

CANTON OBSERVER OCTOBER 17, 1988

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ECCENTRIC (TROY EDITION) OCTOBER 17, 1988

She's not shocked by success

By Larry O'Connor
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7880

Michelle Shocked lists herself as a squatter, a feminist, a Texan, a picker/poet, a jailbird, an Army brat and a runaway.

There's more, but you get the idea.

To those in the music industry, Shocked is a singer/songwriter who has shot up to prominence in meteoric proportion. Her latest album, "Short, Sharp, Shocked," is receiving raves from critics and waves from college radio.

But excuse Ms. Shocked, if she is just blase about the whole thing.

"It's almost difficult not to sound pretentious," said Shocked, during a telephone interview from Atlanta, Ga., "but I'm not impressed by it all . . . I'm really just fortunate to be surrounded by so many good people."

Shocked surrounds herself with many contemporary issues, such as racism, the environment and housing. She's performed benefit concerts and is involved in such organizations as Shelter, WOMAD and YCND.

Sometimes she has gone beyond getting involved. A picture on her latest album shows her being re-

strained rather physically by a police officer during a demonstration in San Francisco, Calif., in 1984.

THE PHOTO is a rather frightening one. Shocked is being grabbed by the throat and is screaming. The police officer has a slight look of bemusement.

Shocked resisted the proceedings by putting a well-placed foot in the general vicinity of one officer's groin area.

"It was really a token gesture on my part," said Shocked, dismissing the importance of her rebellious act.

"You don't realize what is happening when they're herding you off like a pack of animals. Here you were raised to believe in the basic right of freedom of speech and here you are being charged with conspiracy for exercising it?"

She discusses the incident like most people talk about getting a ticket for jay walking. Trauma and upheaval have been Shocked's two best friends for most of her life.

Shocked grew up in a Mormon fundamentalist home in Austin, Texas. She ran away to be with her peace-loving, hippie father, where she began to become politicized.

Shocked took on a Jack Kerouac existence, traveling and participating in various political activities. She was arrested in Dallas and was a rape victim in Italy.

SHE WAS living in the hills of Santa Cruz, N.M., when she was placed into a mental institution in 1983 by her mother. She stayed there until "the insurance money ran out."

"That's where the 'Short, Sharp, Shocked,' came from," she said. "Here I had been living away from home on my own as an adult . . . and she still had this enormous amount of power in which she could put me in a mental institution."

Shocked has been at odds with anyone resembling Big Brother since.

Her musical background takes even more jagged proportions. Since she grew up in a Mormon home, there was no record player. Her Texas roots can be found in her roadhouse blues acoustic sound.

Her first album, "Texas Campfire Songs," was somewhat of a fluke. A fan had recorded one of her performances at a folk festival in Texas. With her permission, he pressed the event into vinyl where it shot up the

independent charts.

Polygram took note and signed Shocked. "Short, Sharp, Shocked" is her first album on the label. On stage, she's politically vocal, but provides no answers. She's not sure she has them.

"I'm touring with Billy Bragg right now. He's very defined politically," she said. "You ask him what he is and he'll tell you he's socialist. Ask me, the answer is vague and quite useless honestly."

SHOCKED IS more busy trying to establish her roots, not trying to make grand political statements. She hopes others take an interest.

"I'm putting my hand of faith in establishing some roots," she said. "Then maybe I can step back and look what other people have done with it. Maybe I'll be inspired by that."

"But what if that doesn't happen? Oh, well."

Michelle Shocked will perform with Billy Bragg and Mancotal at 7:30 p.m. tonight at the Power Center, 121 Fletcher, Ann Arbor. Tickets are \$14.50. For more information, call 99-MUSIC.