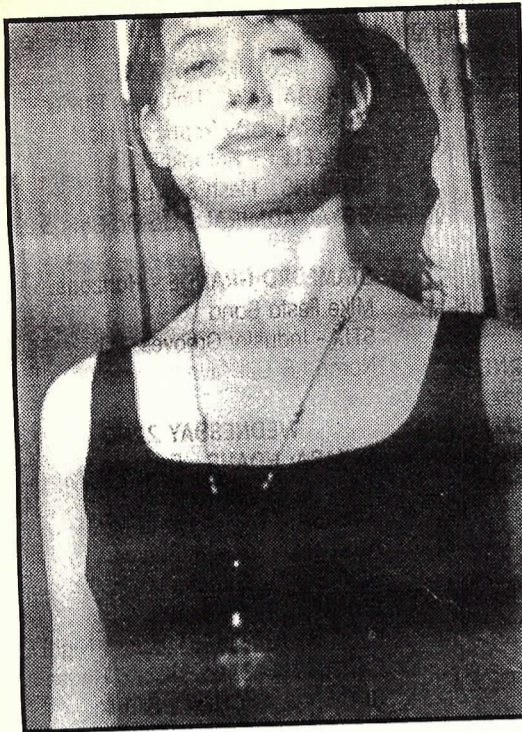


# Get in the van touring guide



## Michelle Shocked

by JC

A regular visitor to this country, and festivals the world over, Michelle Shocked arrives in Adelaide next week to share her meaningful brand of folk inflected song with us. This time around however she will play with a band of talented Californian musicians rather than the fiddle and mandolin supports we have come to expect. ~~Chatting from Sydney,~~ Michelle's fiercely independent streak and strength of character is evident as always.

I gather your current album is *Good News* and is only available at gigs.

"*Good News* is more of a glorified demo. I don't wanna exaggerate its claims because it was done in the course of a week in New Orleans where I live... It's a limited edition. 2,500 copies."

Michelle has cut an interesting and independent path. After recording with Mercury originally, she has since started selling her music only at gigs (though *Kind Hearted Woman* was eventually released by BMG). That reflects the strong and principled stance Michelle has taken against the more corporate side of the music industry.

"You're absolutely right," she says. "It [*Good News*] did follow on pretty much

the same course as *Kind Hearted Woman* where it was out of necessity, but it proved to be quite a blessing in the sense that by selling it direct it was just unwavering support from fans; it gave me a lot of courage. It was a lucrative way to sell a record when the royalty percentage is a hundred instead of one percent. That was a windfall as well. But I spent last year at home in New Orleans, pretty much on sabbatical so in terms of gearing up and going back out to do the work I do it made a lot of sense to continue with this underground railroad."

Michelle's *Arkansas Traveller* album saw her putting down tracks on the road across America and beyond. It features contributions from the likes of Taj Mahal, Paul Kelly's backing band The Messengers, Jimmy Driftwood, Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown and many more great artists. I asked after some of the artists Michelle has worked with.

"It was quite a preterprophetic album - it went all over the place. Yeah, Taj Mahal. I don't think Doc Watkins has a

major part on it but he is one of the seminal pillars of the tradition. And also someone I've become good friends with is Gatemouth Brown. And Hothouse Flowers who I worked with later on the *Kind Hearted Woman* material."

This trip to Australia will see Michelle bringing her California-based band with her.

"It's very, very different from the last time I was here," she concludes. "I'm with a band that I would characterise in such genres as anything from funk to rock, R&B, and a twist of country. They really cover all the water-fronts... There's no mandolin, no banjo, no fiddle. We call it

an intimate dance party. Tell people to bring their dancing shoes... The shows are characterised by a real sense of going with the flow, and the spirit of spontaneity permeates what we do. We don't work with a set list, we just try to read the audience like a painter would do to a blank canvas."

I ask if Michelle Shocked's name is derived from the Billy Bragg song, *It Says Here*. Her answer reflects the many levels that she communicates on.

"Well there's that theory," she concedes. "There's also the Pink Floyd *Dark Side Of The Moon* reference to a 'short sharp shock' [the title of her major label debut]. There's another one I allude to... Do you remember the film *Clockwork Orange*? There was a behavioural theory in the '60s where you would give someone a strong punishment for a minor crime and that would prevent them from doing something more serious later. But the truth is it comes from the term 'shell shocked', which was first a phenomena of war in WW1; the experience of soldiers who were not physically injured by ammunition but shell shocked - their minds were blown basically. At the time I took the name it was in reaction to the political/social atmosphere in the US under Reagan. It was a cold war but there were still all these covert wars going on in

Central America. It increased your paranoia because you couldn't believe anything. They were claiming this to be the greatest time of peace."

Does she carry a message through her music?

"The most concise message I've managed to distil is just that I try to

**"I try to appeal to the highest common denominator rather than the lowest... It's a conscious choice on my part not to underestimate people's intelligence."**

appeal to the highest common denominator rather than the lowest... It's a conscious choice on my part not to underestimate people's intelligence... As result I have a very worthwhile audience that under current pop standards has given me enormous range to grow and to change and to shift and to express things that are meaningful to me; and they trust me... I don't have to work with irony as much as your average pop musician has to because they think I'm dealing with them straight and direct and they can understand that."

Don't miss Michelle Shocked & The Anointed Earls at *Norwood Concert Hall* on *Mon Apr 20* supported by Michael Allen (of Things Of Stone and Wood).