

Michelle Shocked is latest in revival of folk singers

By MARK JORDAN
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Just when you thought they were gone forever, the '60s are back and with a vengeance. There's a new Kennedy in Congress, the Munsters are back on TV, and there are concerts for peace every other day. Of course this '60s revivalism has an '80s twist. People are wearing tie-dyes again, but they're buying them at Goldsmiths.

Another sign of the new age of Aquarius and Gucci is the renewed popular interest in folk rock. New artists such as Suzanne Vega and Tracy Chapman have enjoyed substantial commercial and critical success with their folk-based albums.

Now add a new name to the list: Michelle Shocked. Shocked is an expatriate living on a houseboat in England. She was playing by a campfire one night when a man recorded her singing some of her songs. The resulting album, "The Texas Campfire Tapes," rose to the top of the Independent Album Charts and started her touring with Billy Bragg. Her second album, titled "Short, Sharp, Shocked," places her at the forefront of the new folk explosion.

Lyricaly, Shocked is similar to Vega and Chapman in subject matter. She sings about the injustices of racism and governments. However, she also populates her songs with the intriguing people and stories she has encountered in her travels. For instance, "Graffiti Limbo" is a song about a black graffiti artist who was killed by white transit cops in New York. In these songs, her style is more like Ken Kinsey than Peter, Paul and Mary.

Likewise, knowing that, unlike a lot of singer/songwriters, Ms. Shocked has lived the experiences she sings about gives her added credence. While Tracy Chapman was a shy, quiet coffeehouse singer in college, singing about life's troubles, Michelle Shocked was living them. She ran away from home at the age of 16 to live with her father and drifted around the world for years. When she returned home, her mother had her committed to a psychiatric hospital. She was arrested for protesting at the 1984 Republican National

Convention and has been a political activist for years. She was also a rape victim and has since become a supporter of women's rape shelters such as WOMAD.

What really sets "Short, Sharp, Shocked" apart from the rest is the music. Arrangements on Chapman and Vega albums are basically acoustic guitar backed by a generic rock rhythm section. With the help of producer/musician Pete Anderson, Shocked has put together a suprisingly daring album. Songs like the sentimental "Memories of East Texas" features Shocked with single guitar accompaniment while others

showcase fiddles, dulcimers and other exotic folk instruments. Musical styles are equally as varied. "If Love Was a Train," a song of romantic longing, is positively country, but the final track, "Black Widow," has a rough punk sound.

Michelle Shocked has combined the social consciousness of folk with the rebelliousness and anger of rock in the best tradition of Bob Dylan.

"Short, Sharp, Shocked" is the second chapter in what will surely be a long and important career. She will be performing at Nashville's Exit/In on Oct. 14.

Shocked words

You can have your little Style Wars,
You can keep your little dance,
But Those Crazy Writers,
Don't have a ghost of a chance.
It's 'Color them Cons' (Mayor Koch sez),
Call it a crime,
It's steer clear of the engineer,
On that Midnight Special Line. — "Graffiti Limbo"