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MUSIC

Arkansas Shocker

Michelle Shocked holds a hoedown

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LESS THAN 24 hours after one Arkansas Traveler was elected to the White House, another took the stage at the Catalyst.

Michelle Shocked and her Arkansas Traveler Revue flew into Santa Cruz Wednesday on the heels of an election night appearance at Bill Clinton's victory celebration in Little Rock. With news of President-elect Clinton's victory still emblazoned on the newspaper boxes outside, Shocked led the sold-out crowd in swinging neo-hillbilly "chair dances," sparking what might be Santa Cruz's most unusual new trend: Arkansas chic.

This concert was supposed to take place at the Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium under the aegis of Bill Graham Presents. Originally, the line-up included three of the four former members of the Band backing up Shocked and guest Taj Mahal. The Band backed out, canceling the Civic date. The Catalyst quickly booked the Revue for the same evening with new addition Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown in tow.

Gatemouth, with his trademark

cowboy hat and tobacco pipe, got things underway with a rollicking blues/cajun set, showing off his dexterity on electric guitar and fiddle. Brown, backed by a four-piece band, moved through a crowd-pleasing set playing everything from greasy blues to rousing, floor-stomping bluegrass.

As Gatemouth moved to the bar area to sign autographs, Taj Mahal followed on stage with a short solo set of fitful blues on electric piano and acoustic guitar.

Both would later join Shocked on stage. But she first appeared with her own three-piece Arkansas Traveler Revue, which featured banjoist/guitarist Alison Brown, formerly with Alison Krauss and Union Station. Shocked had the crowd roaring from the beginning, opening up with what many consider to be her signature song, "When I Grow Up (I Want to Be an Old Woman)." With her Beatles haircut and basic black body suit, Shocked hardly looked the part of the hillbilly from the Ozarks. But her music told a different story as she played her uniquely hip mountain music to an enthralled crowd hoping for a hoedown.

On stage, Shocked outlined her various musical influences, making note of her "trilogy" of albums:

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"Short, Sharp, Shocked," "Captain Swing" and her latest, "Arkansas Traveler." Moving from wry songs inspired by the works of Texas songwriters Townes Van Zandt and Guy Clark to Western swing, Shocked paid homage to her musical background, also giving tribute to her father, who inspired her musical path by learning to play the mandolin at the age of 35.

Shocked captured the crowd early, drawing the whole house into a "chair dance," a sort of square dance without the complicated footwork. Calling up volunteers from the audience, the band broke into "Arkansas Traveler," a back-fence hillbilly boogie a la "Pickin' and Grinnin'" from the old "Hee



Michelle Shocked brought her Arkansas roots to the Catalyst.

Haw" TV show punctuated by volunteers delivering lines like: "Hey, Farmer, you lived here all your life?" "Not yet." She then topped the number with a clogging jig of her own that drew a thunderous response.

Much of the set was devoted to Shocked's newer music. On her latest album she rewrote many old fiddle standards and she played a host of them Wednesday, explaining along the way their meanings.

Taj Mahal (who played on the "Arkansas Traveler" album, as did Gatemouth and Alison Brown) joined Michelle for "Jump Jim Crow," the highlight of which was Shocked's surreal falsetto on a

verse from "Zip-A-Dee-Doo-Dah." Much to the crowd's delight, however, she revisited many of her old favorites from her first album including the reflective ode to old friendship "Anchorage" and the angry "Graffiti Limbo."

"I wrote this long before the Rodney King thing," she said of "Limbo," the story of a young black graffiti artist beaten to death by New York City cops. But, largely, this was not a night for political indignation. When Shocked offhandedly mention "I'm looking forward to the next four years," the crowd roared its approval. For one night anyway, Arkansas was where it was at.

Family Fun At