

Sunshine, sadness of Shocked; thrash with Baiter Space

By MIKE HOULAHAN

Michelle Shocked, Luke Hurley; State Opera House, Saturday night.

Busking came in from the cold and into the State Opera House in the form of Luke Hurley.

It was a setting which would overawe many entertainers, and certainly seemed to dwarf Hurley. The jokes and audience rapport he can generate when busking were missing as he shuffled nervously around the stage. Some well-written songs and excellent guitar playing, but overall a disappointment.

Sunshine came to the stage in the form of Michelle Shocked and backing musician Wayne Goodman. Three well-positioned, ex-Admirals Cup yacht sails and some very clever lighting, which traced a day from dawn to dusk, meant the two musicians dominated the large Opera House stage.

Shocked sings melancholy slices of a life spent first in East Texas, and then on the road. Her early influences, Texas blues and country music, ran deep in the veins of her oh-so-sweet acoustic set.

Two variations on an old Texan fiddle tune were followed by a bracket of the protest songs that made Shocked's name.

The Prodigal Daughter, Cement Lament, In Silent Way, God Is A Real Estate, and I Want To Grow Up To Be An Old Woman scudded along on the wave of enthusiasm Shocked had created.

Shocked is a genuine raconteuse on stage, the wry smile and the twinkle in the eye buoying the audience along.

The Ballad of Sister Cindy and Brother Jed, a cynical account of a disastrous Campus Crusade Rally, brought the house down. She had a natural partner in Wayne Goodman, whose big hat and ready grin sparked a few laughs of their own.

No greater indication of how greatly Shocked had the audience in the palm of her hand was her show-stopping version of The Ballad Of Penny Evans, a song she said she would have problems singing because the subject was too close to her.

She sang the song, the tale of a Vietnam war widow, unaccompanied the emotion dripping from

then burst into applause which threatened to turn into a standing ovation.

Shocked then set sail for home, closing the main set with the train song, and concluding a two-song encore by anchoring down with Anchorage. Shocked then sailed out of town at sunset, but she had brought two hours of sunshine with her.

Baiter Space, This Will Kill That; Pausley Park; Saturday night.

A quick dash down found the corner at the end of Michelle Shocked, and just in time to catch the set of This Will Kill That.

Their noisemik, sub Sonic Youth, Butthole Surfers sound made for a total contrast, but not an unwelcome one. Songs like Saccharine and Half Virgin were full-on noise assaults, done well, but travelling down already trodden territory.

Stand-out song was Milk and Honey. A more mellow number than some of the others in the set, it was just a gear below full-out thrash, and showed a depth in songwriting which marks them out as a band to watch closely.

Baiter Space is a band which defies categorisation. One of the most original trios to emerge from the ashes of punk, the roughness of their past existence as the Gordons has been shorn for a golden sheen, but without losing any of their intensity.

Baiter Space play at ferocious volume, their hard, driving rhythms, flaming guitar and punchy lyrics create a molten mix which is refined down to a priceless collection of songs.

New material from their upcoming album made up the bulk of the set.

It's harder, faster and more multi-layered than the songs on Thermos, their last album, but maintains the freshness and spanking new shine which characterised that album.

A harsh, driving version of The State got the crowd woken up, and the mix of old material, plus songs from Thermos such as Fish Eyes and Return To Zero kept the tempo up.

An inspired Grader Spader finished the night off, leaving a sweat-soaked and dazed crowd.

Baiter Space begin a world tour shortly, and if that was a warm-up North America and