks like a cross between a gangly leprechaun and an underling in some Third World army), the most refreshing things about Shocked are her lyrics.

From her opening number — "When I Grow Up" (in which she explains that when she grows up she wants to be an old woman, who will marry an old man and have 120 babies) — to the encore "Anchorage," Shocked proved to be a great storyteller, and a great time.

Opening for Shocked was John Wesley Harding, who combined political cynicism, a driving guitar and powerful voice into a British version of John Cougar Mellencamp.