

## Musician performs 'fonk' music

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Draped in a pink feather boa with a roomy, glittering top hat, Michelle Shocked prances playfully around the stage to an old disco standard.

Then she lets the audience in on "The Secret to Having a Good Time."

It is, she says, "learning not to take yourself so seriously."

But don't be fooled.

Offstage, the singer-songwriter is intense, passionate and deadly serious.

For those who don't yet know her, Shocked, 31, is a two-time Grammy-nominated artist whose acoustic guitar and folksy sound has earned her a reputation as one of a new breed of folk artists. Not one to be pigeonholed, however, Shocked has changed genres like most people change clothes.

As of late, she is the purveyor of a brand of music she's dubbed "fonk" — a folk-funk crossbreed that gets audiences grinding and shaking. During a three-month test run of clubs with her band, the Casualties of Wah, the new sound reportedly has met with enthusiastic response.

"The audience is free to perceive it in whatever way they want," she says. "It's kind of like I'm pleasing myself now."

Onstage Shocked is radiant. She grins and grooves her way through a performance full of funky-up folk and blues-rock tunes. She plays guitar and mandolin. She jumps up and down. She tells stories.

In private, however, talking between bites of dinner, it's obvious she has more on her mind than having a good time. She's got a purpose.

Shocked has taken up the cause of black musicians. Last year, she told a predominately white audience of record company and publishing executives, concert promoters and agents that the music industry has ignored the tremendous contributions and influence of blacks.

She has denounced the bluegrass music she grew up with in East Texas as a whitewashed tradition that obscured its black origins in this country.

And she insists the black paint that white and black entertainers wore years ago in minstrel shows still exists in a symbolic manner today. Shocked says she is taking advantage of that "mask" to perform funk in a genre not usually open to white females.

"Is it right for a white girl to try to delve into funk? I don't care," she says. "I basically have invited myself into the party."

The subject of minstrels and blackface may be taboo to some, Shocked admits, but she says only by acknowledging its roots in American culture can an open discourse on racism be started.

"My ultimate goal has to do with discussion of racism. I feel at this point the dialogue has been narrowed down and narrowed down, beyond political correctness even."

Shocked's politics have taken her from Farm Aid to apartheid. When South Africa's Nelson Mandela visited New York in 1990, she wrote a check in the amount of \$50,000 for his African National Congress.

Artistically, she admits her experimentation with funk may seem strange coming on the heels of last year's Grammy-nominated blues and bluegrass-inspired "Arkansas Traveler," but she sees it as a natural progression.

"For me, funk is blues and blues is swing and so, I feel like I've pretty much established my tap roots in swing and it's perfectly appropriate."



**Michelle Shocked**

Shocked took five years and three albums — her trilogy, she calls it — to explore these roots.

"Short, Sharp, Shocked," released in 1988, was her first studio album and threw her into the folk genre.

It also won her her first Grammy nomination. In 1989, she traded guises with "Captain Swing," a salute to her Western and jazz influences. Then last year's "Arkansas Traveler," with its fiddle tunes and homey, porch-sittin' sounds, propelled her back to her origins — the days when she traveled with her mandolin-playing father to various Texas music fairs.

Shocked says the trilogy was a catharsis of sorts, allowing her to establish confidence and a sense of self.

She hopes to go into the studio by early fall with 30 songs for her new album and out of them pick the best 10.

She would give no hints except to say it will contain "a lot of storytelling, a lot of swing-feel which you could call groove and it's going to have contemporary voicings."

What's most important, Shocked says, is that she's now focused and confident — a far cry from her younger days as a homeless, self-avowed anarchist who fought for squatters' rights and lived in a feminist commune.

"This is what a self-confident woman looks like," she says, throwing open her arms. "It takes a lot of courage in this society to be a woman and say, 'I'm competent, I know what I'm doing.'"

She becomes hostile, though, when asked if she is bothered by any misperceptions of her sexuality because of her reputation as a vocal feminist and activist.

"Yes, it bothers me. It's makes me extremely angry," she says. "In fact I believe it's women who have perpetrated the glass ceiling that has been put on strong women, more than men even. ... It's the feminists who come and need to have a woman, a (lesbian) spokesperson, to the point that they keep you down."

But Shocked says for the most part, her bitter days are behind her. "I give a damn, I always will. Anger can take you a lot of places, but it can only take you so far."