

CONCERT REVIEW

Shocked gives audience a side trip to a moment between two old friends

By JOHN AUSTIN
FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM

DALLAS — Most performers would tell you that guts have prevailed over good sense when a singer opens with 10 tunes nobody has ever heard before. That goes double when the artist does half of them solo.

But most performers don't draw the kind of dedicated cult that country/folk-rocker Michelle Shocked brought Saturday night to Deep Ellum Live. The Shocked troops didn't come out to hear a hot new single. They wanted *When I Grow Up*, *If Love Was a Train* and the other originals that made the Texas troubadour's rep in the late '80s, and they were willing to wait politely to hear them.

The good news is that their patience was rewarded: The staples of Shocked's set are proving to have a long shelf life, especially when she flavors them with the kind of fresh, warm treatment listeners heard on her signature number, *Anchorage*.

The song, written in the form of a letter to Shocked from an old friend who is married, a mother and self-mockingly "anchored down in Anchorage" is worthy of a peak-form Springsteen in its poignant evocation of a wild, shared young time that bonded the writer and the

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recipient, and is now the one thing they have in common.

Demonstrating how few chords, or words you need when you've really got something to say, the voice of the letter writer rifles the mundane details of her domestic life in an effort to communicate that only dramatizes how far apart time has taken the two friends — and how close memories tie them.

Somewhere between talking about her husband, LeRoy, who got a better job, and mentioning the baby's new tooth, the writer reminisces over the love song Shocked played at her wedding. She can't recall how it goes, but Shocked does.

Instead of sticking to a straight-from-the-album reading, Shocked detoured into the song she sang at the wedding, which doesn't appear in the recording. That little side trip gave the audience what it came for — instead of a reheated version of

the canned goods, she took listeners into one of the precise moments when she and her old friend were bonded forever, before leading them back to the present, where you don't know whether to laugh, cry or do both over the space that now separates the homemaker from her skateboard-riding, punk-rocking pal.

And there were other places almost as good as that; unfortunately, most of them came on the older songs. Although one or two numbers from Shocked's privately pressed and newly released song cycle, *Kind Hearted Woman* sounded like keepers, most didn't stick, at least not on first listening.

But Shocked won't let that bother her. A shrewd judge of her own material, she'll figure out what works and exploit the stronger stuff, as she did in Saturday's show.

It didn't hurt that Shocked transplanted members of the Hothouse Flowers for the tour; the bass, guitar and drum trio backed Shocked's rudimentary electric guitar chording with sympathetic economy. Of course, even a great band couldn't carry the show over her puzzling,



Michelle Shocked in a 1993 photograph

Star-Telegram file

pointless version of the folkie chestnut, *Kum by Yah*. What a nightmare that, and the extended tale of her grandmother's gruesome death by cancer, were.

But for the most part, from the silly *Butt Dance* Shocked led the audience in to the rollicking (*Making the Run to*) *Gladewater*, the show enlarged listeners' sense of what Shocked is up to. And that's

always worth a short, sharp glance.

ABOUT THE OTHER NIGHT

Saturday night
Michelle Shocked
Deep Ellum Live, Dallas

ATTENDANCE: 300 or 400 post-motorcycle Miata drivers