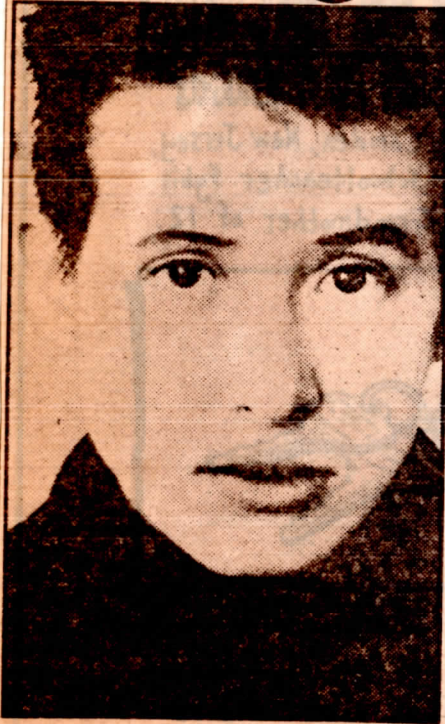


Getting Shocked treatment at Wiltern

By Marc Weiss
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Feminist, anarchist, skateboard punk rocker Michelle Shocked plays the Wiltern tomorrow.

Perhaps you've heard the story of Michelle Shocked. The east Texas-born, self-described feminist-anarchist-skateboard punk rocker, was recorded on a Walkman while she sang at a Texas folk festival in 1986.

That crude recording, complete with crickets in the background, was subsequently released in England as "The Texas Campfire Tapes." It promptly shot to No. 1 on the independent and folk charts, and Shocked was signed to PolyGram records, where she has followed up that first record with "Short Sharp Shocked," a considerably more professional outing.

Shocked's voice came over the long-distance lines from the noisy backstage of a club in Nottingham, England ("home of that great socialist, Robin Hood," she quipped) where she was about to perform. It was her final European gig before leaving for her American tour with folkie-lefty-brother-in-arms Billy Bragg, which stops here tomorrow night at the Wiltern.

Shocked has traveled a long road from her Mormon fundamentalist upbringing in a small town in east Texas to her current status as an American expatriate living in England and one of the up-and-coming stars of the alternative music scene. She's been a squatter with punks in San Francisco, arrested during a demonstration at the 1984 Republican National Convention in Dallas, and put in a mental institution by her mother. Eventually, she abandoned the U.S. for England.

"It's like they say," she laughs, "'America, Love it or Leave It.' There's no middle ground. I mean," she asks rhetorically, "if Dukakis wins, will it be a victory for the left?"

Shocked's politics make it seem somehow inevitable that, once she arrived in England, she would hook up with her current tour mate Billy Bragg, who is well known for his political activism. Befriending Bragg, says Shocked, "was a choice that I made. Because I feel that I'm really no more than a product of my environment, I've got to be very careful about who I associate with. And while parallels don't always run (between them) the similarities are a lot stronger than the dissimilarities.

I feel like we make a good complement in what we do."

As is often the case with political rockers, Shocked is wary about her place in the music industry. "Who could ever be comfortable with contradictions?" she asks. "Contradictions make your life miserable. But given that, and being aware that I am walking a very fine line, playing with fire so to speak, it's an opportunity."

Mostly a political opportunity, that is. "I'm really hoping that a whole new momentum will happen around people claiming music that I feel has been taken away from them," she explains. "Any time that there's three chords, and people who know that the real values of life don't have to be based around money, you're gonna have a good time. My goal is to get the ball rolling, just to claim back what's been taken... it's a populist sort of sentiment, really."

And a big task, too big for one 25-year-old singer from east Texas, something Shocked quickly acknowledges. "That's what's terrifying, because you really put yourself in the hands of fate. I've got a friend, a songwriter, who says, 'When you give your hand to fate, you don't let go.'"

Robin Hood