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After Dark



JEFF SPEVAK

Shocked: blurring the boundaries

Wow, some American black-face minstrel Michelle Shocked turns out to be. She uses the word "capriciousness" with ease in a sentence, she's got a wah-wah pedal on her guitar and she suffers from career angst.

"I planned to have a nervous breakdown after I completed the trilogy," says Shocked, who plays at Milestones tonight. "Unfortunately, I fell in love."

The trilogy she speaks of is her 1988 neo-folk album *Short Sharp Shocked*, 1989's jazzy *Captain Swing* and last year's fiddle-filled *Arkansas Traveler*. The collection got her a couple of Grammy nominations and the usual record-company and management headaches. "I wasn't discovered," she says, "I was exploited in the long line of blues tradition."

Her manager talked her out of describing *Short Sharp Shocked* as the first of a trilogy exploring American minstrelsy. Actually, it was one of her ex-managers who had that idea.

"I've gone through a trilogy of managers," Shocked says. Left to flounder in their own thoughts, critics figured her as a campfire folkie and described *Short Sharp Shocked* as a lot of protest songs. But there isn't even one protest song on the album, she says. It's just good old Texas singer/songwriter stuff.

The trilogy concept has been her guide. "Make sure you leave home with a road map," she says after evoking the ghost of Bob Dylan: "How does it feel to be on your own, with no direction home?" But the map ended after *Arkansas Traveler*. "I can tell you where I come from," she says, "but even I didn't know where I was going."

Where is she going, anyway? Shocked fans will hear a new, funky band (drummer Thaddeus Corea is jazzman Chick's son). "The spirit of it remains the same and the performance remains the same," Shocked says. "The sound could be quite a leap."

Shocked, speaking by telephone from Michigan, seems at once a funny, self-deprecating person and a serious, hard thinker. She talks about her marriage, the spiritual path that led her through the trilogy, her new-found interest in



Singer/songwriter Michelle Shocked, not confining herself to just one element.

TONIGHT

Michelle Shocked and her band, *The Casualties of Wah*, perform at 10 p.m. at Milestones, 50 East Ave. (716-325-6490). Tickets are \$18, available from the club, Ticket Express, 100 East Ave. (716-222-5000), TicketMaster (716-232-1900), Record Archive, Fantastic Records and House of Guitars.

church and her feminist point of view, but she's careful about it. She's trying to avoid whacking anyone in the face with Michelle Shocked.

"There's a serious side of me that likes to look at things from a ponderous point of view," she says. "There's a sincerity, and in its best sense I know people respond to it. But I'm not sure I'm not guilty of selling that, too. Like Sting. Buy my records and save the rainforest."

With Sting, the usual word is pompous; Shocked walks the line with *God is a Real Estate Developer*. She seems to have learned that too much self-revelation and artist-angst immolation can boomerang and strike the artist's mighty furrowed brow.

"I am willing to grow and change, therefore I am willing to fail in front of people," Shocked says. "I'm just not sure how far I'm willing to go. At one show, I announced I was going back to church, and people groaned. The reason you don't announce you're a Christian is there is this implied agenda, and suddenly you're a Christian soldier."

And she's no Christian soldier; Shocked recalls hearing one preacher's anti-gay scripture interpretations: "In the

Bible it says Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve." Shocked has countered that thought with a new song, *Peach Fuzz*, about a group of kids recognizing one of them is gay.

"In any church there are going to be extremists," she says. "Church is no different than life. The spiritual community of human beings is not perfect. Why should I let them drive me away from church just because I don't like what some of them say?"

Sometimes she'll defuse any artistic pomposity at her live shows by opening for herself as a parody of Michelle Shocked. So before anyone's had a chance to label her as the usual feminist, Christian folk singer with a wah-wah pedal, she's already diffused the importance of those labels with humor.

"People know I'm trying," she says. "There's something that's really remarkable that happens. People describe it as intimate, and like being in a living room. I think it's because people have been abused as audiences, they're used to being treated as the mass."

"When you consider how cynical the world is," says Shocked, "I think I get away with murder."

Free advice

□ Tonight, the Classic Rock All Stars with **Spencer Davis**, **Mike Pinera**, **Jerry Corbetta** and **Peter Rivera** are at Scorgie's, 150 Andrews St. (716-232-7583). Admission is \$7; doors open at 9 p.m., Rochester rock band **Chaos Matrix** comes on at 9:30 p.m., the Classic Rockers at 10:15 p.m.

□ Saturday, South African trumpeter **Hugh Masekela** performs at The Horizontal Boogie Bar, 204 N. Water St. (716-546-8508). There will be two shows, at 8 and 11 p.m. Masekela and several members of his band performed on Paul Simon's *Graceland* album, and Masekela did the soundtrack for the Whoopi Goldberg film *Sarafina!* Tickets are \$12 advance, \$15 day of the show with a \$2 surcharge ages 18-20. They're available from Record Archive, The Bop Shop, Record Time, Lakeshore Record Exchange, Fantastic Records and TicketMaster (716-232-1900).

□ Chicago's biggest rockabilly outfit, **The Three Blue Teardrops**, perform Saturday at Scorgie's. Rochester's **Frantic Flattops** open. Admission is \$6, Flattops hit the stage at 10 p.m., Teardrops at 11:15 p.m. □

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