

HARD NEWS

by Mike Daly and Jay Lustig

CMJ Convention: 'People Have The Power'

As promised, last month's CMJ Music Marathon '88 focused largely on music as power—power to spread important messages, raise consciousness, enlighten and inform. The industry people who converged on New York's Vista Hotel hammered away at a recurring theme: College radio can be used as a vital, much-needed social forum *and* still dictate which artists form the cutting edge of the music scene.

The folks at CMJ set the tone of the convention well with their selection of the keynote speaker. Michelle Shocked, the socially-conscious folk singer who college radio helped to break this year, gave a half-hour discussion on the importance of fighting global problems on a local level.

Shocked, an American who lives in England, said that social change in this country is difficult because of its political structure. She reasoned that in order for true change to come in the United States, political parties would have to be based not on left- and right-wing ideology, but on people united for a common issue, e.g. the envi-

survival. And let's not call ourselves the music industry; let's call ourselves the music community."

Shocked also suggested that the best way for music to successfully combat social problems is to conduct several small events over an extended period, like the recent Amnesty International "Human Rights Now!" tour and the



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featured Lou Reed, author/writer Jim Fouratt, *Spin* publisher Bob Guccione Jr., Steve King of Amnesty International, and Melanie Collins of the National Council for Refuse and Resist (see related story).

Reed and Fouratt both implored college-radio programmers to use the freedom they have to the best advantage of the community at large.

environment. This "swing-vote" concept is employed currently in West Germany, according to Shocked.

Shocked told an anecdote to explain the pitfalls of being pigeonholed, whether it be in music or in politics. She recalled that Abbie Hoffman once tried to avoid being photographed after a court appearance by writing the word "fuck" on his forehead. The press took pictures and ran the photos anyway, but the word on Hoffman's head had been altered to read "free." Shocked then said she feels like she's had the word "folk" printed on her forehead for many years, but now it's been altered to read, "Place in the pop-rock section."

That type of categorizing is what has created a two-party system in the U.S., and Shocked argued that many citizens choose not to vote as a sign of protest, rather than apathy.

"All people are saying is, 'Give us something worth voting for,'" said Shocked. "Give us some good music to dance to, and we'll dance to it."

Shocked said her speech was designed as a "sentimental appeal" for the people of this country to "work toward some kind of consensus by 1992," because it is her belief that the only true change can come through consensus.

The singer also stressed that musicians need to address community issues, "because it's within the community that we find

ongoing 24 Hours For Life benefits for AIDS. To drive that message home, she sang her song, "Strawberry Jam," which begins as a story about being at her grandmother's house, preparing a homemade batch of the fruity confection. The tune's theme: "If you want the best jam, you've got to make your own."

In closing, the singer took another shot at the two-party system by saying: "Take it from the Texas Campfire girl—(Jesse) Jackson don't have to wait for a major-label deal."

Continuing along those lines

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was a panel discussion called "Music As A Social Force: The Struggle For Human Rights." The panel was moderated by Sire Records vp Howie Klein, and



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Fouratt said he's heard music on college radio that is based on sexism, racism, gay bashing, and other negative viewpoints, which help to create an unsavory social climate. He said college-radio programmers and deejays should eschew these kinds of records in favor of ones that promote positive social values and explore important issues.

Guccione said that if music is going to be a viable platform for social change, "our main battle has to be against ignorance." He cited as an example the refusal of many stores to carry a recent issue of *Spin* because the mag had a free condom inside. Guccione said many of the stores who boycotted the issue sell condoms at their checkout counters. He said the boycott shows that society is uninformed and afraid.

Fouratt, who identified himself as a gay male, also said that AIDS is an issue that is not being addressed on a wide scale by those in the rock world. College radio, he said, is a medium that should get behind this and other important problems that are being ignored by other segments of the industry.

M.D.