

## A truly electric club performance by Michelle Shocked

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Audience members expecting Michelle Shocked to snuggle into the "bitter folkie" stereotype at the Lone Star Monday night were disappointed. What they got, with the help of two guitarists from Ireland's Holhouse Flowers, was an exuberant, often thrilling, brutally emotional performance that would have melted the jade out of the blackest cynic's heart.

Disdaining acoustic guitars, Shocked rearranged some songs to fit the parameters of her guest sidemen, guitarist Fiachna O'Braonain and bassist Peter O'Toole. And

in the first 45 minutes Shocked seemed too enamored of Bruce Springsteen-style guitar posing: "I am Rock Star, hear me roar."

But starting with the "Secret to a Long Life" from her 1992 album, "Arkansas Traveler,"

Shocked started peeling back layers. On "Come a Long Way," easily her most melodic song, her improvised vocals were transcendent, and the intensity began to soar.

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through rapt attention and adulation. She got both.

Strumming her guitar quietly, Shocked borrowed another Springsteen performance technique, to far greater effect: the confessional monologue. Revealing tales of homelessness in California, squatting in Amsterdam, and her mother's attempts to institutionalize her, Shocked sought absolution from the audience

After more than two hours, Shocked was genuinely gratified by the acceptance she received. She rewarded it by taking a short break, then playing for another hour. She introduced 10 new songs from a self-produced CD, which features cameos from John Doe and more revelatory material about growing up in East Texas. The impact was cathartic, and Shocked thanked the audience for allowing her to purge herself.

When she was done, nearly 3 1/2 hours after starting, Shocked went to the back of the bar, signed autographs and chatted with fans. Others staggered into the Westport night, reminded that superior live music still offers the power of redemption.