

POP MUSIC

Michelle Shocked shakes loose from label

1051A

Michelle Shocked and the Casualties of Wah

Opening act: Pony Stars.
Where: The Vogue, 6259 N. College Ave.
When: 8 p.m. Monday.
Tickets: \$15; (317) 259-7029.

By Roberta Penn
SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER

Singer/songwriter Michelle Shocked has been in a prison without walls for more than three years, trapped in a recording contract with a company that wouldn't let her record.

"I had a contract to do seven records with Mercury, and I did three," Shocked explained. "I wanted to make another record, but for nearly four years they didn't return my phone calls.

"I filed a lawsuit in August of '95 that challenged Mercury under the California labor laws enacted to prevent indentured servitude. It opened a can of worms, and then they returned phone calls and negotiated a settlement."

The settlement included one more release for Mercury, a compilation, that will come out later this year, and it gave Shocked complete artistic control of the project.

Her title for the set, *Mercury Poise*, is a message to the label.



Shocked

the high-spirited Shocked also was working. She put a CD out on her own, *Kind Hearted Woman*, and sold copies at her gigs. When Mercury released Shocked, she took *Kind Hearted Woman* to the Private Music label. The CD was released this week, and Shocked is touring behind it.

The all-original set begins with three songs Shocked wrote for choreographer Mark Morris' dance piece, *Home*. The lyrics tell heart-breaking stories of alienation, loss and the power nature has over humans. The songwriter's plain-spoken way with words lets her take on painful and personal subjects without falling into excessive drama.

"It's a reference to a Graham Parker song, *Mercury Poisoning*," Shocked explained. "The subtitle is *Never P... Off a Songwriter*."

While she was fighting with the label,

Stillborn, the first cut on the CD, is so straightforward and intimate it seems to come from Shocked's own experience. But no, she has not lost a baby.

"It was a metaphor I landed on while trying to write a story for the dance," Shocked said. "Though I haven't lost a child, I know women who have and the metaphor has poignancy and resonance for a lot of women. It's very true to my feminist spirit."

Shocked's tour will feature songs from all her releases, but

the interpretations will be fresh because her band is new. Musical director for the Casualties of Wah is organ and keyboard player Carl Wheeler, a church choir director who has worked with Tony! Toni! Toné! Shocked and her band will also preview upcoming material.

"We'll be doing tons of new material and presenting a spectrum of the four albums," Shocked said. "The new material is work in process, what we'll do in the studio next year. I like to perform the songs before I record them."