

Michelle Shocked jumps genres with glee

By Steve Morse
GLOBE STAFF

CAMBRIDGE — They call David Bowie a chameleon. Well, he's got nothing over Michelle Shocked, whose genre-hopping has become a signature trait.

Music Review

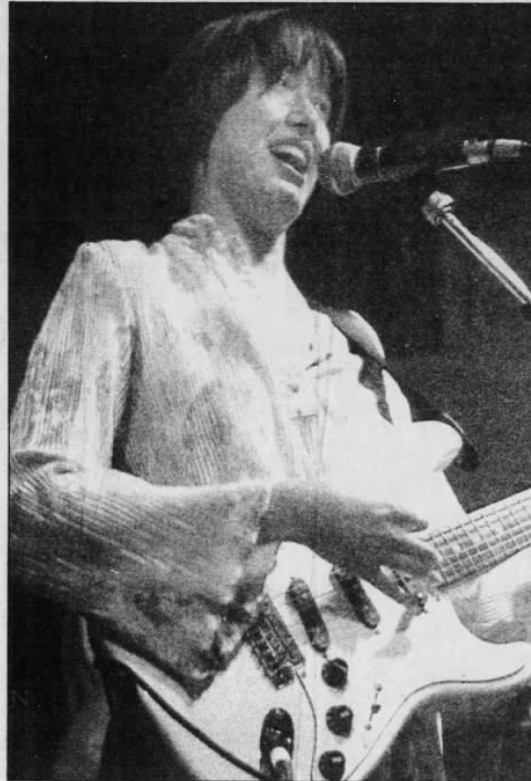
She began as a folkie discovered over a campfire in Texas. She's since recorded swing jazz, country, Cajun, blues and fiddle music.

She's dubbed her latest genre "fonk" — a hybrid of folk and funk, which last night also encompassed a liberal dose of good old-fashioned rock 'n' roll.

Shocked is mainly in town to assist the Mark Morris Dance Troupe, for which she wrote three new songs in a production presented by Dance Umbrella at the Emerson Majestic Theatre. But she couldn't resist booking five nights at the Middle East Upstairs in Cambridge, where last night she unveiled her new band, the Casualties of Wah. It's so named because she's recently become obsessed with the wah-wah guitar pedal — a psychedelic throwback — which she and her new lead guitarist, Andy Kotz, employed to exhilarating effect last night before a sold-out house of Shocked fans.

Playing only their second gig together, Shocked and company had a late start because of several calamities, including the fact they had barely slept since performing their debut show in Miami the night before, then had their equipment arrive late and had their van towed. Not to mention that she rushed over to the Central Square club from the Mark Morris performance.

It was a comedy of errors that fortunately had a happy ending —



GLOBE PHOTO / DIANE BARROWS

Shocked performs at the Middle East last night.

happier than the last time Shocked was in town, when she played the Silverado club in October and got in a dispute with her opening act, The Band, which ended up leaving the tour.

Shocked displayed new energy — and new material — last night, includ-

ing "Mother, May I?," a funky tune about imploring her mother to dance, before her mother ends up teaching her a few dance steps of her own. It was a playful number in which Shocked dressed up in a feather boa a la Mae West. This festive tone was maintained for most of the

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MICHELLE SHOCKED
& THE CASUALTIES OF WAH
At: the Middle East Upstairs tonight,
tomorrow, Saturday and Sunday

show, especially when she reworked some of her older songs and emboldened them with a fresh rock attitude.

"I'd like to rearrange some old songs, which can only mean trouble," she said with a huge grin on her face, before launching into her "homeless trilogy" of "The Cement Lament" (given a double wah-wah treatment), "God is a Real Estate Developer" and "Streetcorner Ambassador." An added playful touch was playing the theme from "Shaft" during one interlude.

Rocking with a Fender Strat, she also breathed new life into her earlier songs, "On the Greener Side" and "33 RPM Soul." Her new quartet — hand-picked through auditions in Los Angeles — was excellent, including drummer Thaddeus Corea (Chick Corea's son), synth keyboardist Robert Rinderer and bassist Lynn Keller. She gave each a lot of room to jump in with fills — and the result was some of her best genre-hopping yet.