

Michelle Shocked gets audience shaking at Paramount

By Rick Nelson

The News-Tribune

73902A

The shocking thing about Michelle is how far she's come since her 1987 debut album was recorded on a Sony Walkman by a Texas folk festival.



The "Campfire Tapes" showed Michelle Shocked, who performed Wednesday at Seattle's Paramount Theatre, to be a talented, sassy, highly political folksinger/songwriter. Then came "Short Sharp Shocked," in '88, which furthered that impression and added some musical niceties

through the addition of "folkie" instruments, such as dobro, mandolin and harmonica.

Early last year Shocked wowed a Seattle crowd with self-deprecating wit and songs such as "Anchorage," which contrasted the life of a politically "correct" East Texas "gypsy" and a friend who has settled down in Anchorage — "Hey, 'chell, I think I'm a housewife."

Well, Shocked may still be politically correct, but she's downplaying the activism and upgrading the music. At the Paramount she unleashed a full-tilt, six-piece swing and boogie band and had the aisles packed with dancers.

Shocked said that her political "rectitude" has resulted in a

common rectal problem — one solved by strict adherence to Professor Longhair's musical prescription: shaking a tail feather at least two hours each night.

She finished her explanation by quoting an American Socialist, Emma Goldman: "If I can't dance, you can keep your resolution."

"When I grow up," "God Is a Real Estate Developer," "Gladewater" all got Shocked's new brassy (two horns) treatment, and her fans seemed to have approved. The music palette ranged from swing and bar-band blues to funk and Bobby Bland horn riffs and R&B.

She started an acoustic section of the show with just her guitar and performed "Memories of East

Texas" and "Graffiti limbo" before being joined by her father for a mandolin duo on "Jefferson Davis."

The band returned for several songs, including "Must Be Luff," and "Don't Mess With My Little Sister," before the finale.

"Love Is a Train," "Anchorage" and "Strawberry Jam" were slated as encores.

It was a well-paced and entertaining show. Michelle is going to have to work even harder to shock her fans out of coming back for more.

Newcomer John Wesley Harding, opened the show, and a young British singer/songwriter provided an engaging if uneven set of original tunes and unusual covers.

Harding — real name Wesley

Harding Stace — scored well with the college crowd with his recent debut album, "Here Comes the Groom," and was well received.

Despite the fact that his chosen name harks back to a Bob Dylan tune, Harding's song structure and phrasing show a heavy dose of Elvis Costello's influence.

Unfortunately, Harding has more of the form than the substance and his lyrics lack the depth and continuity one expects of Costello. The twists and turns of Harding's imagery often seem more affected than sincere.

Midway in his set, which Harding did solo with an acoustic guitar, he got to some material that let a more convincing cynicism come through.