

Shocked Stuns Students With Spontaneity Who Else Would Teach A Kid The Mandolin Onstage?

By Steve Gnagni

Michelle Shocked and her band had already played one set for the 300 people that had gathered to hear her last Saturday in the McCormick Auditorium. A shack and other implements of country living decorated the stage, and Shocked was dressed in a black jumpsuit adorned with a multicolored skirt. Her acoustic guitar stuck close to her body.

After singing "The Cotton-eyed Joe," one of her new songs, Shocked introduced the song to follow, "Woody's Rag," explaining that it had been written originally for the mandolin by her hard-travelin' vagabond forefather, Woody Guthrie.

Then she did something. She did something that all those bands that claim to revere their fans never do. Something that proves that a grain of truth survives in the worn truism that rock 'n' roll thrives on the give-and-take of entertainer and entertained.

Shocked invited a member of the audience up onto the stage. Not to dance. Nothing so rock star as that. No, she wanted someone from the audience to join her on the stage and play the mandolin.

CAS freshman Julie Rhoads bolted onto the stage, faster than a race horse busting out of its stall, hellbent on sharing the limelight with one of her heroes. The audience was amazed: This doesn't happen at just any concert. As one body, the audience cheered Rhoads on as Shocked taught her to play the mandolin part of "Woody's Rag": This is better than MTV!

Shocked's rapport with her audience

glowed throughout the show. The audience understood and listened to her lyrics, new and old, and was very interested in everything that she had to say.

Rightly so, because Shocked always has interesting things to say. She has a lot of knowledge and opinions to share, the kind of life lessons that come only from leading the sort of life most snug and secure college students can only dream about.

Michelle Shocked hails from a small town in East Texas, but she apparently didn't dig it too much, because at the tender age of 16 she dropped out of school and left home. Instead of dissecting frogs, she traveled down some sad lonesome blue highways, like so many minstrels and troubadours before her. She could have wound up another hit-and-run, another waif who slipped between the cracks, another sad-luck dame salving her physical and spiritual lacerations with a stiff glass of scotch.

But she didn't. She got lucky. At the Kerrville Folk Festival, a producer used his Sony Walkman to tape her while she was playing her music atop a fence. This tape was eventually produced and marketed as Michelle Shocked's first album, appropriately entitled *The Texas Campfire Tapes*. Shocked's folksy-bluesy guitar playing and her sometimes militant left-wing lyrics were unleashed on the world. Finding her voice she forged on. The next two albums, *Short Sharp Shocked* and *Captain Swing* stayed true to her unique style and broadened it as well.

The political views that she holds were very evident throughout the concert as well. "It's really hard for me to entertain



after having been all stirred up and angry like I am after watching these Clarence Thomas hearings," Shocked commented in her strong Southern accent.

In addition to these political interjections, Shocked also gave her audience some insight into *The Arkansas Traveler*, her latest album which is due in February.

"We took a 48-track digital studio in a semi trailer and traveled all around the nation," she said. Traveling the byways and highways of this land of ours, Shocked hooked up with other musicians. Like Uncle Tupelo along the

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