

ON MUSIC

New Music Meeting the Mainstream

By Tina Clarke

THE EIGHTH annual CMJ Music Marathon roars into Manhattan this weekend, bringing with it a plethora of seminars, workshops and artist showcases devoted to developing a market for new music.

Sponsored by the Albertson, L.I.-based alternative radio tip-sheet CMJ New Music Report (formerly the College Media Journal), the convention is expected to attract 3,000 attendees today and tomorrow at the Vista Hotel.

Although CMJ's objective — bringing new artists mainstream attention — may be similar to the much larger New Music Seminar, an inherent maverick spirit, coupled with deliberately modest growth, has helped CMJ maintain a fresh and innovative outlook in an industry otherwise stifled by continually narrowing interests.

"We've sought to make the concept of new music its own genre and its own constituency," says Robert Haber, founder of CMJ and co-director, with Joanne Abbot Green, of the marathon.

"We started the publication in 1978 as a company that dealt strictly with college media — college radio, record stores, concert boards — trying to unify that coalition and see how important it was in discovering new bands, taking the information they reported to us and distributing it to the media at large," Haber said. "But as the publication began to grow, it started to encompass the entire alternative media marketplace."

Today, the CMJ New Music Report is published bi-weekly and includes coverage of retail stores, album and progressive rock radio and video in addition to



Michelle Shocked and Billy Bragg are keynote speakers at the CMJ Music Marathon.

college media, which still makes up 30 percent of its 28,000 readers. Over the years, CMJ has been instrumental in aiding the careers of the Pretenders, the Police, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, Elvis Costello and R.E.M. — artists initially deemed too progressive for traditional radio, venues and publications.

One strain of rock that is still overlooked by many radio programmers, despite its popularity, is heavy metal. For that reason, since 1986, CMJ has offered a "Metal Marathon" — a special convention-within-the-convention that focuses entirely on metal music. According to Haber, heavy metal only recently has begun to gain "respectabil-

ity" in the media, and due to the success of groups such as Megadeth, it can look forward to more mainstream acceptance.

Two of the convention's hottest topics this year are "Music As a Social Force," the importance of which is reflected in the choice of two especially outspoken artists, Michelle Shocked and Billy Bragg as keynote speakers, and the impact of world music. "The fact that we are finally seeing the breaking down of barriers in respect to international music," Haber notes, is changing the face of the music industry.

As part of the marathon, 200 musicians are scheduled to play in local

clubs this weekend, with many performances open to the public. Tonight's highlights include: Ambitious Lovers and Identity at S.O.B.'s; Game Theory, Chris Stamey and Peter Holsapple and Yo Lo Tengo at Maxwell's (in Hoboken, N.J.); John Zorn and Kuriokhin Sergei at the Knitting Factory; Wring Poetics and Gigolo Aunts at 40 Worth; Eddy Kirkland and Katie Webster at the Lone Star.

Tomorrow night: Cowboy Junkies, Chills and Christmas at CBGB's; The Tragically Hip, Raging Fire and Material Issue at Big Kahuna; Treat Her Right and Crazy 8's at the Pyramid. ■■■

Tina Clarke is a free-lance writer.