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Michelle Shocked's show goes on, despite disputes

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By Steve Morse
GLOBE STAFF

The Silverado concert series got off to a rocky start Wednesday night. The club looked great, with rows of chairs placed on the dance floor to enhance the concert setting — but the show was sabotaged by disputes beyond the club's control. Headliner Michelle Shocked and her main opening act, The Band, feuded beforehand. The Band ended up not playing — and the reasons are as varied as the plots on your average daytime soap opera.

No one wanted to talk on the record, but it appears that The Band did not want to wait around for 90 minutes after their set in order to join Shocked for a finale. The tour has played six cities so far (out of a planned 28) and tension has built up over this issue, with Shocked taking it very personally, sources said. The

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blowup came Tuesday afternoon. Depending on whom you talked to, Shocked gave the promoter an ultimatum that either The Band was off the show or she was.

MICHELLE SHOCKED
with Taj Mahal and Uncle Tupelo
At Silverado Wednesday Night

Shocked's camp denies the ultimatum and is still hoping The Band will be back on the tour, which lands at Carnegie Hall today. But it was an eerie scene Wednesday night, with whispered conversations in corners (The Band's Rick Danko even flitted through the room at one point, at a pace that would have impressed Olympian Carl Lewis), and a sense of total bafflement among the nearly 1,000 fans.

Amazingly, Shocked showed no ill effects from the day's emotional traumas. She and her four-piece band, including former Boston banjoist (and Harvard grad) Alison Brown, pumped out a foot-stomping blend of old-timey/bluegrass music, Western swing and the kind of wonderfully instructive acoustic experimentation that marks her latest al-

bum, "Arkansas Traveler." There were even elements of cornpone humor akin to the "Haw" TV show — all without any trace (or any mention) of the day's melodrama.

If anything, Shocked went out her way to express contentment. "I'm so happy to be here tonight, love you all. That's a goofy thing to say, but I really mean it," she said. I was a bit strange, but you've got to give her credit for playing well and also overcoming a few glitches in the sound system.

Another opener, the ageless bluesman Taj Mahal, opened effectively, reviving archival country blues such as "Freight Train" and "Sitting on Top of the World," plus updating with a touch of burlesque. "Big Legged Mama are Back to Style." The other opening act, Uncle Tupelo, was less successful, playing acoustically (as opposed to their rowdily electric Neil Young style) and not really pulling it off, though the redeemed themselves when the joined Shocked later on.