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Review

This time Shocked warm, powerful

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By Eric Rasmussen

Special to The Capital Times

When Michelle Shocked first played in Madison in 1988, opening for Billy Bragg at the Wisconsin Union Theater, she was an unknown folk singer with a stage presence that fell somewhere between bemused and terrified.

What a difference 3½ years can make.

Shocked played to a near sell-out crowd at the Barrymore Theatre Sunday night. Not only was her demeanor more confident — as one would expect after three albums and constant touring — but she showed her command of a wide range of musical styles beyond the folkie material with which she made her initial splash.

Michelle Shocked Barrymore Theatre

Backed by the Austin, Texas, trio Bad Liver, Shocked ran through country, swing, country-swing, and most of all, bluegrass during her two-hour show. She opened with the familiar, "The Waterfall" and the longing refrains of "Memories of East Texas," but most of the evening was devoted to new material from her forthcoming album, "Arkansas Traveler."

The first new tune of the set to kick things into gear was the satirical "What's Wrong with This Picture?," which Shocked described as her attempt to "put every dirty word you know into

a song without anyone knowing it's there." It worked, as it took most of the audience a second run-through to pick up the double entendres.

After ending her first set with one of her few hits, "Anchorage," Shocked and band returned to a more elaborate stage setting, a facade of an Appalachian shack, replete with still.

In a fine bit of musical revisionism, however, Shocked has rewritten the lyrics to most of the tunes.

Along with the other revamped bluegrass numbers that finished the show, "Prodigal Daughter" proved Shocked to be a fine musical interpreter as well as a warm, powerful performer.