

# Shocked episodes

*Michelle Shocked was never destined to lead a conventional life. Her own history is filled with episodes of horror and despair. Her latest album is about death, as something to be embraced rather than avoided, she tells Sophie Gorman*

**K**ind Hearted Woman, Michelle Shocked's latest album, may well be regarded by many as her own theme song. In it she demonstrates emotional depths that are universal to all, pulling you with her through her myriad of moods. Listening to Shocked's music in a detached analytical fashion is impossible as you feel yourself being swept up in her haunting but often brutally emotional lyrics.

Michelle Shocked is a woman with a public persona of incredible strength and determination. She has survived the most unconventional upbringing, or lack of, and has just finished a bitter dispute with her now ex-record company, Mercury Records, a war which she won. Though it is now freely available in the shops, *Kind Hearted Woman* had its earliest release at the gates of her concerts. As a result of the growing divide between Shocked and Mercury, she unconventionally sold hand-numbered copies of a demo version to raise enough money to record and mix it properly, and, more importantly, to pay for a band!

"The album did have slightly limited availability at first," Shocked admits, laughing. "I recorded this demo on my own in a friend's garage studio and is very different to the

commercial product now on shop shelves. In essence the demo was a very raw work, and is truly a collector's item for loyal fans with my own handwriting visible on each copy."

The show that Shocked will take to the Olympia tomorrow night is at heart R'n'B. Shocked shows her own inherent self belief by bringing with her an individually styled five-piece Oakland band. Faced with the choice between either a lead guitar or a horn section, the decision was obvious for her and the trombone and trumpet have pride of place in her tour bus.

It is undoubtable that Shocked is the eponymous chameleon performer. Each tour, and possibly, each show takes on a new dimension, a new face. "It is impossible to just repeat the show from night to night, you have to really open your heart and let whatever lies inside flow out."

Working with an incredibly diverse group of artists, ranging from The Casualties of Wah to the Hothouse Flowers, has been a learning process for Shocked, who openly admits the influence these artists have had on her own brand of music. "They are all people I admire and feel blessed to have been given the opportunity both to work with and learn from, I feel that each and everyone of them is with me in spirit during every performance.



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an R'n'B album. This new progression in R'n'B is really connected to my own personal development," asserts Shocked. "There are a lot of similarities to church music and that music is connected with a very spontaneous self. It's got to come

from the soul, the spirit has to be allowed to move you."  
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from home at a young age, was institutionalised by her mother, got raped in Europe, and once lived in the famous beer-squats of San Francisco.

She reached utter despondency when her grandmother, the person she feels was her only true family link, died in 1994. This death inspired her to finish the album and has played a pivotal role in many of the melancholy tracks. "My background is a thing of the past and rather than wallow in it, it is important for me to get something back from it. I use all the emotional baggage that I am carrying inside me as inspiration to write songs with which everyone can relate. Experience is the greatest raw material for the creative process.

"Writing and singing does give me some kind of release from the demons of my past, it is a therapy of sorts, but, to be honest, my marriage played a more important role in my acceptance of myself than performance has ever done," she admits. "Gigs are less about me searching for therapy than me really trusting that my experiences, particularly my emotions, are universal. It makes me feel as if I have a common bond with what each individual member of my audiences is going through in their own life.

**T**he fact is that this album is about death, as something to be embraced rather than avoided. It differs from most commercial releases who try to avoid the taboo subject and, instead, focus on positive images and themes. If this record is to succeed it must be accepted that seven out of the 10 tracks deal directly with subject of death. Death is a part of existence and must be recognised. I have included several tracks with an upbeat tempo, and then surprised the listeners with fatalistic lyrics.

"There's an overwhelming storyline on *Kind Hearted Woman* of despair leading to redemption, and I used a lot of the emotions and frustrations that I've personally experienced to help illustrate that," Shocked says.

The future for this brave independent woman is, however, extremely bright. "I have a wealth of material that I'm eager to record after this tour. I'm pretty much using it as an opportunity to work through some new songs, iron out the creases, and I hope to start recording a new album in summer."

Michelle Shocked plays the Olympia, Dublin, tomorrow night at 8pm