

SHOCK ANNOUNCEMENT

MICHELLE SHOCKED is still trying to live up to her principles even though now she's now part of the big-time, LISA WALLER reports.

MICHELLE Shocked has fallen in love and she's getting married. It wasn't the news I expected when I asked her what she had been doing for the past 12 months. Musical celebrities usually respond to such questions with details about their latest recording stint or overseas tour.

But Michelle Shocked has never fitted into the industry mould, preferring to cut her own image, sing her own songs and keep a tight rein on the creative side in the recording studio.

She comes across as an open person, willing to talk and share information about herself. She's friendly. The big-time hasn't gone to her head.

She does do quite a bit of flitting around the world. She was in Canberra just 12 months ago on her first, very successful tour of Australia.

Shocked loves Australia. While she was here she bought one of those crazy maps of the world which puts Australia at the top and it now hangs in pride of place in her bedroom. She said she likes to think it shows "Australia's point of view".

She said Australia reminds her of the "best of" her home state, Texas. Shocked has "a lot of problems" with the "Texan attitude" but she has had no difficulties with the way she perceives Australians think and act.

Falling in love has not stopped Shocked writing or performing. She plans to go into the recording studio when she returns to the States after her current Australian tour. She will be touring with The Messengers — best known for their collaborations with Paul Kelly — and might record a couple of live numbers with them for the forthcoming album while the tour is in progress.

Shocked said the material she has been writing is "really different again" from her previous albums, *Texas Campfire Tapes*, *Short Sharp Shocked* and *Captain Swing* — which are all, in turn, very different from each other. This material has a "different emphasis".

"I feel I've changed," Shocked

said. "The relationship has given me depth and stability. I'm writing about the same themes. There are a few more songs that are inter-personal — introspective."

She isn't giving a lot away about the music she is writing but said she would be performing some new songs on her Australian tour. Audiences are in for some surprises.

Shocked is a dynamic performer. She possesses great stage presence because she gives so much of herself. She moves with a guitar as if it was an extension of herself. She dances with it, occasionally swapping it for a mandolin. She also spins a great yarn. Shocked warms her audience, creates an intimate atmosphere and feeds off the energy she receives in return. She doesn't preach but she does have something to say.

She sings about domesticity, racism, small-town Texas thinking, war, capitalism and feminism but she doesn't bash the Big Red Book, nor does she sell the radical "Package Deal". She offers her own perspective on the world. Stories from her childhood, portraits of people she has met on her travels. Learning to drive.

Her "voice" is unique. Shocked made her debut in an unorthodox manner. In a hand-written biography she writes: "While I was an activist in the squatters' movement I learned that I had an album that was No 26 on the UK independent charts."

"In May 1986 I had worked as a volunteer at the Kerrville Folk Festival. An English chap by the name of Pete Lawrence requested a few of the tunes he'd heard me play at a campfire the night before, which I recorded then into his Sony Walkman. He released it on his Cooking Vinyl label as an album called *The Texas Campfire Tapes* and I was invited to London for a short tour in January 1987. Recorded on weak batteries and complete with chirruping crickets, it went to No 1 within a few weeks and remained in the charts for almost a year. This

success created the opportunity to record for Polygram Records."

She said that album was "bigger than I had the imagination to dream about".

It caused her some problems. Having lived as a "runaway", a political activist a traveller and a squatter, the prospect of working in slick studios with Hollywood producers was frightening.

"I feel fortunate that I was able to bring my political insights to bear... working within the system. I still made some mistakes and they really hurt."

Shocked said her priority now is "protecting the creature inside myself". She said her political beliefs and activities have not changed and that she uses those visions to deal with the reality of her day-to-day life.

"Those similarities have helped me to deal with unfamiliar territory," she said.

WHEN *The Good Times* spoke to Shocked, the Gulf war was still in full swing. She said she did not have "enough reliable information" to form an opinion about the war but that she had "suspicions about what [was] going on".

"When I have real information it makes me inclined to be bolder but I have been hesitating to talk until I have more information."

Shocked said she feels a responsibility to go into it; that people expect it of her, but that like "everyone else", she was relying on mainstream media for her information and she didn't trust what she was being told.

"In a sense war is good for business," she laughed. "As a folk singer I have a conflict of interests."

The idea of writing songs about the Gulf war and making a "killing" just doesn't appeal to her.

Michelle Shocked and the Messengers will appear at Llewellyn Hall, Canberra School of Music, next Tuesday Mar 19. Tickets from Bass.

