

Michelle-Shocked



The
Texas
Campfire
Tapes

Michelle-Shocked is one of the talented new female singers/songwriters with new albums.

Campfire songs lead to album

By Tim Goodman
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Michelle-Shocked has a great rock and roll past by way of folk music, a lucky break and a Sony Walkman.

Another in a long list of great new female singer/songwriters, Shocked is the most roots-oriented. She wants nothing other than to sing her folk songs backed only by an acoustic guitar. But that's getting way ahead of the game.

To get to that point, of playing and singing and getting critical attention, Shocked had to experience her story.

It goes like this: She sent a tape to a Texas folk festival so she could perform. Her tape got lost enroute and she had to settle for the occasional duet with friends.

A man with a keen ear for talent heard her singing and asked her to play some songs around a campfire.

He recorded Shocked on a Sony Walkman with crickets and trucks humming in the background, took the tape to England, pressed it into vinyl and watched it fly up the independent charts, stopping at No. 1. It's that simple.

Her album, "The Texas Campfire Tapes" on PolyGram Records,

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is a gem of warbling folk songs and important yarns in the life of Michelle-Shocked. That's simple too, but there is a slow beauty that comes from these recordings the more you listen.

From the opening strains of "5 a.m. In Amsterdam" you'll know this is no ordinary album. The sound of Shocked's voice comes on too bright, fades, and then returns sharply again.

It's almost startling how clearly she's heard, more like a tape-recorded voice (which is what it is of course) than a song.

The same process which allows for startling clarity also allows the crickets to get their air time when Shocked fades out in her distinct singing style.

Her guitar playing is sparse, framing her intricate tales, never rising above her voice. In fact she only raises the tempo when trucks go by.

The songs themselves are what makes Shocked, though her litting

voice does do a few Dylanesque tricks and shows range. Each song is a thumbnail sketch of life and creates, momentarily, a vivid postcard of Shocked's travels. Sitting around a campfire has never been this much fun to hear.

Yet the idyllic sounds of purity transformed from that Walkman may soon be a thing of the past. Shocked will release her next album, "Short Sharp Shocked," in the near future and this time she's in a studio.

While Shocked benefits largely from the novelty of the album and her wild tale of getting started, there is still true quality here and there's no reason to believe that her next album will be a letdown.

In fact, though she will lose the feel of the forest, a little more "sound" may flesh out her songs, without losing the folk appeal, and give her a better shot at more radio play.

The biggest loss will be her storied background that momentary lived up the music world. Then again, her forthcoming album was named for abusive treatment in mental hospitals, and of course, she's been in one of those too.

Maybe we've just scratched the surface of Michelle-Shocked.