

# She's a defender of Shocked values

By ISAAC GUZMAN  
DAILY NEWS FEATURE WRITER

In the gospel according to Michelle Shocked, music has become too segregated, with audiences separated by race and class. A genre-bender who plays everything from soul to bluegrass to punk, Shocked wants to reach listeners from all walks of life.

"I want an audience that looks like America," Shocked says. "I don't want an audience that just looks like Michelle Shocked."

But Shocked's idealistic outlook has put her at odds with the music industry. She spent much of the '90s battling with her former label, Mercury, over control of her recordings. At one point, she even sued the label for violating the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery.

Shocked finally reached a deal with Mercury and, having secured the rights to her records, she's now ready to rerelease her back catalogue on her own label. She's also planning to issue her first album of new material in three years, "Deep Natural," due out in spring.

The singer is in New York this week for a series of performances as eclectic as her music. Tonight and Friday, she's appearing at the Village Underground, where, accompanied by Hothouse Flowers guitarist Fiachna O'Braonain, she'll be playing acoustic versions of her recent gospel-inflected material.

Then on Saturday, she'll be at the Brooklyn Academy of Music with bassist Rob Wasserman to provide the music for the modern dance piece "Home" by the Mark Morris Dance Group. Playing with Morris "is the most glamorous thing I've done in years," Shocked says. "I just feel

like a queen for a day up there."

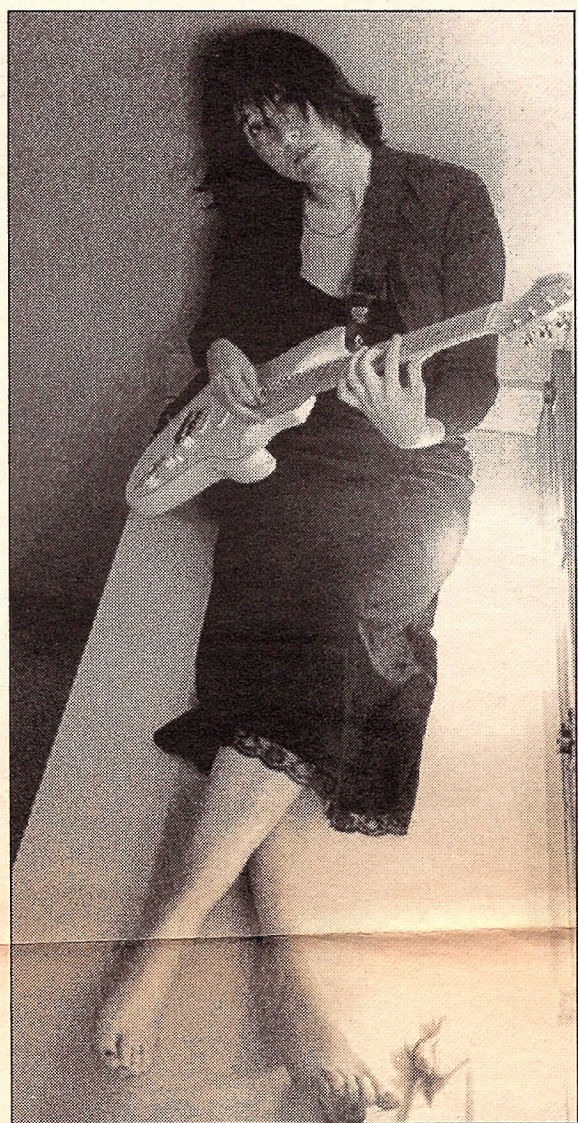
Shocked began her career in the mid-'80s as a "punk-rock folk singer" who found a national audience with the 1988 hit "Anchorage." She followed that success with "Captain Swing," a big-band album that featured strong songs, but confused her audience and angered Mercury.

In 1991, Shocked went further afield with her masterwork, "Arkansas Traveler." She made the album in a dozen locations, recording with roots legends such as Doc Watson, Taj Mahal and Clarence (Gatemouth) Brown. Although it was critically acclaimed, the album widened the gap between Shocked and her label, which couldn't figure out who her market was.

Since then, Shocked has been releasing her new songs in records she sells only at shows. One was aptly named "Artists Make Lousy Slaves." She searched, in vain, for a major label that would use its clout to champion her admittedly quirky music.

And though her audience is now small, it is devoted. She has earned a reputation as an artist who can get just about any crowd, including jaded Manhattanites, to get up and dance.

"I've always thought of music as utility for dancing," she says. "Every exploration I've done is to have my audience integrate dancing into their musical experi-



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MUSICAL MAVERICK: Michelle Shocked

ence. But in modern life, it's hard to pull that off. We're just a little too cynical and jaded."

Shocked's next mission is to turn her label into the equivalent of the United Artists film studio, a place where the creators, not the businessmen, reap the rewards of their work. As always with Shocked, it is an admirable idea, but few prophets find followers in their own time.

## A new '42nd Street' is on tap

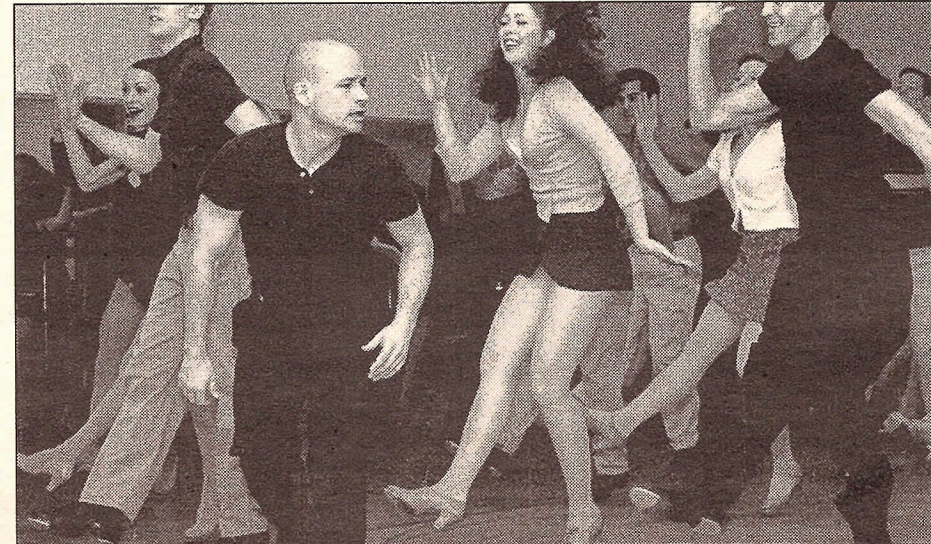
There's a new "42nd Street" to light up the new 42nd St.

A revival of the musical that won a Tony Award in 1980 and ran for more than eight years on Broadway will open May 2 at the Ford Center for the Performing Arts.

The 50-member cast held an open rehearsal yesterday, showcasing some of its famous songs, like "Lullaby of Broadway," "I Only Have Eyes for You," the title song and a huge, tap-dancing finale featuring the entire cast.

The musical is a showbiz, star-is-born story about a dancer from the chorus of a Broadway musical in the '30s who takes over the leading role when the star can't make it. Young Kate Levering has that role; the rest of the cast includes Broadway veterans Christine Ebersole, Michael Cumpsty, Mary Testa, Richard Muenz and Billy Stritch.

Patricia O'Halre



COME AND MEET THOSE DANCIN' FEET: Michael Arnold, left in front, steps lively during a rehearsal of the Broadway revival of "42nd Street," set to open May 2.

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