

Protest singers Shocked, Bragg perform at Clearview

7880
By Lisa Taylor

DATEBOOK ASSISTANT EDITOR

It was shockingly simple how Michelle Shocked entered the world of musical stardom — the right person heard her at the right time.

It was in 1986 at the Kerrville Folk Festival — that wonderful Texas event in the beautiful Hill Country — where Shocked first made her mark. After singing at campfires for several years, a London record producer heard her distinctive voice.

Amid the Kerrville crickets, Shocked sang into the producer's Sony Walkman. Little did she know producer Peter Lawrence would return to England, play it for a disc jockey, who in turn played it on radio making it an overnight hit. It was so popular that Lawrence made a record of it, and Shocked's first release became the No. 1-selling independent album in England. Shortly after, Polygram Records in the United States signed her and flew her to Los Angeles to record another album, "Short Sharp Shocked" (her latest).

Now Shocked is on her first tour, and appropriately, she's performing with British protest singer Billy Bragg, who shares her political-activist approach to music. The duo will perform Thursday at Club Clearview in Deep Ellum.

This will be a homecoming of sorts for Shocked, who attended Eastfield College in Mesquite for a time and whose father, a mandolin player, lives here.

At age 16, Shocked ran away from home to Austin, where she joined the songwriting scene and became a fan of songwriter Guy Clark (whom she refers to as "God" Clark). From there, she moved on to San Francisco, where she became involved with the politics of the homeless and the hard-core music scene, and then to New York



Michelle Shocked

and Amsterdam. Now Shocked lives on a houseboat on the Thames River in London.

Her hard-core and folk background has created music that appeals to fans both young and old who like witty lyrics and an activist approach. Shocked said in an interview that she hopes her music will make people do more than think about important issues. She wants them to make music for themselves (like they do at the Kerrville Folk Festival).

"I think more than any political message that I put out to people it would be ... that I would like people [to play] music for themselves again [rather than for an audience]."

Shocked said because of her ex-



Billy Bragg

perience hanging out with hard-core San Francisco musicians, who picked up their guitars and played without training, she had the gumption to do it herself.

It was with that spirit that British protest singer Billy Bragg picked up an electric guitar 11 years ago after seeing The Clash, the influential group that began its stardom that year.

"The lesson I learned from The Clash was that if you only sing about it and don't come up with the actions to match it, nothing happens," said Bragg, whose recent single "She's Leaving Home" is No. 1 in the United Kingdom. "If you really mean what you sing in the songs, you have to try and match it with action. That doesn't necessari-

ly mean you're going to change the world, but at least it's not a pose.

"The most that we can do is encourage the debate and raise consciousness. We're not doing this to change the bleeding world."

Bragg's action includes co-founding Red Wedge, an artists' socialist alliance, "to create common ground between the Labour Party and the young people." To establish this common ground, Bragg brings politicians and activists to his concerts to talk with fans.

What are the results of his activism?

"I don't think it's the kind of thing you can measure by counting heads. If people go away confused and skeptical, it's all right. I am as well. I want them to see a different perspective, that's all, and to begin wondering what other perspectives there are at the same time.

"I don't claim to have the answers. I just claim to have a different perspective."

Bragg, as you might suspect, gets complaints from some listeners who believe music's sole purpose is to entertain. Bragg doesn't deny the importance of entertainment.

"Entertainment is a high priority," he said. "It's just that I believe — and I don't mean to force my precept on any other artist — that my duty is to hold up a mirror to society and reflect what I see. If I hold a mirror up to society and people don't like what I reflect, that's really not my problem.

"I'm only trying to reflect it back onto them. Not only the horrible-ness, but the responsibility for the horribleness. We have to confront things. We can't just keep hiding. Sooner or later those issues are going to come find us."

Billy Bragg, Michelle Shocked and Louis en Reike will perform Thursday night at Club Clearview, 2806 Elm. Tickets \$15 at 787-2000. Doors open at 9 p.m.