



Boo! Hiss! What sort of catcalls and boos would 'Gone With the Wind' get in today's theaters?

## Loud hisses from small minds

**D**URING A SOLD-OUT concert at the Catalyst, hip folk singer Michelle Shocked pauses after an especially swinging rendition of Texas swing to mention to the audience that she has recently been married. Immediately, a hiss rises up from the crowd.

"Sounds like we got a leaky tire in here," cracks Michelle (who is somewhat less than "shocked") in her back-fence Arkansas drawl. Despite the apparent disapproval of her life decisions from the capacity crowd, she goes on to tell the story of her whirlwind wedding before launching into a heartfelt version of the ode to lost friendship titled "Anchorage."

At the 41st Avenue Playhouse in Capitola the next week, the brutally funny Tim Robbins film "Bob Roberts" is playing to an almost empty house. When Bob, a right-wing folk-singing ideologue makes a stray comment about "the welfare state," the "leaky tire" returns.

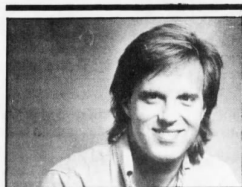
It's opening night for Spike Lee's magnum opus "Malcolm X" at the Movies in Santa Cruz. When the houselights go down, every seat is taken. Not far into the film, a young 1940s Malcolm played by Denzel Washington throws breakfast in the face of a white man while serving him on a train. Roars, laughs, hearty applause.

Later, the militantly Muslim Malcolm makes very patriarchal comments about the role of women in the family to his wife. Here comes those hisses again, hovering in the air like a swarm of cicadas.

I don't know if this is going on all over the country or just here in the rarefied PC atmosphere of Santa Cruz, but I suspect the latter. I don't know if the hisses are a tiny clique of idea cops or if everyone is getting in the game.

I do know, however, that it's annoying and distracts from any kind of serious message the artist is trying to put forward.

It's important here to note that we are not talking about midnight screenings of "Rambo" or "Sorority Babes in the Slimball Bowl-a-rama." The above men-



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tioned instances were generally friendly to politically-correct consciousness. "Bob Roberts" and "Malcolm X" are two of the most socially aware and politically lacerating films of the year. And Michelle Shocked is about 31 light years away from Phyllis Schlafly on the political spectrum.

Yet even they get the boos and hisses. We are not talking about rights here. Anyone has the right to boo whatever he or she feels like booing. Technically, you have the right to boo, cheer, engage in word games, do the hambone or stand up and sing "By the Time I Get to Phoenix" if that is your inclination.

It's not a question of rights, but — excuse my princess here — a question of manners. Supposedly enlightened and sophisticated audiences hissing at the mention of the word "married" or cheering some act of aggression is no different from some testosterone-addled cretin cheering when some movie communist gets shot full of holes or some uppity woman on the screen gets a backhand across the face.

It would be perfectly appropriate to cheer or boo if, say, Shocked (who played the Catalyst the night after the election) made some snide comment about the fall of George Bush. It may even be appropriate if she launched into a diatribe against marriage, baseball and apple pie. In that

case, she is displaying her own feelings on the subject and enlisting the audience for support.

But the new hissing trend does not recognize such distinctions. No matter what the context, whenever a mention is made of some supposedly unpopular notion — which these days ranges from Nazism to meat eating — it is the duty of these new Victorians to bow to orthodoxy and voice their displeasure.

Don't tell me that these folks are trying to make a point. If you're with ACT UP and you're shouting down a homophobic politician, you're engaging in free speech. If you boo "Malcolm X" in the dark of a movie theater because you don't like what he said to his wife in 1961, you're doing nothing but drawing attention to yourself and showing little respect for the filmmaker or the rest of the audience.

Admittedly, this is not one of America's crushing social problems and I have no intentions of starting up a PR campaign to stamp out inappropriate booing. But the trend seems to be an indication of how ignorant audiences are when it comes to the rights of the artist.

There is a difference — a big one — between exploitative dreck that seeks to elicit those kinds of simple-minded reactions and serious art that seeks to foster thought and understanding. At the very least, artists deserve to be heard. Though audiences should never be pliable and meek, they should give the artist the opportunity to state his or her case — even if wearing fur is presented in a less than condemning context.

I'll save my boos for instances that call for it instead of denigrating a folk singer I admire because she decided to get married or to hiss at a movie role such as "Bob Roberts" clearly meant to be satirical.

I'll continue to honor the right of the artist to say what he or she wants to say, no matter how politically incorrect it might.

Oops, there goes that leaky tire again.

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