

Mocked Wave

Michelle (Shocked) treatment takes Barrymore's by storm

There is a horde of musicians out there who'll tell you how critical it is to use an acoustic guitar to create rock tunes. But many of them would make fools of themselves on stage armed only with an acoustic guitar, with no band behind them, plunking out barebones arrangements of their hollow, chart-busting tunes.

East Texas bluegrass punkster Michelle Shocked won over a huge number of converts with her fluid singing style and stellar western-swing and bluesy band arrangements on her *Sharp Shocked* album in 1988.

At Barrymore's Wednesday night, after rollicking along for more than an hour with U.K. new traditionalists The Oyster Band, who had the audience bobbing and weaving with their mix of rock 'n' reel, some members of the packed house seemed startled by the fact that except for a microphone and a guitar resting on a chair, the stage was bare when Shocked's late-night set was about to begin.

But as she strummed the opening chords to *When I Grow Up* from the side of the stage and came galloping out to complete the song, there was no doubt that Shocked is a performer who has clutched with or without a band backing her up.

Despite her rural background, Shocked has a worldly presence. The former skateboard punker and squatter has lived through hard times, but doesn't ask for sympathy, nor does she club the audience over the head with her political wish list now that she's entrenched in social idealism.

Dressed in a turtle-neck, black tights and a Lennon-style peaked cap, the reedy singer had a voice to match her stature: frail at times, but capable of creating a strong charge of electricity. Her between-song commentary was sometimes spoken so softly that it forced the rock-club audience to settle down, straining to catch her quick wit.

"Folk music? You're soaking in it," she mused at one point, in a play on the dish detergent commercial. She finished many of her well-known numbers, such as *Anchorage*, with a twinkling smile and a flourish.

But there was plenty of grit, namely in *Graffiti Limbo*, the story of a young black man allegedly killed in New York by police officers after he was arrested for spraypainting in the subway. And in the cappella *Ballad Of Penny Evans*, the soul-wrenching plea of a young wife whose husband was killed in Vietnam, which deservedly received the biggest ovation of the night.

"Ah hope this song offends some of y'all," Shocked drawled as she introduced *Campus Crusade*, a melancholy look at shopping-mall Christians bent on saving us from the fires of Hell.

Musically, though, she saved the best for last, when her "band" joined her on stage. That was when she closed the main part of her set with her train trilogy, starting with *The L&N Don't Stop Here Anymore* and culminating with *If Love Was A Train*, accompanied by her guitar roamed on side.

A bit of showbiz finesse wound



BARR HOPPING
Greg Barr

things up in her second encore, in a rendition of *The Secret To A Long Life (Is Knowing When It's Time To Go)* "I mean it this time," she sang, and with that, Shocked bounded off stage and out the back door to her tour bus, the electricity of her performance still charging the air.

Silence is golden

You might have seen Mel Brown load up behind the keyboards with Texas torch singer Angela Strehli on her first trip to Ottawa. Now Brown returns to The Rainbow playing his instrument of choice, a Gibson guitar.

Brown and his rhythm section, The Silent Partners, have recently signed with Antone's Records in Austin for a May album release, tentatively called *If It's All Right, It's All Right*.

But Brown is no stranger to recording, having worked in the studio with the likes of Bobby Bland (11 years), Albert Collins and Jimmy McGriff.

Like Strehli, Brown is only now getting some recognition outside the Lone Star state. Combining speed and silk on his lead breaks, Brown is not unlike the technically-inclined Duke Robillard, but with some of the genuine blues feeling that the masterful Coco Montoya puts out. The Silent Partners — bassist Russell Jackson and drummer Tony Coleman — have their own road-wise pedigree, including stints with Bland, BB King and Katie Webster.

Brown and his Silent Partners will be speaking volumes of the blues at The Rainbow tonight (\$6 cover) and Saturday (\$7).

Starting April 16, the Rainbow adds weekend jam sessions for local blues artists.

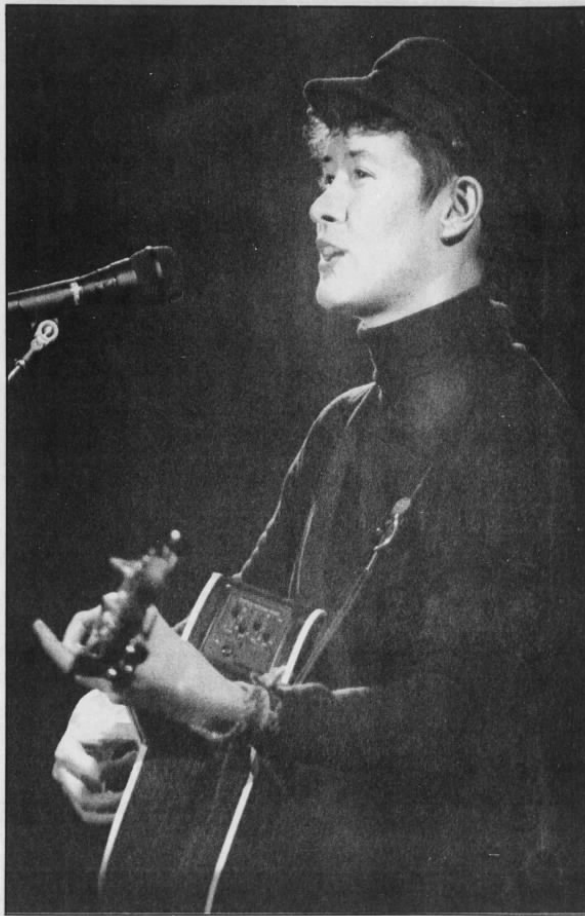
Ottawa blues guitarist Drew Nelson will co-ordinate the proceedings, to be held Saturday and Sunday afternoons at 3 p.m. with no cover. The Sunday jam will extend through to 11 p.m., presuming the bodies can be found to keep it all going. The exception to that rule would be when the club has a Sunday evening concert. Nelson will be joined in the blues jam April 22-23 by veteran performer AC Reed, whose band appears at the club that weekend.

Talent hunt

Spinner's is looking for a few good musicians.

Starting Monday and continuing each Monday through the next seven or eight weeks, the Bank Street club is conducting a talent search for solo singer/musicians.

The winners each week get a chance to return for the talent contest finals, tentatively set for May 29. The grand prize is 16 hours of free



Bluegrass punkster Michelle Shocked gave solid performance Wednesday without back-up band

recording studio time. Club manager Mike Charlebois said the audience will decide the winners each week, except for the finals when a celebrity panel of judges will be called in. Anyone who loses out is welcome to return to the club another week to give it another shot.

Local singer Norm Brunet, a club regular, will host the talent show each week. By the way, the club has a piano it can provide if that's your instrument. If you want to register, call Charlebois at 234-8709.

Standing pat

Ottawa rock band The Standing, formed about five years ago, has finished recording its debut independent single, to be released in about a month.

Vocalist Rich Rankin said the single was produced with aid from the Energy 1200 musicians grant program, and will include the songs *Institution* and *New Beginnings*. "One will be marked Side A, the other Side 1. We'll let the (radio) stations decide which one to play," he said.

If the financing comes together, the band, whose influences range from Peter Gabriel to Midnight Oil, will follow up with an EP in the fall. You can catch the band during a week-long run at The Talisman's Beachcomber Lounge starting Monday.

Early jazz

Starting Monday, the weekly Jazz Ottawa sessions at Yuk Yuk's (formerly the File and Drum) at the Beacon Arms Hotel have a new starting time, 8 p.m., to give patrons a better chance of catching that last bus home.

Concert gossip

Tickets for the April 16 show by Toronto chanteuse Mary Margaret O'Hara at Grand Central go on sale today at \$10 plus surcharges at TicketMaster and various independent record stores. First it was Randy Travis, now it's k.d. lang's turn. Canada's criminalized cowgirl has scheduled a mini-tour of smaller Ontario cities in April, including two dates near Ottawa: Peterborough April 19 and

Kingston April 22. She'll likely pass through Ottawa in the summer after her new album is released. Tickets go on sale today at TicketMaster outlets for the April 26 Congress Centre concert by Toronto's Pursuit of Happiness. Tickets are \$16.50 plus surcharges. Montreal garage-rockers The Hodas return to the Rainbow Monday and Tuesday, with a revamped lineup. Coming to the club later in the month: AC Reed and The Sparkplugs return April 19-22, and Kathy McDonald, who has toured for years as a vocalist with Long John Baldry's band, brings her own group in live nights April 25-29. Tuesday's show at Barrymore's by Swiss metal band Celtic Frost has been cancelled, as have the band's other dates through eastern Canada. Refunds available at the club. Meanwhile, Monday's cancelled BTFO show has been rescheduled to May 1. You can keep your tickets or get refunds at Barrymore's. Coming to Barrymore's down the road: Former Rough Trader Carole Pope May 4, and Ottawa's own guitar god Pat Travers, returning home from the U.S., May 19.