

CONCERT LINE

Michelle Shocked's voice emerges from a chilling past

By David Silverman
Entertainment writer

7880

Michelle Shocked's sophisticated folk music and political balladry have placed her among a pack of recently emerging voices of conscience that includes Suzanne Vega, Sinéad O'Connor, Toni Childs and Tracy Chapman.

But what seems to separate Shocked from the rest is the compelling, chillingly autobiographical tone of her music. It is social poetry set to music, with a distinct texture born of Shocked's own experiences.

Although only 25, Shocked has seen life as an Army brat, a squatter in San Francisco and Amsterdam, an arrested anti-nuclear activist and a teenage runaway who at one point was institutionalized by her mother, among other things. She now lives on a houseboat in London.

Asked to put a label on herself, Shocked runs off a list that includes "Texan, picker/poet, skateboard punk rocker, jailbird, runaway, rape victim, C.E.O. and storyteller." They're all true—and all a part of her songwriting, which contains lyrics that are direct and sometimes painful in their accuracy.

Her stage presence is as down to earth as the acoustic guitar and fiddle she plays. The music is accompanied by a patter that is penetrating, yet disarming.

Shocked's first album, "The Texas Campfire Tapes," was recorded on a mini-tape recorder at a Texas folk festival and eventually rose to No. 1 on the British independent record charts. Her first major-label release, "Short Sharp Shocked," was released in August, receiving critical acclaim and moderate sales.

Shocked will play in concert Saturday at the Riviera with Billy Bragg.



Michelle Shocked appears Saturday at the Riviera.