

17 MAR 1991

Date



Michelle Shocked . . . political.

A shock to the system

BECOMING a musician didn't just mean a change of jobs for American soul singer Michelle Shocked, but a change of lifestyle.

The former squatter who has worked as a waitress and towel washer is still coming to grips with handling international fame.

"Think of a cat that is picked up and held upside down and then tries to land on its feet," she said. "That's what it feels like."

"When I was a squatter we needed our survival skills daily. We didn't have many resources of our own and so we lived in abandoned buildings.

"We didn't have much power but we would always support each other if one of us was threatened with eviction."

Today Michelle is signed to an international record company and has toured most of the world.

She entered music by accident when she was discovered at a 1986 folk festival by an English producer who taped her singing original tunes on his Sony Walkman.

The album was released, *The Texas Campfire Tapes*, and it soon topped the independent charts. She has since released the album *Short, Sharp And Shocked*.

But Michelle said she was still feeling her way in the music system which often put

profits before people and ethics.

"I am wary about getting into debt to people who are selling my resources. Especially in the beginning I didn't trust people in the industry," she said.

"I have made a lot of mistakes in judging people as I only looked on the surface at people's political beliefs and ideologies."

Born in 1962 the eldest of eight children, Michelle ran away from home at 16 and in 1979 went to live in Dallas with her father who was a hillbilly and blues specialist.

This was her first introduction to music beyond the fundamentalist environment of her mother's house.

Michelle has devised a unique way of recording her next album — she will use a mobile recording system.

For a month she will visit dozens of places, spending several days in each, recording with blues and hillbilly artists like Norman and Honey Blake.

Since the early 1980s Michelle has written politically-based songs especially when she became involved in squatters movements.

She will be supported by The Messengers for her Wednesday night performance at Brisbane Mayne Hall.

ID 690

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Shocked swings

AMERICAN singer and songwriter Michelle Shocked is back in Australia with a new set of songs on her *Captain Swing* album.

The songs mark a melodious change of tune for Shocked, who started her recording career with a tape of tunes sung by a campfire.

Those songs — recorded on a Sony Walkman at the Kerrivale Folk Festival — became the *Texas Campfire Tapes*. The tapes, complete with chirping crickets, were released in 1986 and went to the top of the American and British charts.

This success led to Shocked making a second album, *Short Sharp Shocked*, with producer/guitarist Pete Anderson.

It proved an inspirational working relationship and the pair worked



MICHELLE SHOCKED

together on *Captain Swing*.

For Shocked, who hails from Dallas, Texas (she calls it "Dollars") the second album gave her the chance to be more creative in the studio — however she has stayed in control of her work. Her belief in the artist being in control can be seen at every level — including her press release which includes an autobiography hand-written by Shocked.

- Born in 1962, she spent her early years travelling around army bases with her mother and stepfather. She ran away from home in 1979 and went to live with her father, who is also a musician.

She started going to music festivals with her father who introduced her to country bluesmen Leadbelly and Big Bill Broonzy as well as the underground folk music of middle America. Two years in Austin, Texas, provided the catalyst for her songwriting and Shocked left Texas in 1983 to live as a runaway.

The first track on the album, the satirical *God is a Real Estate Developer*, gives some indication of her feelings about big business and little people's rights.

Shocked was an activist with the squatters' movement when she learned she had a No. 1 song on the charts.

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"The anxieties of my first encounter with a studio made me hold very tight on the creative reins," says Shocked in her autobiography.

Shocked will perform in Australia with The Messengers, Paul Kelly's band, with whom she hopes to record an album later this year.

—Sandra McLean

WHEN AND WHERE:
March 20, Mayne Hall, University of Queensland;
March 21, Byron Bay Arts Factory.