

# Shocked gets into the swing

Shedding her folk image proves to be worthy experiment

By Barry Walters  
EXAMINER POP MUSIC CRITIC

IN THE persona of Captain Swing, Michelle Shocked challenged her folkie image with a big band and a lighter activist touch at a packed Warfield Saturday night. She explained that her decision to give people the unexpected came in the aftermath of a dream about Marilyn Monroe, who told her, "Don't preach to the converted — play for the troupes."

Shocked didn't exactly do that. The crowd wasn't much different than those she's had in the past (equal parts young lesbians and slightly older hippies). If sales of "Captain Swing," her latest album, are anything to go by, her audience may have even shrunk.

But her willingness to experiment musically is just as laudable as her recent frankness with the press about her affairs with women. While other female folksingers praise the virtues of freedom and remain constrained, Shocked isn't

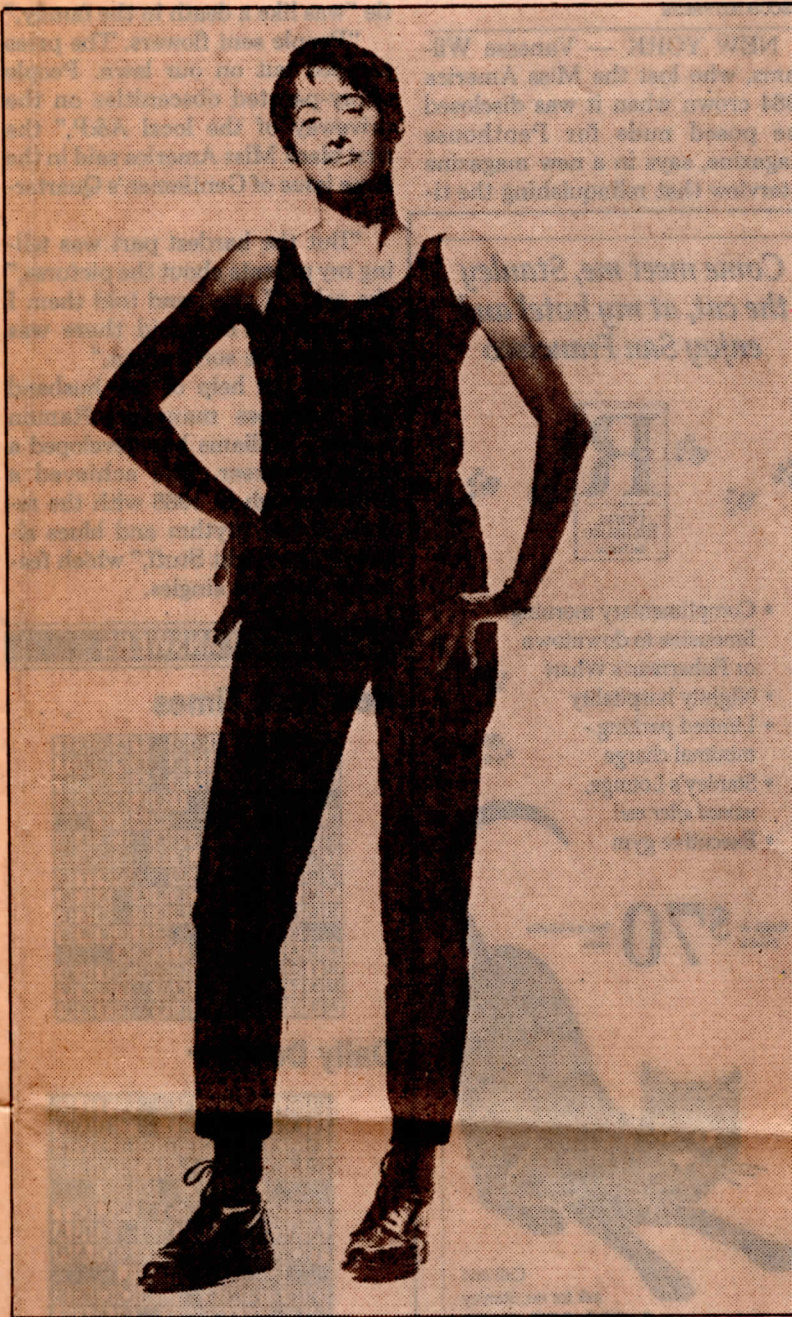
afraid to close the gap between her public and private self.

As a result, she's become more playful, less preachy. In a ribald speech that drew a relationship between politics and proctology, the singer pointed out that her switch to swing was an attempt to cure herself of a "serious social disease" — extreme and debilitating political correctness. (Shocked sure is a good talker.)

The remedy she offered for such a malady is dance. Problem is, her music is still better for listening than for dancing. Shocked is a true folk singer in that she's tops at painting a scene with words. When you can't hear her lyrics, she's a lot less interesting. Her melodies are rarely instantly infectious and her new swing arrangements only mimic what others have already done better. She gets lost in the music and that isn't good.

On the other hand, there's a new sense of pleasure in her performance. Her voice has technically improved and grown more expressive. When she sang "Graffiti Limbo" from her last album, the difference from the recorded version was impossible to ignore. Here she held notes longer, harder. If swing has taught her to sing folk this strong-

[ See SHOCKED, B-10 ]



The new Michelle Shocked: more playful, less preachy

SHOCKED from B-1

## Shocked gets into the swing

...then both Shocked and her fans are better for the experience.

The high point of her show wasn't during the swing tunes or a little instrumental jam with her dad and younger brother. It was "Memories of East Texas," a song that drew the loudest reception from the crowd. The band left the stage and Shocked soloed on acoustic guitar as she has in previous tours. Her fans didn't need to be told to sing along.

Another familiar tune, "Anchorage," benefited from a full group, organ-heavy arrangement

show's opening song, "When I Grow Up," also bounced along. Despite the extra instruments and energy, the newer songs weren't as memorable. The best among them were those on the restrained side, particularly "Silent Ways." Shocked may sing the praises of merry music, but she's at her best only when she has a substantial lyric to bring to life.

At a time when other singers are jumping on the folk bandwagon, it's a sign of courage that Shocked has jumped off. Her swing doesn't have the depth of her more conventional songwriting — she hasn't been doing it as long. But it feels like a diversion, something that comes more from the head than the heart. Perhaps she's now thinking with her feet so that she

5/28/90 S.F. EXAMINER

dream about Marilyn Monroe, who told her, "Don't preach to the converted — play for the troupes."

Shocked didn't exactly do that. The crowd wasn't much different than those she's had in the past (equal parts young lesbians and slightly older hippies). If sales of "Captain Swing," her latest album, are anything to go by, her audience may have even shrunk.

But her willingness to experiment musically is just as laudable as her recent frankness with the press about her affairs with women. While other female folksingers praise the virtues of freedom and remain constrained, Shocked isn't

you can't hear her lyrics, she's a lot less interesting. Her melodies are rarely instantly infectious and her new swing arrangements only mimic what others have already done better. She gets lost in the music and that isn't good.

On the other hand, there's a new sense of pleasure in her performance. Her voice has technically improved and grown more expressive. When she sang "Graffiti Limbo" from her last album, the difference from the recorded version was impossible to ignore. Here she held notes longer, harder. If swing has taught her to sing folk this strong-

[ See SHOCKED, B-10 ]



The new Michelle Shocked: more playful, less preachy

5/28/90 S.F. EXAM

◆ SHOCKED from B-1

## Shocked gets into the swing

ly, then both Shocked and her fans are better for the experience.

The high point of her show wasn't during the swing tunes or a little instrumental jam with her dad and younger brother. It was "Memories of East Texas," a song that drew the loudest reception from the crowd. The band left the stage and Shocked soloed on acoustic guitar as she has in previous tours. Her fans didn't need to be told to sing along.

Another familiar tune, "Anchorage," benefited from a full group, organ-heavy arrangement that recalled Bob Dylan when he went electric with the Band. The

show's opening song, "When I Grow Up," also bounced along. Despite the extra instruments and energy, the newer songs weren't as memorable. The best among them were those on the restrained side, particularly "Silent Ways." Shocked may sing the praises of merry music, but she's at her best only when she has a substantial lyric to bring to life.

At a time when other singers are jumping on the folk bandwagon, it's a sign of courage that Shocked has jumped off. Her swing doesn't have the depth of her more conventional songwriting — she hasn't been doing it as long. But it feels like a diversion, something that comes more from the head than the heart. Perhaps she's now thinking with her feet so that she may soon bear her soul.