

Shocked jolts Coach House crowd

By Noel Davis
Special to the Register

One of the first things you learn in physics class is that when an irresistible force meets an immovable object, the result is inertia. Yet by an incredible reversal of the laws of nature, the collision between Michelle Shocked (the irresistible force) and the music industry (the immovable object) has resulted in the exact opposite of inertia: music that refuses to stand still.

In a freewheeling, high-spirited set Tuesday night at the Coach House that ranged from instrumental, acoustic folk-music prking with her father and brother to the raucous, big band swing of her six-piece Captain Swing Revue, Shocked showed as little inclination to conform to the artificial music categories of the mass media as she has in the line any time in her rebellious young life.

In fact, in the first half of her show, Shocked seemed determined to rebel against herself. She referred repeatedly to her former political activism, asserting that it was a malady that

LAST NIGHT

Who: Michelle Shocked and John Wesley Harding
When: Tuesday night
Where: The Coach House in San Juan Capistrano
Next: This pairing repeats Saturday at the Wilkern Theatre, 5730 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles.
Ticket availability: Limited seating remains available for Saturday's performance.
Call: (714) 380-5005



An overnight review

could only be cured by vigorous movement of the backside. She then demonstrated in cover-loose, joyous numbers from her recent "Captain Swing" album what she meant.

She also gave the swing treatment to "When I Grow Up," "Hello Hopeville" and "Making the Run to Gladwater" from her earlier folk-oriented album,

"Short Sharp Shocked." But these songs fit so well into the swing format showed that Shocked's recent change in direction is less radical than it appears on the surface. There is an underlying thread of folk roots and good humor that runs through all her material.

In a set that traced her musical career in reverse, Shocked then

dismissed her band and delivered two early songs as "Memories of East Texas" and "Graftin' Limbo" from "Short Sharp Shocked" and "Five A.M. in Amsterdam" from her first album, "The Texas Campfire Tapes," which was recorded live on a Sony Walkman.

Reaching back to her earliest musical experiences, Shocked then called up her father and brother, who joined her on fiddle and mandolin for the traditional instrumental tune "Jeff Davis." She called back the Captain Swing Revue Band to conclude her set with more good-natured numbers from "Captain Swing."

From sensitive folk songs about east Texas to foot-stomping swing about street-corner ambassadors and cement taments, Shocked's show had all the variety an adventurous music fan could wish for.

Just as Shocked was about to become another folk Madonna, in the gold and platinum mold of Suzanne Vega and Tracy Chapman, she switched to swing, which hasn't sold any records since Benny Goodman retired. Judging from Tuesday's performance, it should sell records.

Shocked decides to entertain, not shock, troops

By Clay Kallam
Staff writer

SAN FRANCISCO — On the road to revolution, Michelle Shocked has taken a sharp turn to the right.

The onetime solo acoustic folk-singer has grown tired of "preaching to the converted" and says Marilyn Monroe came to her in a dream and told her to "entertain the troops."

That's exactly what Shocked did at The Warfield Saturday night, as she and a crack band rolled through a set filled with good-time road-house boogie and New Orleans jazz — much to the surprise of her cult followers, who came expecting left-leaning folk songs delivered in a Texas twang.

But no one complained about the music, which was hot stuff from note one to the final goodbye. Shocked's band turned up the heat on material from her third album, "Captain Swing," and had heads nodding in time throughout the one hour, 40 minute set.

Shocked did include a superb acoustic break — with just her, her guitar and the audience — which in

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many ways was the highlight of the evening. Her a cappella version of Steve Goodman's "Ballad of Penny Evans" was a riveting look at the stateside casualties of the Vietnam War, and was her most heartfelt number.

When the band was on, Shocked had the perpetual smile of the professional entertainer locked into place. The group went through the usual choreographed moves of rock bands — and somehow it came as no surprise that since her last show at the Great American Music Hall, Shocked has moved from a houseboat in London to Los Angeles.

She even had a star-turn entrance — announced by her bass player — and left the stage before the band at the end of the regular set and both encores.

Those show-biz frills are a major change in direction for Shocked, who seemed more likely to inherit the mantle of Woody Guthrie than Janet Jackson, but it was pretty clear Saturday night that Shocked is

out to be a star rather than a revolutionary.

Of course, with that band (led by rock-solid drummer Jeff Donovan), she just might make it happen. The Warfield was rockin' and rollin' all night long, and the crowd, even though it may have been unprepared for the new style, was right with it from start to finish.

My concern, though, is that there are a lot of bands that can get the

crowd dancing but very few singers who can articulate the needs of the nation. Michelle Shocked is one of the latter, and if she keeps going in this new direction, a voice of passionate reason will be stilled.

As she did at her Great American Music Hall concert, Shocked concluded by saying music and politics are too important to be left to professionals — yet Saturday night she and her slick band were clearly in that category.