

Rebel Michelle Shocked plays Paramount

By G. Brown

Denver Post Special Writer.

Michelle Shocked has been defined as an enigmatic and legitimately eccentric folk artist. The cover shot on "Short Sharp Shocked," her debut album, was a dramatic black-and-white news photo of her being dragged away (and half-strangled) at a 1984 protest in San Francisco.

Shocked's resentment at being portrayed as part of the burgeoning number of sensitive women singer-songwriters is borne out by her list of self-descriptions: "Feminist, anarchist, skateboard punk rocker, carpenter's apprentice, rape victim, storyteller."

She prefers to place herself in the camp of Texan rootsy songwriters, as represented by Townes Van Zandt and Guy Clark. Her third album, "Captain Swing," makes a big stylistic leap, embracing

MICHELLE SHOCKED

Time: 8 p.m. tomorrow

Place: Paramount Theatre

Tickets: \$16.50 through TicketMaster, 290-8497

swing music with a complete brass section and full-scale orchestration.

"I knew that I was defying convention with the new record, but I don't think that's so unusual," she said before a recent concert in Philadelphia. Shocked will perform at Denver's Paramount Theatre tomorrow night.

"I came at it from a naive point of view, but still determined to play the game by my own rules. Anytime that happens, the way that you package yourself is going to be as original and

individual as the music itself," she said.

Shocked fled her east Texas fundamentalist home at age 16 and fell into the San Francisco hard-core scene. She hitched to New York and Amsterdam, becoming involved in squatter's rights and the politics of the homeless. She was later committed to a psychiatric hospital in Dallas "until the insurance money ran out."

She was lifted away from her life of demonstrations and small folk festivals by a bizarre incident that is now part of music industry lore. At the 1986 Kerrville Folk Festival in Texas, an impressed English observer recorded Shocked (and the local crickets) singing by a campfire on his Walkman, "like recording a conversation." Boom, a debut

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Shocked made easy shift to full band for 'Captain Swing'

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album ("The Texas Campfire Tapes") and a left-field hit in the United Kingdom.

Shocked's stock was sent soaring, but she rebelled against attitudes in the music business. To produce her second album, her U.S. record company referred her to Pete Anderson, known primarily for his work with Dwight Yoakam.

"But I was so cynical after the debut album, I was afraid they'd trivialize it — 'OK, now let's make a *real* record.' So I did a lot of saber rattling about not getting corrupted by the system, taking on the challenge of riding the tiger and not the other way around."

But Anderson's input was hardly formulaic, as he spiked

Shocked's coffeehouse guitar sound with deft backing. "Short Sharp Shocked" won acclaim and emerged as a Top 10 critics' choice around the country as well as a Grammy nominee in the Best Contemporary Folk Recording category.

Shocked collaborated again with Anderson on "Captain Swing." "The record is as much a result of touring solo for three years as anything," she noted. "Back then, I had a chance to feel like I was getting the lyrics across, but what was sorely lacking was a sense of interaction. So it's been real easy to make a shift to a full band and horn section, because now I've got all the interaction I can handle."

Some critics have seen the bluesy, big-band swing of the album as succumbing to tradition-

al pop music values. "I felt threatened that unless I used the same stylistic approach as the last album, something was going to be lost in the translation. But I can only work with what I have. I wouldn't say I come from a literary point of view, but it's definitely a songwriter's take on music, and that's never going to change no matter what style I use."

On "Captain Swing," Shocked still makes statements on the issues of homelessness and personal political power — "God Is a Real Estate Developer" is a particularly sassy commentary.

"I tend to get involved in those struggles from the point of view that it's not who I am, but the fight's worth fighting.

"My theory is that there's been a . . . liberal agenda, and it's al-

most like they put out an ad in the newspaper's classifieds of 'Wanted: folk singer who conjures up images of Bob Dylan and Joan Baez, feminist, must be opinionated and articulate.'

"I started feeling like I was very much asked to work within the parameters of that agenda, and I'll tell you something, that agenda fell so far short of my needs and my goals. So in a way, 'Captain Swing' was an opportu-

nity for me to say, 'No, you made the category, now you can make me try to fit into it.' Because I'm only out to fit into my own category."

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