



Michelle Shocked brings her unique musical sound to Asheville for a sold-out Tuesday night performance at Be Here Now, 5 Biltmore Avenue.

Michelle Shocked tries on new sound

By Tony Kiss

ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

After three successful albums and two Grammy nominations, Michelle Shocked was ready for something different.

So the acclaimed singer-songwriter got funky.

She organized a new funk-folk band, the Casualties of Wah, and three weeks ago, they launched an unusual cross-country tour. Tuesday night, they play a sold-out show at Asheville's Be Here Now, 5 Biltmore Ave.

Shocked and the Casualties are touring without a new album — she's eager to record, but that probably won't happen before next year, she said.

And there's no support from her old label, Mercury Records. Their business relationship is just about over.

"They've said I could go ... they have not negotiated terms," she said in a phone chat this week from Chicago.

Rather than wait until that matter is cleared up, Shocked and the Casualties hit the road with new material. "It's pretty risky," she said, especially with the change in musical direction.

But she was determined to have "access to my audience," she said. "If I had my way, as soon as this tour was over, I'd head straight for the studio."

For now, her mission is simple. "I'm asking people to dance," she said. On Northern dates, "it's been so hard to get them moving," she said. "People don't spend as much time dancing as they used to."

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Shocked has so far released three official albums - 1988's "Short, Sharp Shocked," 1989's "Captain Swing," and last year's fiddle-fueled "Arkansas Traveler."

The albums "were designed as a trilogy," she said. With that project wrapped up, came the next question. "Now, what can I do?"

"For five years, I was so focused on (the trilogy). From one day to the next, knowing what the next would be. Now what?" The uncertainty was "pretty terrifying," she said.

"When time came to make the change, it kind of fell into place."

The switch from from fiddle tunes on "Arkansas Traveler" to her funky new sound "isn't that much of a jump," she said. "Both are designed as dance music."

Still, there are changes in the way she works, she said. "I never expected to work in such a collaboration. I've worked with bands (before), but they've been sidemen. This is stuff we're creating from scratch, that's not been recorded yet. We're kind of making it up as we go along."

Michelle Shocked as the Casualties of Wah play 9 p.m. Tuesday at Be Here Now, 5 Biltmore Ave. The show is sold out.