

Musical Marriage—

Funky Tower, Folksy Michelle Shocked a Hit

By GREG HAYMES
LENOX, Mass. — Have you ever wondered what would happen if funk slammed head-on into folk? Well, if you were lucky enough to be in the crowd when Tower of Power teamed up with Michelle Shocked at the Berkshire Performing Arts Center on Saturday night, then you already know the answer.

If you weren't, well, then you're just going to have to use your imagination.

On paper, it looks like an unlikely, unorthodox combination of sounds — the brassy, partying funk machine from Oakland joining forces with the brash, outspoken folksinger from Texas. But sometimes these kinds of things have a way of working themselves out on stage, and Saturday

night was definitely one of those times.

Tower of Power was up first, and from the first blast of their five-man horn section, there was no doubt that they were ready to live up to their name. Led by saxophonist-founder Emilio Castillo, the 10-strong Tower grooved mightily through an hour-long set of soul gems culled from their 21-year career.

Review

Old dance-floor favorites like "Down to the Nightclub (Bump City)" and their theme song, "What Is Hip?," sent the message directly from their flaring horns to the feet of the audience. "There's Only So Much Oil in the Ground" took on a new,

ironic meaning with the recent developments in Kuwait, but it was still driven by those same old irresistible rhythms.

Throughout their two decades, Tower of Power has run through a long list of lead vocalists, and their latest recruit, Tom Bowes, doesn't possess the soul-drenched inventiveness of their last great singer, Ellis Hall. He couldn't quite match the intensity of trumpeter Greg Adams' innovative horn arrangements on the sweet soul ballad, "So Very Hard to Go," either, but he held his own on the chugging, churning "Go and Get It With Your Good Credit."

The cheering crowd wouldn't let Tower of Power get away without an encore of "You're Still a Young Man," and then the band managed to

slip offstage only after Castillo promised that they'd be back later that night.

After a brief intermission, Michelle Shocked ambled out armed only with her acoustic guitar. It's a dangerous assignment anytime a solo performer attempts to follow a full band, but trying to take the stage after Tower of Power has pumped up the crowd is almost suicidal.

Shocked, however, was definitely up to the challenge, deftly mixing reflective, pastoral ballads like "Memories of East Texas" with new, as-yet-unrecorded tunes like the spritely finger-picked "Worth the Weight" and cabaret blues like "Fogtown."

An aching, a cappella version of Steve Goodman's anti-war ode, "Penny Evans," was the emotional high point of her show. She followed it with the wailing blues of "Graffiti Limbo," raging against social injustice, and "The L&N Don't Stop Here Anymore," a dark tale of quiet desperation in a mining town.

Then she waved to the wings, and Tower of Power trotted out to join her for a 35-minute romp that included the jazzy ballad "Silent Ways," the high-steppin', funk strutter "Too Little Too Late," the calypso glide of "On the Greener Side" and the full-force Dixieland attack of "Must Be Luff."

Shocked was positively effervescent, bouncing around the stage like a child at Christmas, while the horns charged through chorus after chorus. They finally wrapped things up with