

Healthy, unhealthy loves populate Shocked's album

'Godmother of Americana' brings her songs to Casbeers.

BY JIM BEAL JR.

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Politically charged songs such as "Ballad of the Battle of the Ballot and the Bullet, Pt. 1: Ugly Americans," "Other People" and "Pompeii," from her "Soul of My Soul" (Mighty Sound) CD are what listeners expect from Michelle Shocked.

But there are also tender tunes such as "Love's Song" and "Waterproof" on the same disc.

"I don't do love songs," Shocked said via cell phone from somewhere near a Los Angeles sushi restaurant. "Last April I was in Paris, and, like an exercise, I wanted to write love songs. I was sitting in cafes, walking down boulevards, it just seemed natural to write love songs in Paris. This is a body of love songs, healthy, positive, personal love songs to my sweetheart (visual artist David Willardson), and love songs of unhealthy desperation about my relationship with my country."

The healthy/unhealthy combination is a bit jarring at times, but the Texas-born Shocked has never been one to shy away from the difficult. For more than 20 years, starting with "The Texas Campfire Tapes," recorded during a Kerrville Folk Festival campfire session, Shocked has wrestled her muse and served up plainspoken socio-political songs. She's battled the music business, toured the world, released records on her terms and influenced plenty of other troubadours with punk/folk leanings.

"To really listen to my music you almost have to know the backstory, the history," Shocked said with a slight laugh. "It's highly conceptual and it helps to have the Cliff's Notes."

The political songs on "Soul of My Soul" are definitely anti-George W. Bush. But she's not giving the current administration a pass.

"Everybody desperately wanted to believe the honeymoon with President Obama would not be over," she said. "I cherish the history-making aspect of Obama, but he's a cen-



FILE PHOTO

Americana singer/songwriter Michelle Shocked mixes love songs and politics on her new album, "Soul of My Soul."

At a glance

WHAT: Evening with Michelle Shocked

WHEN: Thursday, 8:30 p.m.

WHERE: Casbeers at the Church, 1150 S. Alamo St.

TICKETS: \$25

trist, like Bill Clinton. Centrists are more polarizing. I'm an idealist. I've always chosen the idealist road.

"It's not important we all agree. It is important that we have civilized dialogue. Unless we all raise our voices in unity, we'll be drowned out by the people who bought democracy out from under us. I do believe there's power in people raising their voices in unison."

Shocked has a wide range of musical knowledge and has put that knowledge to use in her songs.

"I'm an idiot savant," she said, laughing. "I've always had this sense that I don't really know what I'm doing. I trust my instincts, and I need time on my side to prove the savant side. I knew I was taking the

legacy of the Texas troubadour to another level.

"People didn't understand that when I did the 'Captain Swing' and 'Arkansas Traveler' albums. They kind of lost the plot. They just wanted me to be a chick folksinger. I stayed true to my vision. I'm like the godmother of Americana. As Texans, we have such a wide range of music, why should we not play it?"

For the Casbeers show, Shocked will be accompanied by South African bassist Schalk Joubert.

"We'll reassure the audience with old familiar favorites and play some new songs," she said, laughing again.

Through the years, Shocked has been known for a certain toughness.

"I'm one of the most insecure people around and needy in terms of validation and love," she said. "I've managed to out-grow most of that, but, for the last 20 years, there was a lot of self pity. But the journey was worth it. Now I can say I'm humble and grateful for my credibility."