

# Michelle Shocked goes 'fonk'

## Singer/songwriter to stage rare club show at Iron Horse

By SHERYL HUNTER  
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NORTHAMPTON — No matter what you think of Michelle Shocked's music or her in-your-face politics, you can't say she is predictable. Since rising to prominence in 1986 on the strength of her crudely recorded "The Texas Campfire Tapes" she has embarked on a career that has taken her all over the musical map. On her three major label (Mercury) releases, she has embraced such diverse musical styles as folk, jazz, cajun, swing, and bluegrass.

In the play-it-safe music business, Michelle Shocked is a bonafide risk taker. Who else would have followed up a breakthrough album like "Short, Sharp, Shocked" with the big band sound of "Captain Swing"? And, how many artists would travel 50,000 miles around the world to record an album as "Arkansas Traveler"?

In the latest twist to her diverse career, the outspoken singer is embarking on a brief summer tour that will play small clubs. Shocked, who in recent years has played to full houses at the Academy of Music and John M. Greene Hall, will perform two shows at the Iron Horse on Monday and Tuesday at 7 p.m. Tickets priced at \$18.50



MICHELLE SHOCKED

are available at the Northampton Box Office (586-8686).

This rare club appearance is coming on the heels of a five-night engagement at the Middle East Restaurant in Cambridge. She was in the Boston area, doing some work with the Mark Morris Dance Troupe, for whom she wrote three new songs for an upcoming production.

While in Cambridge, Shocked will be experimenting with her

new band, the Casualties of Wah, and dabbling in a new genre she is dubbing "fonk" — a hybrid of folk and funk. However, the Iron Horse shows have been booked as solo engagements (although the singer has the option to bring backup musicians with her, if she chooses).

Considering her workload of the past couple of years it is no wonder that the 31-year-old singer is engaging in some low-key performances. In the spring of '92, Shocked released her latest and most ambitious work to date, "Arkansas Traveler."

The album, which has been described as a feminist version of "On The Road," is the final installment of a trilogy which began with her first studio recording "Short Sharp Shocked" and also included the slick "Captain Swing." Each album in the trilogy reflects one of her songwriting influences.

On "Arkansas Traveler" Shocked went back to the fiddle music she grew up with and wrote lyrics to these old tunes. She then loaded up her pickup with recording equipment and headed cross country to record the songs with many of her musical heroes. Working with such luminaries as Doc Watson,

Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown, Taj Mahal and Pops Staples, she recorded everywhere from a living room to a riverboat.

In support of the album, Shocked launched the Arkansas Traveler Revue last fall, a U.S. tour that featured the singer/songwriter along with Uncle Tupelo, Taj Mahal and the band. Again controversy followed.

The tour had barely gotten off the ground when reports of internal squabbles began circulating. The rumors were confirmed when only days before the tour was to play John M. Greene Hall, the Band and Uncle Tupelo handed Shocked their walking papers. Shocked and Taj Mahal proceeded to complete the tour and delivered a fine show in Northampton, but reports are that it was a highly stressful situation for Shocked.

In her self-penned biography for "Arkansas Traveler" Shocked wrote that with the trilogy complete she didn't know where the next road led. While her loyal listeners anxiously await her next musical move, they won't want to miss this rare opportunity to see the gifted singer/songwriter in the intimate setting of the Iron Horse.

**SATURDAY**

