

October 11, 1996

Michelle Shocked breaks the established mold

Catch her
at Alegria
Wednesday

By DAVID PRINCE

Every once in a while, an artist comes along to break an established mold and remind us how refreshing an original vision can be. Such an artist is acclaimed singer and songwriter Michelle Shocked, who has steadfastly gone her own way, even when it meant open confrontation with the corporate powers-that-be.

Shocked's Club Alegria concert at 8 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 16, her first Santa Fe appearance since 1993, will be the third stop on her current 27-city touring schedule. Beginning in her recently adopted hometown of New Orleans and stopping in Austin before reaching The City Different, the pseudonymous Shocked and her so-called Casualties of Wah are celebrating the release of *Kind Hearted Woman*, an album that previously had been sold only at concerts and by mail-order.

The album and tour are the initial public evidence of Shocked's newly signed pact with Beverly Hills-based Private Music, the label that's currently the recorded home of Leo Kottke, Leon Redbone and Taj Mahal, among others.

According to *Billboard* and other trade publications, Shocked's contract is unique in the music business, in that it not only gives the artist ultimate control over the fruits of her labors, but also creates a specifically non-exclusive relationship between the parties, even during the two-album term of the agreement.

The reason for all the attention to the finer points of Michelle Shocked's contract relates to the now well-known battle that raged on for years with Mercury Records, her former label.

After the release of *Arkansas Traveler* in 1992, an album that completed the musically adventurous, stylistically divergent trilogy that also includes *Short Sharp Shocked* and *Captain Swing*, Mercury refused to free the disgruntled Shocked from her contract, yet they also stopped active promotion of her career.

Calls to Mercury's Publicity Department during that period usually resulted in terse statements to the effect that Shocked had been "dropped" by the label, and there were



'Kind Hearted Woman' Michelle Shocked

DETAILS

WHO/WHAT:
Michelle Shocked
& The Casualties of Wah

WHEN:
8 p.m. Wednesday,
Oct. 16

WHERE:
Club Alegria
Agua Fria,
one block north
of Silver Road

INFO:
Tickets \$17 at
Casablanca Videos, 473-0600;
Call 884-0999 to charge
by phone

muttered asides about her unruly nature.

But to the outspoken Shocked, it was a clear case of economic murder by silence — her catalog continued (and continues) to sell extremely well. Mercury, she charged in the lawsuit she eventually filed, was in violation of the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, the clause that prohibits involuntary servitude.

Finally, the parties agreed to a settlement that leaves Shocked's earlier efforts on the Mercury label for the time being (they will, however, soon revert to the artist herself), with one final collection of "greatest hits" to be issued by Mercury.

That Shocked insisted that this two-CD set be titled *Mercury Poise* is a direct reference to another former Mercury artist, Graham Parker whose vitriolic parting shot at the label at the end of the '70s was a 12-inch single named . . .

Mercury Poisoning.

But all the cloakroom dagger-eyed stares will be forgotten when the Casualties of Wah strut their mighty stuff on Wednesday. Speaking from an Oakland rehearsal space last week, Shocked told *Pasatiempo* about her latest stage show.

"It's a retrospective of my entire career," she said, "that begins with some old-school R&B before shifting into a mood reflective of New Orleans-style soul for about five or six numbers.

"Then, we'll do maybe another five or six songs that're coming out on *Mercury Poise*. At this point, the rest of the band will leave the stage, and I'll sing some of the *Kind Hearted Woman* songs, solo.

Then, the band comes back to do another four or five from the new record, and we'll take it on out with a dose of party funk."

Joining rhythm guitarist Shocked and her musical director, former Tony! Toni! Tone! keyboardist Carl Wheeler, will be an as-yet unnamed drummer and bassist, as well as what now appears to be a trumpet-trombone horn section that Shocked says is more in the "Earth, Wind & Fire mold rather than the New Orleans style."

The edition of *Kind Hearted Woman* that Private will release the day before Shocked's Santa Fe visit is a re-recorded version of the same tunes that fans purchased during the "enforced recording hiatus" occasioned by the troubles with Mercury.