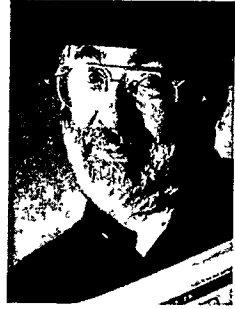


THE VANCOUVER WEEKLY



James Barber

A recap of three months' worth of breakfasts, lunches, and dinners



Michelle Shocked

The enigmatic singer swings with life's complex changes



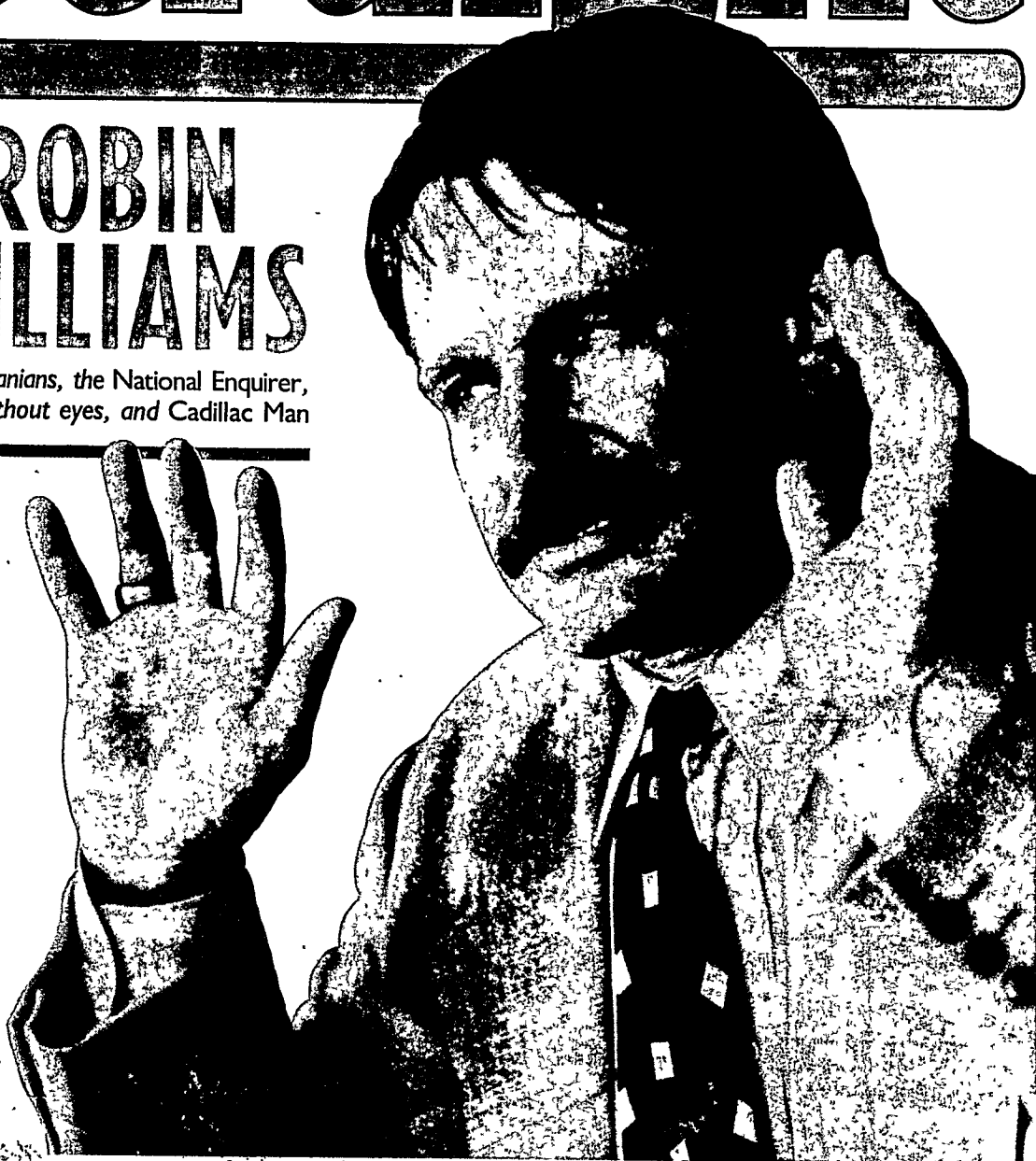
Salif Keita

Pink Floyd meets Malian tradition in this albino African superstar

THE GEORGIA STRAIGHT

ROBIN WILLIAMS

On Pomeranians, the National Enquirer, Oscars without eyes, and Cadillac Man



MUSIC

Spunk sparks punks; Vocal Warz open

"IF YOU AIN'T GOT IT, you can't have it." That's the pugnaclous motto espoused by the band Spunk, a new Vancouver supergroup put together by local rock 'n' roll impresario Laurie Mercer from the ashes of the B.C. and Toronto punk scenes. The idea is to feature a rotating cast of what Art Bergmann, himself apparently a possible candidate for Spunkdom, might call "never-wases trying to be has-beens" in a tribute to the early days of punk. The band's reper-

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ertoire will include the '70s songs of the Ramones, the Damned, the Dead Boys, Black Flag, and more. And for the first Spunk gig, at the Town Pump on Tuesday (June 5) the line-up will include Scramblers Howard Rix and Ziggy on vocals and guitar, bassist Chris Houston, guitarist Jon Doe, and Peryscope Concert Productions' Ian Noble on drums. Noble describes the Spunk project as "strictly a cash cow", adding, "There's no integrity involved, just the desire to milk some dubs out of a lot of money." But he backs off from his Malcolm McLarenish scenario bit when he adds that Spunk will only play songs that have stood the test of time, and admits that the idea of punk nostalgia is a slightly scary concept. "It kind of makes me feel old. I mean, this was 10 years ago, and I remember it."...THE

WHITESNAKE CONCERT that should have happened last Tuesday (May 15) has been rescheduled for Wednesday (June 5), and while the venue—the Pacific Coliseum—remains the same, and all valid tickets for the earlier show will be honoured, the opening act has changed. Faster Fuzzycat will now open up for David Coverdale's band of rock gods, which will excite fans of trash thrash but may disappoint fans of Bad English, the originally scheduled appetizer. According to Peryscope Concert Productions' Ian Noble, the rumours of denied tickets and drug records are just that: rumours. The change of fare was necessitated by problems with the original itinerary, which had the Vancouver date added to the band's West Coast tour; the new schedule brings the local appearance into line with the rest of Whitesnake's Canadian dates...IN

LAST WEEK'S Random Note about the worthwhile and entertaining Save Howe Sound cassette, which Fluid Records has issued as a means of raising money for Greenpeace and the Save Howe Sound society, we

neglected to mention that A&B Sound has organized a major publicity push for the project and is stocking the tape in its stores all over the province. The company's wholesale division will be distributing the cassette throughout B.C. and the Prairies. It's good to see some of this country's biggest music businesses getting behind the project, which features artists like Art Bergmann, Paul Hyde, Fifty Four Forty, and many more...**AKG**, makers of some of the world's finest microphones, is sponsoring Vocal Warz '90, a chance for aspiring singers to show off their pipes in front of a music industry audience and win prizes ranging from a set of AKG headphones to a national record release and \$1,000 in cash. The Vancouver area, Richard's on Richards, Champagnes, and Frank's Place are the host venues, and the competitions start on Sunday (May 27), and will run Sunday to Tuesday until the first week of July, when the regional finals will be held. Vocalists, who will sing to a prerecorded tape of a popular song—minus the vocals—or to a tape of their own material, can register to join the competition at any of the host clubs. Information about the contest is being distributed through all A&A Records, AKG, and Le Chateau outlets. ■

Shocked Swerves Toward Swing

Brush-cut neo-folkie moves to a more Longhair sound

By Ron Yamauchi

Her name is Michelle, but you can call her Captain. Introduced to the world in 1987 via the intimate, Sony Walkman-recorded *Texas Campfire Tapes*, Michelle Shocked (the clever pun of a name is a memorial to a colourful, if often ghastly, personal history) has released a brassy, bold new album. Breeching the neo-post-folkie-feminist-singer-songwriter mode which yielded last year's FM hit "Anchorage", *Captain Swing* is a lively blend of Louis Jordan and Jerry Lee Lewis, with Michelle's bluesy vocals storming and fandancing around horn arrangements by Tower of Power's Lee Thornburg.

In advance of the Captain's Vancouver visit—she'll play the Commodore on Tuesday (May 22)—the *Georgia Straight* called Michelle Shocked in Philadelphia, where she was supervising a soundcheck and chewing on a bagel. "The decadent rock and roll lifestyle," she calls it.

Shocked's voice is pleasant and unexpectedly soft, considering the lusty vigour it can achieve on "If Love Was a Train", from *Short Sharp Shocked*, or "Must Be Lull", from *Captain Swing*. Her East Texas drawl is mild and amused, smoothed out by three years on the road all over the world. "I remember the first time I was [in Vancouver]. I played at the folk festival. I was real impressed with the way that was set up. So many countries, and the workshops—it was a wonderful chance to show the different sides of the music."

That particular tour had been solo, a woman alone with her trusty guitar. Now aided by Jeff Donovan's



With a swinging new sound that draws on the blues and jazz of her native Texas, singer/songwriter Michelle Shocked is moving away from the land of female singers with little or no hair.

drums, Skip Edwards' keyboards, Lee Thornburg's trumpet, Jeff Pollock's sax, John Graham's guitar, and Taras Produnjak's bass, Michelle has been on tour since April 5, beginning in Houston.

That city reminds me of a thought I'd had while listening to the new record: Michelle started out with comparisons, valid or not, to Phranc and Suzanne Vega, both neo-folkies with little or no hair. But *Captain Swing* has more in common with roots acts like Angela Strehli

or Marcia Ball, really gutsy Southern women with good lungs.

The Captain chuckles. "I enjoy those kinds of comparisons a lot more, because I think they're being more accurate to the spirit of the music. Whereas the comparison to Phranc or Suzanne Vega was an attempt to subvert the music to a category based on image."

Her true musical patriots are Louis Jordan and Professor Longhair. Or, more contemporaneously, k.d. lang and Lyle Lovett. In Shocked's opinion, the suc-

cess of these anti-fashion artists "debunks a lot of the conventional wisdom about marketing and style and so forth. I tend to believe that if you're doing music that you believe in and love, then it's going to be worth it."

In terms of material worth, Shocked has been asked to, among other things, endorse Budweiser and sell her life story to a Hollywood producer.

Life is hectic enough, though. Recently, Shocked taped a show for National Public Radio in New York. She left her guitar in a cab.

In a panic, she called the taxi company, and contacted the driver's room-mate. After much tense phoning around, the driver gave the guitar up, and may get a song written for him. "As a matter of fact, we named the guitar Bad Penny after that, because it came back. And that sounds like a good song to me."

More seriously, Michelle acknowledges that in her short career she has "gone through lots of changes," some of them surprising. "I really thought that the whole point to the exercise was starting out with a preconception and sticking to it no matter what I learned. And, unfortunately, I've learned lots of things—I've tried to take the good, leave the rest. It accounts for some changes in my attitude. For example, when I started out I thought that this was really an opportunity to present my political agenda because I had the musical platform."

But now? "I tell ya, my general rule of thumb is that when anyone puts themselves into the role of spokesman, and says, 'I have to raise people's consciousness about that, and that alone is worth the effort,' then I tend to be really cynical, because my attitude is that by and large people know what the problem is. What they lack are the resources—the wherewithal, the tools for having any kind of effective change."

Michelle Shocked laughs when I suggest that she has all the musical tools she'll ever need. "I've just shied so far away from believing that because I'm a left wing radical that I'm the good guy. I just don't wanna touch that tar-baby; it's just too close to the truth of what I learned growing up, you know, raised as a fundamentalist with God on your side." ■

Roots-Rockers Revel in Formerly Format

By Alex Varty

The Sir Douglas Quintet, Bob Dylan, Paul Butterfield, Maria Muldaur, Ian and Sylvia, the Downchild Blues Band, the Blasters, Big Joe Turner, Canned Heat...if you're looking for credentials, Doug Sahn, Amos Garrett, and Gene Taylor have got 'em. The combined weight of their resumes could sink a B.C. ferry. But, fortunately, all that these three roots-rock legends will be bringing with them on their upcoming West Coast tour will be their reputations.

The Formerly Brothers—Sahn, Garrett, and Taylor, plus Sahn's crack Tex-Mex rhythm section—will play here at the Commodore Ballroom on Sunday (May 20). In what promises to be a show full of virtuosity and surprise.

The instrumental skills come largely from Garrett and Taylor: Amos is one of the most creative electric guitarists working today, with a keening, liquid tone and an unsurpassed talent for wrenching pedal-steel sounds out of the regular six-



Doug Sahn, ex-Sir Douglas Quintet, is one of the three big names who will re-form the Formerly Brothers this weekend.

string, while Gene has mastered the rough-and-tumble boogie woogie piano sounds of the '30s, '40s, and '50s to a remarkable degree. Both players combine a thorough knowledge of the history of their instruments with the

kind of creative drive that has let them stake out their own signature sounds.

The surprises will come from Doug Sahn, because while he is no slouch on any of his instruments—piano, organ, guitar, fiddle, dobro,

and the list goes on—he is also a truly free spirit, one who laughs in the face of conventions, musical and otherwise. As a white kid playing the blues in the '50s, and as the first hippie bandleader in '60s Texas, Sahn has always sought out the unusual, and unusual is exactly the word to describe his on-stage actions.

"Doug's sort of like Jerry Lee Lewis," says Taylor. "He knows just about every rhythm 'n' blues or country 'n' western song ever written, and he's always springing them on us. He'll write out a set list, but he won't stick to it...he'll throw it away after a couple of tunes, and just wing it. And when he calls something by, say, Hank Williams, it won't be one of the songs that you already know; it'll be something little-known or obscure."

There's more than a trace of affection in Taylor's voice as he says this: Sahn's love of surprises and change could throw a wrench into any other band's working relationship, but it's clear that both of his "brothers" relish the challenge of on-the-spot improvisation. Taylor calls Sahn the band's

catalyst, and says that he is not only a winning front man but a very supportive back-up musician.

The rapport between these three is nearly accidental: the group came together at the instigation of Stony Plain Records' Holger Peterson. He had booked Sahn into a Toronto club as part of his label's 10th anniversary celebrations, and wanted to find a suitable back-up band for the Texas star. Garrett and Taylor both had Stony Plain albums of their own, and both now live in Canada: they were Peterson's first choices for the one-time group, and he chose so well that what might have been just a party band has evolved into an ongoing affiliation.

Which is not really all that surprising. All three players are rooted in the blues, yet have eclectic tastes. They complement each other well, and have found a format that allows each of them to do what they do best within an unpressured dynamic. With similarly inclined Vancouver musician Jim Byrnes opening for them, in a rare performance of his country blues material, next Sunday's performance of the Formerly Brothers should be a treat. ■