

CONCERTS

Michelle Shocked

DUNGAREES weren't *de rigueur* at Michelle Shocked's gay benefit at the Hackney Empire. Enthusiasm was. The all-women audience stomped, waved copies of Time Out and yelled "Take your hat off!" as soon as Ms Shocked stepped on stage in her Willy Brandt cap. When she sang "Memories of East Texas", they went wild. When, towards the end of a hot, exciting evening, she belted out that bluesy number, "If Love Was a Train" ("...I would ride a slow one") they went wilder.

Michelle Shocked — her surname was born after her arrest at the Republican Convention in 84) — recorded her first album in 1986, outdoors on a Walkman. A radical folkie with a voice like gritted honey, she isn't afraid of causes. What marks her work from the Joan Baez school of protest is the wry style. Internal rhymes aren't unknown in Shocked lyrics.

She played all her greatest hits, including "When I Grow Up", which reached number 58 in the charts. This has a line "then I think I'm gonna find myself / an old man" which didn't appeal to the Gay and

Lesbian Pride supporters. They booed, so she hummed the next bit sweetly, and made a joke of it. The audience had taken up residence in her tiny hand by this time. So much so that Shocked risked a poem. It wasn't that much of a risk, actually, as the one she read was by feminist poet Marge Piercy.

Although not an artist to sell loads of singles, Shocked moves quite a few albums. But she won't sell them to just anybody. PolyGram were prepared to pulp copies of "Short, Sharp, Shocked" after it had been released by accident in South Africa. As I said, she isn't afraid of causes, including Aids. "Graffiti Limbo" was dedicated to a Canadian Aids victim murdered in a bus.

Her ability on acoustic guitar, a Martin given her by Daddy, makes even the chart numbers sound very different in concert from on vinyl. "Anchorage", a female buddies song, acquired a few new words and a loosened-up delivery. It was so good she chose it for an encore. "Keep on rocking girl / Yeah keep on rocking"; I hope she does.

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