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Michelle Shocked . . . simple brilliance and sheer exuberance.

Shocked silence

FOLK

MICHELLE SHOCKED
Perth Concert Hall, March 14
Reviewed by MIKE GEE

THERE was one moment during the performance by Texan singer/song-writer Michelle Shocked, that will live with me forever. With the lights down low and only a shadowy back-lit canvas "mountain" behind her, she launched into an unaccompanied version of the Steve Goodman song *The Ballad of Penny Evans*.

The song deals with the feelings of a 21-year-old mother of two who has lost her husband in the Vietnam war. It is gut-wrenching stuff but unaccompanied songs are usually the time when whistles, yells of encouragement and the like are deemed necessary by at least several people in any audience. You could have heard a pin drop in the Concert Hall for the three minutes or so of *Penny Evans*. Shocked simply sung the audience into silence. Pure magic.

That was one highlight of an evening of highlights. Shocked — backed by Paul Kelly's band, the Messengers — was simply brilliant. From her stage patter, which ran from complicated little tales of morality to the details of how she learnt to drive on the red clay back roads of east Texas, to the power of her songs and the vitality of her music, Shocked came as close to perfection as you are likely to see.

From the second song she had the audience dancing in the aisles as she and the Messengers took off on a romp through the world of Texan swing, fiddle tunes, swamp blues and Cajun r'n'b.

But it was not all swing and dance. The Messengers disappeared from the stage on a couple of occasions, leaving Shocked, a guitar and an adoring audience.

The material for the night came from her three albums — the brilliant *Texas Campfire Tapes*, *Short, Sharp, Shocked* and *Captain Swing* — with some of her favourite songs thrown in for good measure.

In a night of sheer exuberance, particularly outstanding were a brilliant version of *Fog Town*, which began with her solo and ended with Messengers filling out the song, the magical folk/pop of *Anchorage*, the full on-swing of *Hold Me Back*, the traditional blues of *I Hear a Train Coming* and the ever-popular *Running Glade Water*.

The Messengers opened the show with five songs they either stole from Kelly or he stole from them and proved just what a fine, tight outfit they are in their own right. But the nicest touch was at the start when Shocked, lantern in hand, walked on stage amid a cloud of dry ice to introduce the Messengers and tell the audience just how proud she was to be working with them.

Superlatives do not do justice to an evening with Shocked. The three standing ovations she received are just an indication of how enjoyable and outstanding an evening she created.

I cannot wait for her to come back.