

By CRAIG ROSEN  
Daily News Staff Writer

7880

In the June issue of Musician magazine, Texas-born, London-based singer Michelle Shocked was featured in an article titled, "Why the best new artists of 1988 are women."

Also profiled were shaved-headed Irish rocker Sinead O'Connor, folk-singing sensation Tracy Chapman and r&b-influenced belter Toni Childs.

It would seem likely that Shocked, a feminist, would be off-featured by an article that grouped a series of artists together on the basis of their sex.

But that's not the case. "Actually, I welcome that," Shocked said during a recent phone interview from her manager's office in London. "Because then I can introduce my theory.

"I have a lot more in common with African artists who have been taken out of their community, out of their city, put up on a stage with bright lights, with photographers wanting to take their pictures and journalists wanting to talk to them."

Indeed, Shocked, who performs Saturday at the Wiltern Theatre in Los Angeles, isn't a run-of-the-mill pop star, regardless of sex.

Some record-company executives insist that Shocked shy away from the "folk" tag, but the 25-year-old singer won't deny the connection.

"So much of what I do is based on naive or innocence, so no one can shut me up. I will say it is folk music with a vengeance."

Then again, she dismisses the idea of a folk scene. "I am very

*"So much of what I do is based on naive or innocence, so no one can shut me up. I will say it is folk music with a vengeance."*

**Michelle Shocked**  
describing her work



cynical about a folk revival, but I believe in the idea of a folk survival."

Shocked's story is true to the folk tradition. She made her recorded debut unintentionally, after an Englishman named Peter Lawrence recorded her performance by a campfire, including sounds like crickets and a truck passing by, on his Sony Walkman. Lawrence was so pleased with the results of his tape, he decided to put it out on vinyl.

That album, titled "The Texas

Campfire Tapes," went on to top the British independent-records chart and was later released on Mercury Records in the United States.

### Studio phobia

The powers that be at PolyGram, Mercury's parent label, were so pleased, they requested another record, but this time they wanted it recorded in the studio. This was alien to Shocked, a tran-

sient and political activist who adopted her last name after being arrested for protesting in front of the 1984 Republican Convention in Dallas.

(The album's cover features a photo of a San Francisco police officer, wearing riot gear, with a firm grasp on Shocked's neck. The photo, taken at the Stop the City demonstration in 1984, was published in the San Francisco Examiner.)

"I never even made demos before," Shocked explained. "It was pretty intimidating. The risk that I was taking was pretty great. I was afraid of trivializing 'The Campfire Tapes,' and I heard so many horror stories about being manipulated by producers."

When her record company suggested that Pete Anderson, known for his work with Dwight Yoakam, produce the record, Shocked rejected him.

"The fact that he was suggested by PolyGram was grounds for me not to consider him," she said.

But things didn't go as planned. A producer that Shocked wanted to work with wasn't interested.

"He didn't want to know about a girl who made records with crickets on them."

Finally Shocked agreed to work with Anderson, but she was still skeptical.

"I am a very strong feminist," she explained. "I didn't want to be patronized. I wanted to be respected for my different way of doing things."

She was also suspect of the country-music industry that had, as she puts it, taken "black music and put a white face on it."

As a safeguard, Shocked brought along a friend from the British band the Mekons.

"After a week," Shocked recalled, "I realized I could let my guard down. Not only could I trust Pete, but my friend went on holiday."

And Shocked admits to being pleased with the results.

"I had the best of all possible worlds," she explained. "Not only was I able to draw from my roots — a wide range of folk sources — but we could draw on Pete's experience as well."

In the process, she grew to respect Anderson. The two were even photographed together for the back cover of "Short Sharp Shocked."

"That was the least I could do," Shocked explained. "He helped me make a great record. I even have a fantasy about touring with him."

Fans of "The Texas Campfire Tapes" should be pleased with the results. "Short Sharp Shocked" takes the singer's bluesy voice and acoustic guitar playing and embellishes them

## THE FACTS

- **Who:** Michelle Shocked, opening for Billy Bragg.
- **Where:** Wiltern Theatre, 3790 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles.
- **When:** 8 p.m. Saturday.
- **Tickets:** \$20. At TicketMaster outlets, Rhino Records and the Wiltern Box Office. For more information, call (213) 380-5005.

with Anderson's economic electric playing, and on some tracks a full band, including drums, bass, keyboards and other instruments, without losing the intimacy that made her first effort so special.

One track on the album is a bittersweet ballad called "Memoirs of East Texas."

The song includes lines like, "They couldn't make a place for a girl who'd seen the ocean."

"You can kind of imagine what it is like growing up in a small town and you don't fit in," she explained. "It is not like being in a city where you can find weirdos that are your idea of being normal."

Shocked's father, a sort of hippie English teacher, and fundamentalist mother are divorced. She left home at 16 and traveled to San Francisco, New York and Amsterdam. Today, when not on the road, Shocked resides on a houseboat in London.

But her travels came to a shocking, temporary halt when she returned to Austin in 1983. Her mother had her committed to a psychiatric hospital, at least until the insurance money was exhausted.

Since then, Shocked hasn't spoken to her mother. "I guess I would have to call her long distance from hell, because that is where she thinks I am," Shocked said.

Much of her material comes from her travels. One song on the album, "Graffiti Limbo," was written in memory of black New York City graffiti artist who was allegedly beaten to death by a group of white transit police.

After seeing a huge tribute to the artist, Shocked talked to his friends, then wrote the song.

Another song on the album, "Anchorage," a heartwarming correspondence between old friends, has hit potential if the mainstream audience isn't scared away by "Short Sharp Shocked's" graphic front cover and her defiant posture.

"The marketing department was quite sure that (the cover) was going to be the doom of an otherwise brilliant record," she said.

"But it's like I say: If you are going to like the music, you are going to have to take my two cents' worth, too."