

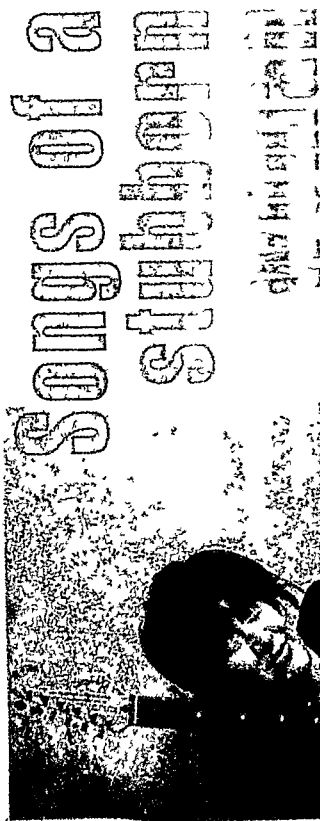


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Picture: JACK ATLEY

**> In the face of adversity,
 Michelle Shocked is
 calmly determined to
 find her soul again. She
 spoke to TERRY RELLY**

In her 36 years, Michelle Shocked's road has seldom been sealed, even at the best of times. She suffered rape, homelessness and was placed in a psychiatric institution by her fundamentalist Christian mother.

With a fetching chuckle, the Dallas singer-songwriter has a delightful way of articulating her hard-headed woman and stubborn to a fault," she says.

She's so stubborn that she lost her major record company deal with Mercury in a dispute over her "alter-native" stance on black and white roots music. On *Arkansas Traveler* (1992) she wanted to preserve the tradition of American country roots music. Ever mindful of the American musical heritage, the singer-songwriter was enthusiastic about collaborating with the innovative R&B band Tony Toni Tone (*House of*

Music, Sons of Soul) who had put new words to gospel songs such as *Wade in the Water*.

As Shocked soon discovered, Mercury's African-American president was not too keen on the collaboration. "He did not want to be responsible for this musical miscegenation," she says.

So now - after four critically acclaimed albums (*Short Sharp Shocked*, 1988; *Captain Swing*, 1989; *Arkansas Traveler*, 1992; and *Kind Hearted Woman*, 1996) Shocked is back to independent recording.

Her latest release is *Good News*, a limited-edition 10-track album to coincide with her sixth Australian tour. Shocked's first album was also independent: a British indie producer made a bootleg copy of *The Texas Campfire Tapes* in 1987.

Losing major label support has been "costly and worthwhile", she

says. "You don't know the value of something until you lose it. Where the values in a relationship come into conflict, I don't water down principles, I like to raise standards."

Shocked, who wrote *Quality of Mercy* for the *Dead Man Walking* soundtrack, is stoically prepared to face her nightmares with a positive attitude. The rape incident in 1985 became the catalyst for personal illumination and wider understanding.

"Rape was my greatest epiphany in understanding racism. A black man in the South walking the streets after dark often risked harassment, or his life would be threatened."

Michelle Shocked and the Anointed Earls play the Prince of Wales on April 22-24. Supported by Karma Country. Bookings: Ticketmaster 136 100.