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Michelle Shocked rambles back to her roots

By KEVIN RANSOM 7880
NEWS SPECIAL WRITER

On her last tour, the politically left-leaning Michelle Shocked unwound a sly smile and announced in her lazy East Texas drawl that she had grown weary of "preaching to the converted."

Marilyn Monroe had come to her in a dream, it seems, and told her to "entertain the troops" instead.

PREVIEW

WHO: Michelle Shocked.

WHEN: 7:30 p.m., Wednesday.

WHERE: Power Center, University of Michigan.

HOW MUCH: \$17.50 reserved. For details, phone 763-3333.

It was a surprising remark, even with her jokey delivery. Shocked had used her previous shows as a forum to — as she put it — "spit out my two cents worth" on issues like U.S. militarism, women's rights, the lack of low-cost housing in America and the oppression of the underclass everywhere.

Her newfound showbiz attitude was consistent with the playfully jazzy, finger-popping tracks on "Captain Swing," a 1989 release that

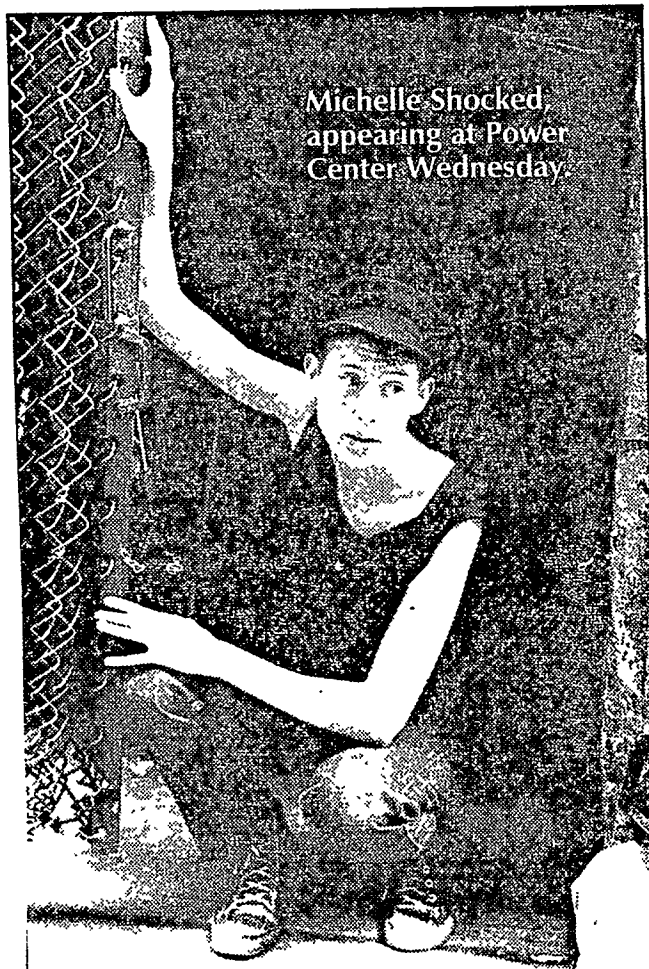
was an abrupt change-up from the poignant country-blues and roadhouse roots-rock of "Short Sharp Shocked" — the 1988 album that introduced her to American audiences. While "Short Sharp" was filled with loving, deeply personal reminiscences of her Texas childhood and recalled folk artists like Woody Guthrie and Ledbelly, the lyrics on "Captain Swing" were, in her own words, "clever for their own sake."

But lest her devoted audience thinks she's abandoning her folk roots, Shocked's next LP, "Arkansas Traveler," goes way back into the American musical tradition. Nearly all the songs on "Arkansas Traveler" are based on old-time fiddle tunes she learned from her father, an amateur mandolin player named Bill Johnston.

In the troubadour spirit of Guthrie and Pete Seeger, Shocked wrote and recorded the songs while traveling around the South. Along the way, she managed to collaborate with some of her favorite artists, including bluegrass picker Doc Watson, fiddle phenoms Mark O'Connor and Allison Krauss, dobro wizard Jerry Douglas, seminal gospel-soulman Pop Staples and Levon Helm and Garth Hudson from The Band.

The project actually had its genesis on a road trip two years ago with her father. "My dad had never been on a hitchin' trip before, so we hit the road to go see a friend of mine in

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Michelle Shocked, appearing at Power Center Wednesday.

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Missouri River. Like Pop Staples living in Sweet Home Chicago.

The audience liked the new songs, just as they should have. The twist that was offered by a prevalent fiddle in the songs from *The Arkansas Traveler* freshened the material, and her lyrics were as inventive and intelligent as they have ever been.

It's too bad that February is such a long way away.