

## PERFORMANCE

### DWIGHT YOAKAM AND MICHELLE SHOCKED Universal Amphitheater, November 22

Both roots and punk rock moseyed on into the Universal Amphitheater last Friday under the brim of country music. But while the scenario felt typically countryish — Stetsons aplenty, monster trucks in the parking lot — Dwight Yoakam and Michelle Shocked demonstrated how atypical the genre can be.

Michelle Shocked always likes a challenge. Last time around she did the big band thing; this time she took us to a dusty, front porch somewhere in the Ozarks, the stage setting complete with bloomers on the clothesline. She and her band, Austin's Bad Livers, yee-hawed their way through new tunes that plinked out many a fiddle, banjo and mandolin solo. Fiddler's tunes, she said. Just a bunch of folks swiggin' beer and passing time on a Sunday afternoon. And when Shocked took the guitar off and announced that she just had to dance, the lanky performer's goofy skanking sent jolts through the crowd. Heck, what the bejeezus was this little lady doin' up there? What she was doing was digging what she was creating, digging the primal energy that even the most simple music (like punk rock) possesses.

Dwight Yoakam's music has always had as much in common with the bar bands of Hollywood as with the chart toppers of Nashville. Even more so than his albums, his live set was a stew of American roots music. It rocked, thanks in part to a solid band, and especially Pete Anderson, possibly the best roots guitarist to pick up a Tele these days. And, like a bar band, there were searing, lip-biting leads, sloppy impromptus ("Jambalaya," with Emmylou Harris), and broken guitar strings. Not a Randy Travis show here. Look at the artists he chose to cover: Elvis, Hank, Gram, the Blasters, the Dead — all have successfully blurred the lines between rock and country. Yoakam, too, belongs in this category. And while he might never be a huge country star as a result, he surely remains one of the more adventuresome. The packed house ate everything up, from the material on his recent *If There Was a Way* album to the still-fresh "Guitars, Cadillacs" from his debut EP.

It's good to see that all those days sharing bills with the L.A. underground rock bands of the early '80s has left Yoakam with the ability to crank it up. It's also encouraging to know that Yoakam and Michelle Shocked are around to help keep country music and its fans on their toes. (Neal Weiss)