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SWINGING Texan singer Michelle Shocked won't be bringing a big band with her to Australia, but audiences will be treated to a special guest... her dad.

"He's a character in his own right," Michelle warned last week. "I kinda like letting him loose on folks, he's pretty cool."

Her mandolin-toting dad, "Dollar" Bill Johnston, encouraged Michelle to play guitar and introduced her to bluegrass and blues music. It was in his small record collection she heard Guy Clark, Randy Newman, Doc Watson, Leadbelly, Norman and Nancy Lake, Big Bill Broonzy and Hot Rize.

"Dad was my earliest inspiration for travelling and playing music," Michelle said. "It's been really great fun for me to get him out of Texas."

Before launching into their Australian and New Zealand tour next week, Michelle and Bill will take it easy for a while sailing the Whitsunday Passage, with the wafting sounds of their after-dinner jams no doubt entertaining nearby yachties.

The much-travelled Michelle Shocked is a keen sailor whose houseboat in England is being minded by a friend; now she has based herself in a multi-cultural district of Los Angeles.

"There's a stereotype that LA's this white air-head Valley Girl kinda thing, but I find that the exception rather than the rule," she said. "I live in a neighborhood that is probably more ethnically diverse, multicultural than any other city I'll probably ever live in."

"I live in a neighborhood that used to be Korea-town, but so many waves of immigrants come in, it keeps changing constantly..."

With three albums to her credit - The Texas Campfire Tapes, Short Sharp Shocked and Captain Swing - Michelle Shocked's reputation as a talented and outspoken entertainer has put her in the same left-field league as Tracy Chapman and Billy Bragg.

On the phone from Los Angeles, Michelle Shocked comes across as a likeable and intelligent person - quite a rarity in an industry overpopulated with arrogant, egotistical air-heads.

The first album, The Texas Campfire Tapes, was recorded in the hills of West Texas... on a Walkman, beside a fire, with the rhythm section provided gratis by chirruping crickets.

The complete spontaneity and absence of heavy-handed production made for a delightfully simple introduction, which I'm not alone in preferring to her latest release, Captain Swing.

Captain Swing is a complex studio offering that runs a gamut of styles, in-

cluding R&B, Memphis soul, New Orleans mambo, Texas swing and New York bebop.

Although far less overtly political than her first two albums, my simple question about the title Captain Swing resulted in a quick history lesson on class struggle.

"Captain Swing's a double meaning, and that's the reason for the wink on the album cover," she said. "Of course, I have a boat and I play swing music, that should be the obvious take."

"But probably pretty obscure is that England had its own version of what were called the weavers on the continent in the 1800s. They would throw their sabots - their wooden shoes - into the weaving mills when they couldn't come to some agreement with the own-

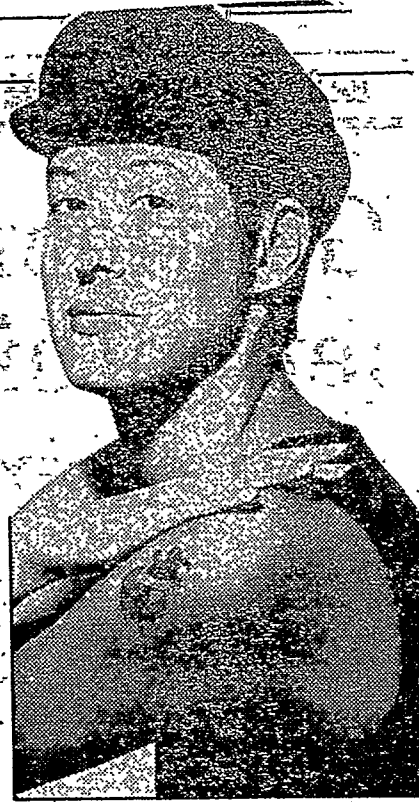
ers of the mills. That's where the word sabotage comes from."

"In England it took the form of a movement called Captain Swing, where the peasants would rise up and burn the threshing machines of the wealthy landowners. They would leave notes signed Captain Swing."

"In the 1800s having the name Captain Swing posted up somewhere was very threatening, it was like... you were next."

Michelle's visit to Australia in January comes at the end of 21 years touring solo in the UK, Europe and the US. As the songs from Captain Swing would require a complete band to perform live, most of the material we'll hear on this tour will be from her first two albums... which is fine by me.

Michelle Shocked and her dad - will be at the Byron Bay Arts Factory on Monday, January 1, and in Sydney Town Hall on Monday, January 8.



Michelle Shocked: likeable

Michelle brings her dad along

By RICHARD CONRAD

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