

Riveting and real

New wave of talented women on center stage

By Steve Morse

If you like music without any kind of coating, you might enjoy Michelle Shocked's "The Texas Campfire Tapes," released last year on the tiny Brit label Cooking Vinyl—and newly released on PolyGram Records.

Shocked is a winsomely eccentric folkie who peoples her songs with off-beat characters such as Ruby the Hooker, Patch Eye and Meg. Her album, Dylan inflections and all, became a sensation in England, attaining No. 1 on the indie charts. This was partly due to its novelty of being recorded on a skimpy Sony Walkman backstage at the Kerrville Folk Festival in Texas. The album isn't as original as some British writers have claimed, but does come with a different twist in the ambient cricket sounds from its woody recording site.

On the opposite end of the spectrum is the studio-crisp

rock 'n' roll of Jenny Morris and Joanna Dean.

Morris is the former home economics teacher from New Zealand. She has sung backup on a stateside tour by Australian band INXS, whose keyboardist, Andrew Farriss, produced her new album, "Body

& Soul" (Atlantic). She sounds a bit like a Down Under Pat Benatar. This is a promising debut.

The loudest rock 'n' roller in the new breed is Dean, who grew up listening to the Rolling Stones and Foghat while her parents moved from the Tennessee border to Chapel Hill, then to Atlanta, Augusta, Tulsa and back to Georgia. Her peripatetic youth didn't hurt her vocal chops, which come burning through the speakers on songs about Saturday night frolics. She's helped in her songwriting by Bobby Whitlock, who used to be with Eric Clapton in Derek & the Dominos. A down-and-dirty fuzztone guitar completes the package, which ends with a gutsy plunge into the Stones' "Gimme Shelter." Old-time rock with an '80s verve.

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