

Brisbane News  
 Queensland Suburban  
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Let's Talk About Love, Celine Dion  
 In My Life  
 Aquarium, Aqua  
 24 Apr, Brisbane  
 131 931

**CONCEPTS**  
 Metallica: \$52, 8pm, 20 Apr, Brisbane  
 Entertainment Centre, 131 931  
 Bay, 131 931.  
 East Coast Blues & Roots Festival  
 View Hotel, 3286 1002.  
 Clare Hansson: 12.30pm, 6  
 3846 4321.  
 Carl Rush: 1.00pm, The Ship  
 Healer, 3852 2575.  
 Steve Lott Band: 8.30pm,  
 Mt Coot-tha Lookout, 3369 9922.  
 Sassy and the Stringman:  
 The Brisbane Jazz Club, 3265 7.  
 Brisbane Big Band

**MANAGE PACKAGE FOR TWO**  
 Dutch art five lucky readers have the  
 chance to win double passes to The  
 Golden Age of Dutch Art Seventeenth  
 Century Paintings from the  
 Rijksmuseum and Australian  
 Collections, courtesy of the  
 Queensland Art Gallery. The exhibition  
 brings together more than 40  
 magnificent paintings by Dutch mas-  
 ters including Rembrandt van Rijn,  
 Frans Hals, Jan Steen and Jan van  
 Goyen. It will continue until  
 4 May at the Queensland Art Gallery.  
 Hutton

# Shocked value

**Musical chameleon Michelle Shocked hasn't been lumbered with instant fame, which she thinks is probably a good thing, writes Alicia Pyke**

**M**ICHELLE Shocked is possibly music's best-kept secret. The extremely talented but under-exposed singer-guitarist hasn't released an album since 1994, but still sells out shows. She returns to Brisbane next week for two concerts at Tivoli Cabaret.

"Gratefully surprised" by overwhelming audience responses, the quietly spoken artist claims another side takes over when she performs.

"I sometimes feel like one of those performers who is possessed," she says. "I used to think that I was being myself on stage but I'm like a hyper version of myself — more myself than I am in real life. Many times I'll get off stage dazed and confused, asking people around me what happened."

Known primarily for her single *Anchorage*, Shocked is one of those rare performers most people seem to know of but few know much about.

"I see myself as one of a very precious handful of functioning artists," she says. "Most of my colleagues are called artists but they function as name brands."

A distaste for musicians as commodities may explain her chameleon style that results in a diverse range of musical output. But Shocked is no longer content to hover on the fringe of commercial success, with a desire for increased popularity propelling her in new directions.

"I really have hopes of working in the mainstream as an artist and showing that you should not underestimate people's intelligence," she says. "I appreciate main-

stream music very much — I find it to be very democratic but I think sometimes it's guilty of pandering and worse than that, it often caters to the lowest common denominator."

In striving to develop her style, Shocked explores a variety of genres — from folk and bluegrass to big band and funk.

"My music, at the risk of sounding incredibly arrogant and jingoistic, I call American music", she says, citing a blend of Afro-centric and European influences.

As a songwriter, her voice constantly evolves as she distances herself from purely autobiographical material, preferring metaphor to deliver her message which has frequently earned her a protest-singer tag — something she believes is exacerbated by past associations with other musicians.

"I did a lot of work early on with [British singer] Billy Bragg and a lot of times I felt like I was nailed to his cross. He was very willing to engage in polemic and practically didactic kinds of dogma. He would try to liven it with humour, that's one thing we have in common, but I was never so comfortable with having a set of values or social theories like socialism to answer all my questions for me, which makes it hard to be a protest singer."

The 36-year-old university graduate was born Karen Johnson in Dallas, Texas. Her moniker came much later when she was involved in political protests during the United States election campaign in 1983.

"I was arrested at a political demonstration. At my arrest I had to give a name so I

gave the name Michelle Shocked to indicate that I was a shell-shocked victim of a cold war."

The name stuck and Shocked continued to agitate while singing and playing guitar, as she has done since 16. She was unaware her talents would show up on a bootleg album recorded on a Walkman around a campfire without her knowledge.

"I was living in a squat in New York in 1986 when I received, through a friend, a letter saying 'you have an album on the independent charts in England'. I had no knowledge of having an album or even recording, for that matter. I finally got a copy by this artist Michelle Shocked and it was me all right — *The Campfire Tapes* was a bootleg."

With her first album "already *fait accompli* by the time I was informed", Shocked established herself as a performer. In 1988 the first album was surpassed by a legitimate studio release, titled *Short Sharp Shocked*. Since then, she's released *Captain Swing* (1989), *Arkansas Traveller* (1992) and *Kind Hearted Woman* (1994).

Her latest album, *Good News*, is only available to concert-goers. Recorded earlier this year, it features Shocked's new band, the Anointed Earls.

"I considered it like a glorified demo. It may be a taste of things to come when I have the proper resources available."

Following a split with her label Mercury, Shocked took a break from touring and spent time with her husband of five years, writer and journalist Bart Bull, at their

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*Back on track: Michelle Shocked took a year off to re-evaluate her life as a musician*

home in New Orleans. "I spent last year basically in sabbatical, partly for spiritual purposes but also to re-evaluate whether the choices, the sacrifices and struggles I'd make were worth it. By the end of the year I'd pretty much decided they were."

She is now seeking new industry support. "I spent the last four days prior to flying over here in Los Angeles showcasing what I'm up to — there are about 10 labels interested but I know the one I'm interested in. I've picked one, I hope they pick me."

In terms of fame, that precious 20th century phenomenon which fuels egos and

effort, Shocked believes she is a "sleeper" and that interest in her ability "creeps up from behind".

"I haven't bought it (fame), I've earned it. It's been a very slow, steady word-of-mouth thing, letting the work speak for itself, without the big, over-exposed promotion."

The Good News tour is Shocked's fifth to Australia and she looks forward to seeing her favourite destinations again. "I love Byron Bay," she exclaims of the location she discovered on her first visit to Australia.

She returns to Byron Bay to play at the

East Coast Blues & Roots Festival where she has performed before.

"I was solo before so I'm really looking forward to coming back with my band."

Renowned for her dynamic stage performances, Shocked has a special request of fans this time — that audiences "bring their dancing shoes" because she promises to wear hers.

◆ *Michelle Shocked and the Anointed Earls perform at Tivoli Cabaret, 52 Costin Street, Fortitude Valley at 8pm on Tuesday, 14 and Wednesday, 15 April. Tickets cost \$30.50. Phone 3852 1711.*