

# Shocked into recognition

## Dad may join Michelle in expanding campfire folk to 'big band' R&B sound

By Tom Harrison  
Music Critic

**W**ELL, it's a big band in Michelle Shocked terms.

She did, after all, come to the public's attention via an LP recorded under the stars, by a campfire, with the use of a solitary Sony Walkman Pro that captured Michelle alone with her guitar and songs.

Now she's appearing tonight at the Commodore with her Captain Swing Revue of six accompanying musicians and possibly her father.

"I've been bringing him up from time to time to play a number on mandolin," she explains. "He's 20 years older than me but looks 10 years younger than that. If you ask him, he'll just say he was precocious."

The presence of a mandolin is a reminder that Shocked's idea of a big band is similar to that of Lyle Lovett's "large" band — a collection of musicians versatile enough to bring her rock, country, folk, rockabilly, swing and blues roots to life. It isn't an arbitrary decision to adapt her every song to a tribute to Count Basie.

It is, however, the first time a Vancouver audience will hear Shocked in the presence of other musicians.

"It was an exciting challenge," she says of her decision to work with a band, "but it wasn't much of a stretch for me because I used to play with my father and family. I'm not one of those bedroom folk musicians."

Indeed. As soon as The Campfire Tapes had established the veracity of her folk and country roots, Michelle next came with Short, Sharp Shocked whose Pete Anderson production boldly embraced other extremes of her character and experience, including rockabilly and punk.

She took another turn with her third LP, Captain Swing. Since she's never stood still long enough to repeat herself, the big band horns and jazz feels of the LP really aren't as radical a departure as

they seemed to some fans — who might also have viewed the French-coiffed, mini-skirted Michelle of the Greener Side video as a pop sell-out.

Then again, to anyone expecting an entire album of '40s-era swing, On The Greener Side is another surprise, being the product of Michelle's exposure to African music during the years the Texan spent in London.

"Yeah," Michelle says proudly. "I got that from listening to a guitarist from Sierra Leone called S.E. Rogie who played palm wine guitar. Pete Anderson heard it as a rockabilly guitar part but I told him the line I heard. It was one of the few times I got involved in the production end of things."

Upon the release of Captain Swing, Shocked said that for her next album she might return to campfire-style folk music. The experience of working with a band now has her looking in another direction.

"At the risk of sounding like a dilettante or a jack of all trades and master of none, I've become very interested in modern rhythm and blues, which has become subject to the worst kind of cultural racism by having it called dance music or disco or whatever. Since when was rhythm and blues not dance music?"

"So, as a folk singer, I'm interested in seeing how far I can take that."

Meaning she'll apply her songwriting to modern rhythm and blues as opposed to reinventing herself as another Paula Abdul.

"Right," she starts to explain. "My kind of songwriting comes from a literary background and a songwriting tradition where the words and the ideas are important. If those are strong you can go anywhere with any kind of music."

"As long as I stick to my roots," Shocked concludes, "I should be pretty safe."

Opening for Michelle Shocked is John Wesley Harding, last seen at the Commodore with Mighty Lemon Drops.



■ Michelle Shocked