

# Campfire recording makes Shocked hot

By JIM BEAL JR.  
Express-News Music Columnist

"Although style in this content is everything, the real purpose of this album is to suggest that music, beyond style, is about feeling. The best music, no matter what style, always has that swing; an organic whole greater than the sum of its parts. Among the principles for this album... 'Only thru Diversity.'"

Those words, written about her third and latest album, "Captain Swing," close Michelle Shocked's press package autobiography, but speak volumes about the lady herself and all of her music.

Saturday, beginning at 8 p.m., Shocked will bring that music into the Majestic Theater with Poi Dog Pondering opening. Tickets are available at the Majestic box office and all Rainbow Ticketmaster outlets.

If you judge people by the set of a cap, the cut of a hair, the cast of a vote or the style of a boot you're liable to misjudge Shocked every time.

Born in what she calls "Dollars, Taxes" in '62, Shocked was raised on Army bases and in small Texas towns. Shocked's father, Dollar Bill Johnston, introduced her to folk,

blues and bluegrass music.

After running away from home at an early age, Shocked spent time in Austin, New York, San Francisco, Amsterdam, England and Italy.

In '88, while working as a volunteer at the Kerrville Folk Festival, an Englishman named Pete Lawrence recorded Shocked playing and singing at a campfire. Lawrence released "The Texas Campfire Tapes" in Britain. The tape took the United Kingdom charts by storm. Meanwhile, Shocked, on the edge of homelessness, was in the thick of the squatters' movement.

The success of "Campfire Tapes" led to a recording contract with Polygram and Shocked's second album, "Short Sharp Shocked."

"Captain Swing" finds Shocked backed by a full band, complete with horns, doing everything from scat-style jazz to Bob Wills-inspired Western Swing to blues to flatout rock 'n' roll.

There's a real temptation to characterize it ("Captain Swing") as being a dramatic change from even "Short Sharp Shocked." Last year I spent an inordinate amount of time defendin' myself against comparisons to other women who play acoustic guitar.

I felt that wasn't a fair compar-



Michelle Shocked will perform her hit music Saturday at the Majestic Theater.

ison because it was being based on the image and if they were making that comparison based on music it didn't hold. I felt the music was being sacrificed to questions of image," Shocked said in a phone interview from her home in Los Angeles.

Image? Shocked has close-cropped hair, dresses in basic black, wears a Greek fisherman's cap, sports a tattoo and writes and sings songs about reality.

"On 'Short Sharp Shocked' there was country blues, R&B, a funky jazzy thing, folk and country!

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things. I think that was true on 'Campfire Tapes' as well, but getting past the production is a challenge.

"What I claim is being from Texas you have a wealth of styles and traditions to draw from. Most Texas musicians give themselves permission to do that," she said.

Shocked isn't keen on comparisons or descriptions, but, if her feet were held to a fire, how would she describe her music?

"I'd scream, 'Texas,' which is pretty ironic since I left the d-state," she said.

Shocked then talked about her influences.

"Songwriting most clearly would be Guy Clark. The music would be Louis Jordan and Leadbelly and then the folk people in general. I got my real introduction to music by going to festivals with my father and listening to fiddle tunes," she said.

Shocked pulls few, if any, punches in her lyrics. Maybe that's why interviews with the lady have included information about her shoes, her boyfriend in Los Angeles, her boyfriend's car, her fundamentalist mother, her liberal father, her politics and her reaction to John Lee Hooker.

"It's my own d-- fault. I found it important to talk about those things so people could understand how I got here. I've also dramatized the career dilemma that I'm in signing to a major label with the political background I have," she said.

Dilemma? Shocked eschews the trappings of music biz glitz, left the country during the Reagan administration because she disagreed with America's political direction during that era and is a no-nonsense voice for the rights of the homeless.

"I pose some interesting challenges for myself because I try to apply my political philosophies to the way that I run my career. I try not to talk out of both sides of my mouth.

"I used to think people in the public medium had a responsibility

I'm hoping to get some support for looking at music on a basis more important than style.

— Singer Michelle Shocked

to use the medium to raise issues. But that was before I had experienced the phenomenon I can only call the 'Hollywood benefit.' You've got a bunch of what I call 'knee-jerk liberals' out here and they're not telling the truth any more than the Republicans in Washington, D.C. I played a benefit not long ago for medical aid to El Salvador. You had the usual suspects — Jackson Browne and Kris Kristofferson — and also all these TV actors from 'thirtysomething,' 'L.A. Law' and 'Cheers.' Some of these people you can figure are committed, but it gets confused because maybe by showing more depth it gets them considered for more serious, deeper parts in a career sense of the word.

"The real power for change is within yourself. And, on a grassroots level, you can entertain the troops. You come into a town and do a concert, you can point out that the people in the audience have something in common — not just that we all like me," she said with a laugh.

Shocked closed with her hopes for "Captain Swing."

"I'm hoping to defy the trend where you break down music based on style. When you do that it has less to do with the musical style than with the image you're putting across. I'm hoping to get some support for looking at music on a basis more important than style. Things have gotten compartmentalized. Texas music, for instance, is such a melange of styles that they don't have a category for you to go in. I think that I'm on to something. If you are going to put music in categories you've got to make sure the category is more important than image or style."