Shocked has 'em eating out of her hand

Music

REVIEW/by Daniel Gewertz

Michelle Shocked & the Anointed Earls at the House of Blues, Cambridge, Sunday; through tomorrow.

Hot shows at the House of Blues are no great rarity, but what Michelle Shocked accomplished there on Sunday was unique. She got the capacity crowd to follow her every wild whim.

Late in her 2½-hour show, the first of four nights in Harvard Square, Shocked convinced the entire crowd to turn around and wiggle and twitch their posteriors.

Then, on "Prodigal Daughter/ Cotton Eyed Joe," Shocked performed a slight miracle: She arranged a wide aisle in the middle of the jammed room, and then called square-dance steps.

At the back of the House, there are almost always a bunch of chatting hangers-on. Not this time. Everyone was involved. Folks promenaded under a canopy of joined hands. It was quite a sight.

This was a "shake-down" tour for Shocked's new band, The Anointed Earls. "We're working out kinks," she said. The set was tighter as it progressed, with Shocked taking advantage of the feel of a small club. She's had many fine backup groups before, but this may be the first time she's touring with a band that sounds like a complete entity unto itself.

The Anointed Earls jelled like a great juke-joint band steeped in funk and soul. The quartet best displayed its gospel roots on the a cappella "Can't Take My Joy," one of several songs from her new self-distributed CD "Good News." Though keyboardist Cassandra O'Neil and bassist Jaime Brewer were aces, the fat, mossy guitar raves of Juba Smith were the night's highlights, and drummer Sedrick Anderson created fierce and solid grooves.

MICHELLE SHOCKED: Miracles at House of Blues Staff photo by Justin Ide

The night began with a 15-minute video from Greenpeace, a protest against the vinyl industry's presence in a black town in rural Lousiana, where activists say the high dioxen levels in the industry's waste has caused illness. After a resident of Convent, La., gave a short, tearful speech, Shocked sang "Good News," a soulful song about that town, known as "Cancer Alley."

Most of her set was less serious, though she always emitted plenty of attitude. One song contained strings of profanity, but she cutely broke off her syllables in ways that made them unintelligible. "Little Billie" was sung in a loose, hot wail. One new one, "No Wonder" was a forgettable ditty in '60s pop mo But most of her new songs we worthy. "Forgive to Forget" was heart-grabber about getting ov hurt and grudges.

After 90 minutes of new m terial, Shocked dug into her cat log, with persuassive versions "Come a Long Way," "If Lo Was a Train" and "Anchorage," song that ends with the sugge tion from an old friend to "Ke on 'rockin' girl." She's takin those words to heart.

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