

# MUSIC



PHOTO BY PETER DARLEY MILLER

Rocker Michelle Shocked: "Political correctness is a serious social disease."

## ROCKIN' SHOCKED

*Michelle Shocked learns how to boogie without blunting her radical edge*

**MICHELLE SHOCKED.** At the Warfield, SF, Saturday, May 26th.

By Derk Richardson

**M**ICHELLE Shocked is pushing hard these days. But instead of needing her fans about their political apathy, as she did last year at the Great American Music Hall, the Texas-bred firebrand is urging them to boogie while forcing herself to loosen up and have a good time. The stance makes Shocked a lot more endearing without blunting her radical edge.

After her second song before a wildly appreciative audience at the Warfield, Shocked delivered a lighthearted lecture about the physiological consequences of righteous single-mindedness. Her graphic discussion of anal uptightness, hemorrhoids and proctologists led to the conclusion that "Political correctness is a serious social

Unlike some other rising singer-songwriters, Shocked arrived on the scene with a punky aesthetic. Her street-smartness kept her songs in touch with daily life, but it also gave her a tendency to act as if she was reinventing the wheel outside of a whole continuum of radical thought and activism. There was an antagonistic quality to her presence, even when she was among allies.

Whether it was her body or her mind that was giving her the message, Shocked revealed a new flexibility on her second major-label album, *Captain Swing*. After touring as the solo troubador for three years, she reversed the current trend of electric rockers downshifting into bare-bones acoustic formats, and instead plugged in and cranked up her music. The newer songs aren't as delicately wrought or uniquely personal as "Anchorage" or

"Memories of East Texas" from *Short Sharp Shocked*, but they're still socially rooted and reflect an experimental spirit.

At the Warfield, a fine if unexceptional six-man band supported Shocked for 16 of her 21 songs, using electric bass and guitar, keyboard, drums and pair of horns to recreate the R&B, jump and rockabilly sounds of *Captain Swing* and to bring new punch to the older material. "God is a Real Estate Developer" came off with a Lyle Lovett-styled swing; "Street Corner Ambassador" had a Tom Waits fake-jazz arrangement; a new song, "Playing the Game," rode a swelling organ sound with a funky rhythm and blues texture; and "(Making the Run to) Gladewater" was out and out rock'n'roll.

Shocked told the audience that she decided to change her direction after praying to Karl Marx ("I've got problems of my own," he responded) and then dreaming of Marilyn Monroe, who advised, "Girlfriend, don't preach to the converted, entertain the troops!" The result was a sort of USO tour for progressives.

The new sound was not groundbreaking: Lovett has a better band; k.d. Lang and Marcia Ball have stronger vocal pipes. But it served to make her acoustic interlude — including "Memories of East Texas," "Graffiti Limbo," "5 am in Amsterdam" and Steve Goodman's "Penny Evans" — that much more resonant. That segment became a family affair when her brother ("Future Shock") and father ("Dollar Bill") joined her on fiddle and mandolin for "Jeff Davis," a bluegrass tune they learned from listening to Norman and Nancy Blake. "It's a little bit awesome right now," her pop quipped about being on the big stage instead of the back porch, adding in very Shocked style, "but empowering."

The entire show went over especially well in San Francisco. Although born in East Texas and now living in L.A. after a brief expatriation to England, Shocked has special ties to the Bay Area. She squatted and was arrested here, hung out with hardcore band MDC, performed in one benefit show with Paul Kantner and Grace Slick and another for the Freight & Salvage in Berkeley, recently played a free concert in UC-Berkeley's Sproul Plaza and has been accompanied by guitarist Nina Gerber.

Shocked seems destined to broaden her appeal and yet remain intriguing to her grassroots fans. She has the edge of a canny manipulator and seems tempted by the allure of stardom, at least judging by her beaming response to her audience's adulation. But she also seems principled and independent enough to keep her ship on an even keel. And, despite her reminder during the "Strawberry Jam" finale that "music and politics are too important to be left to professionals like us," Shocked is learning well how to stay in control and pull her audience along with her. ■



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After her second song before a wildly appreciative audience at the Warfield, Shocked delivered a lighthearted lecture about the physiological consequences of righteous single-mindedness. Her graphic discussion of anal uptightness, hemorrhoids and proctologists led to the conclusion that "Political correctness is a serious social disease." Perhaps the first major pop figure to make a direct link between rollicking New Orleans pianist Professor Longhair and anarcho-feminist Emma Goldman, Shocked prescribed the former's music as the cure and subscribed to the latter's desire to be able to dance at the revolution. And she commanded the crowd to "move your butts."

Putting theory into practice, Shocked completed the Crescent City connection with a high-energy romp through the New Orleans-flavored "On the Greener Side" and wiggled her butt. The 90-minute Woody Guthrie-meets-Jane Fonda workout indicated a dovetailing of musical growth and personal maturation that promises a long career.

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