

Michelle Shocked bringing dance tunes, 'fonk' to Valley

By Thomas Conner
The Arizona Republic

*I thought I knew what I was doing
I was wrong
Mistakes I've made and lived to tell
I tell them in a song.*

— *Over the Waterfall*

Michelle Shocked is an American musician. She takes to the road like an old-time Southern minstrel, toting her musical influences in a handkerchief on the end of a stick over her shoulder. She stops along the road to spin yarns with folk music, blues, bluegrass — sometimes

all three in the same song.

She's a musical melting pot, forging her own stylistic blend she calls "fonk." Her new band melds her east Texas swing roots with a newly discovered groove and maintains Shocked's penchant for being unclassifiable.

"I consider my music to be truly American music," Shocked said. "I think American musicians are selling themselves short if they limit themselves to one genre. If you're American and you're just playing within one

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Polygram Records Inc.



Singer brings her 'fonky' beat to Rockin' Horse

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genre, you're wasting your time. Americans can do it all. Leave the genres to the Europeans and the record collectors."

Shocked brings her brand of American tunes to the Valley for two shows next week at the Rockin' Horse, 7000 E. Indian School Road in Scottsdale. The first show is at 8 p.m. Sunday, the second at 8 p.m. Monday.

She brings with her a new band, the Casualties of Wah (so named because of her fresh affinity for the wah-wah guitar-pedal effect), which she hand-picked at auditions around the country.

Swinging in sync

"I like performing with the band," Shocked said from Austin. "They're more sensitive to my needs than they like to admit. They like to act tough. They're very professional. They understand that their job is to perform the material as it's been arranged, but I can really go off on emotional tangents that require more flexibility

than just doing the job. When I swing left, they swing left, and so on."

It's another dynamic change of color for the chameleon singer-songwriter. She's known for her intimate solo performances. Her first record in 1986, *The Texas Campfire Tapes*, is simply Shocked and her guitar around an actual campfire. It was recorded by a fan at a music festival on a Sony Walkman.

Four albums later, she's on the road again playing funk, whatever that is.

"It's a logical but not obvious link to what I've been doing in the past," she said.

In the past, she has focused on folk, blues, bluegrass, Texas swing, Irish folk and a wealth of other styles. What's the logical link in all that?

Dancing, of course.

"They're dancing on tables at some of our shows," she said, laughing. "It's a new thing. The groove is paid the respect that it's due. I mean, dance has been divorced from music for so long, people need to be reminded that they were never in-

IF YOU GO

Michelle Shocked

WHEN: 8 p.m. Sunday, 8 p.m. Monday.

WHERE: The Rockin' Horse, 7000 E. Indian School Road, Scottsdale.

TICKETS: \$17 advance and at the door.

tended to be separated. And I'm more than willing to do my part to tempt and cajole the folks into it. You can be bored or have fun at the show. I recommend that you dance."

Trends are out

Shocked likes to dance. She frequently quotes anarchist Emma Goldman onstage, saying, "If I can't dance, you can keep your revolution." Then the band kicks in, and she dances the dirty dog.

She recently assisted the Mark Morris Dance Troupe by writing three songs for a Morris production in Boston. Morris created a new dance

called *Home* around her songs and performed in the clog-dance fiddle sections of the songs.

All this from an artist relegated to the rock/pop category of your local music store. Shocked certainly is no trendy player.

"In the long run, if you do what you believe in, things will catch up to you. If you chase all the current trends, you'll get wrung dry," she said.

Shocked said this tour is the hallmark of a new sense of confidence in her career. Despite a quarrel with her parent label, Mercury Records, Shocked said she is finally feeling confident about her talent.

"I'm ready to take responsibility for my own sense of self-confidence," she said. "I'm extremely ambitious, and I struggle to reconcile my ambition with my strong desire to maintain a spiritual meditation through my music. It can't come from an ego. It has to come from a strong sense of self-confidence. You have to know how to strike out on your own."

What an American thing to say.