

Militant miss lets her hair down

Michelle Shocked
Birmingham Town Hall

"I've come a long way," she sang. The black-clad, severe haircut, nervous energy Shocked with political/feminist songs lacing the dry humour and tales of fractured love has vanished. Instead, she's relaxed, twinkle-eyed, sports a Peter Pan hairstyle and wears a grey/white outfit of stripes and checks.

And, unless you count the Civil War-inspired *Shaking Hands*, the politics are as conspicuous by their low profile as the women-in-comfortable-shoes audience she once attracted.

A long leap too from *Short Sharp Shocked's* photo of her being attacked by a cop to the Uncle Remus Hicksville stage set for the show's *Arkansas Traveller* segment with Shocked bedecked in straw hat and Southern Sunday dress and the band toggled up to match.

But it's certainly a change for the good, the music letting down its hair and romping from piano pumpin' rock 'n' roll through Hot Club to Hoe Down and more familiar acoustic roots.

And, despite omitting *When I Grow Up*, providing a fair balance between old favourites *Anchorage* and *Memories of East Texas*, and new gems like *Prodigal Daughter* and *Blackberry Blossom*. Even bringing on dad for a burst of bumpkin blue-grass.

She's come a long way, and the road ahead looks even more promising.

Mike Davies