

**MICHELLE SHOCKED
TAJ MAHAL
UNCLE TUPELO**

Carnegie Hall, New York

FEW ENTERTAINERS CAN coax members of any crowd to sway from side to side, shout responses, clap along, and volunteer for on-

stage speaking parts, particularly when the venue is one of the world's foremost opera houses.

However, singer/songwriter Michelle Shocked has always had a gift for mesmerizing audiences with her endearing stage manner and her profound folk-oriented music, inspired by Texas songwriters like Guy Clark, big-band music, and traditional fiddle tunes. At this October date, Shocked and the Arkansas Traveler Revue (named after her current Mercury Records album) proved no stage is too lofty for a down-home family affair, no event too momentous for a fraternal love fest.

Nevertheless, Shocked was visibly moved by the grandeur of the hall, the "emotional support" provided by Taj Mahal (who opened for her and joined her on stage for a performance of "Jump Jim Crow"), and the presence of family members. The singer described her grandmother's recovery from a recent operation and then said, choking back tears, "I wanted this to be just a regular show but my Grandma ruined it. She flew in from Texas just to see me."

Apparently, the whole family was invited. Shocked's husband was on hand, her brother made a startling vocal cameo, and her father played mandolin on a couple of songs.

The spirit extended to the Arkansas Traveler Revue and to the audience. Acting like a good hostess determined to make sure everyone at the party knew each other, Shocked introduced the members of her band to one another, instead of to the crowd. (Fiddle sensation Alison Browne, who just released a new album on Vanguard, nearly stole the show.) She then invited volunteers to play the age-old question-and-answer gag that goes, "Hey farmer, where does this road go?" (Answer: "Been livin' here all my life, and it ain't gone nowhere yet!")

Though she focused on songs from her latest album—which was recorded in various spots around the world with such guests as Pops Staples, Hothouse Flowers, and openers Taj Mahal and Uncle Tupelo—Shocked worked in such early favorites as "Anchorage," "When I Grow Up," and "Graffiti Limbo," as well as a brand-new song called "Custom Cutter."

The Texas-born singer closed with a blunt, prophetic message for then-President George Bush: "The secret to a long life is knowing when it's time to go," she said, introducing her final encore.

How ironic that the message was delivered by the Arkansas Traveler.

PAUL VERNIA