

Michelle Shocked not another Madonna

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Madonna and Michelle Shocked.

For the fans of one who do not like the other, my apologies, but aren't they both singing some of the same kind of music these days?

Swing.

Michelle Shocked calls her music as much, titling her recent album "Captain Swing." Madonna's new album of Broadway-style music, "I'm Breathless," also contains swing cuts.

Shocked told her fans at the Wiltern Theatre Saturday that, sure, they were used to her singing a different style of music and offering a lot of political rhetoric. But, she said, one day she was praying to Karl Marx when Marilyn Monroe answered, suggesting that instead of preaching to the converts, she should entertain the troops.

Thus a turn from the folk singing found on two of her previous albums, "The Texas Campfire Tapes" and "Short Sharp Shocked," both of which are folk-oriented, to the upbeat material on "Captain Swing."

Shocked's political attitude stems from living among people who know what it is like to be poor. Writing in a press release issued by her recording company, PolyGram, Shocked notes she "did not adjust well to Reagan's America" after running away from her mother and stepfather when she was 16. "From my first days as a runaway, I continued to exist close to the edges of homelessness," she writes. "In San Francisco, I joined ranks with 'squatters' who settled into warehoused buildings left vacant by real estate speculators. In New York and Amsterdam my involvement grew as I saw hope for solutions to developers' red-lined ghettos."

Shocked goes on to say, "While I was an activist in the squatters movement, I learned that I had an album that was #26 on the U.K. independent charts."

It makes it sound as though she was not even aware she had an album out.

The story of that album is enough to make Bruce Springs-



JOHN DEMOS/The Signal

Michelle Shocked recently played to a crowd at the Wiltern Theatre. The singer's album, "Captain Swing," is available at record stores.

teen's recording his "Nebraska" album at home seem ordinary. Shocked was at the Kerrville Folk Festival in the hills of west Texas when an English chap named Pete Lawrence asked her to record some of her songs into his Sony Walkman.

That recording, complete with crickets and cars passing in the background, became "The Texas Campfire Tapes."

Saturday at Wiltern Theatre, the last stop on her tour, Shocked opened with "When I Grow Up" (off "Short Sharp Shocked"), a song about growing up, marrying an old man and having 120 babies.

Then, from her new album, she played "God is a Real Estate Developer" and the MTV hit "On the Greener Side." Other songs included "(Making the Run to) Gladewater," which starts off saying:

*Upshur County is drier than an empty bottle
Since the Mormons came to town
And to run out of beer means a run to Gladewater
Highway 79 thirty miles on down.*

She played "The Cement Lament," "Griffin Lambo," "Memories of East Texas," "Streetcorner Ambassador," "(Don't) You Mess Around With My Little Sister," "Must Be Luff," "If Love Was a Train" and "Anchorage."

Her older material proved perfect complement for the new, she opening with a number of swing songs, then rolling in some old bluesy music when she needed a change-up.

Highlights of her show? Shocked introduced her dad and her brother Max (she called him "Future Shocked"), who sang with her. Max also sang one song on his own.

Shocked closed with a song about strawberry jam, noting that, like jam, the best music is homemade. She noted all her songs were limited to about three chords and a person need not be well-trained to produce good music.

However commercial she becomes, it isn't likely Michelle Shocked will ever be referred to as a "Material Girl." Nor is it likely — regardless what Marilyn Monroe told her — she will ever be as apolitical.