

ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

SANTA ANA, CA
DAILY 321,145

MONDAY

MAY 28 1990

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If she conformed, then she would no longer be Shocked

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By Mike Pearson
Scripps-Howard News Service

Once determinedly solo, Michelle Shocked is now flying in formation — and loving every minute of it.

Her first album, 1987's "The Texas Campfire Tapes," was recorded on a hand-held tape recorder and boasted authentic crickets in the background. It brought her to the attention of Polygram Records, which quickly signed her to her first studio disc — "Short, Sharp, Shocked" — an acclaimed work of poetic urgency that spawned a Top 40 hit and made its composer a cause celebre.

Not bad for someone who ran away from home at age 16, changed her name to Shocked, then spent the next few years homeless and living on the edge of society. Her schoolrooms were abandoned warehouses; her classmates were men and women gathered around campfires trading dreams and recounting quiet desperations. From then Shocked learned that change, however improbable, is always possible when one dares to speak out.

Shocked is now turning with a new album, a new band and the same old activist attitude. But "Captain Swing," her second re-

CONCERT PREVIEW

Who: Michelle Shocked and John Wesley Harding.

When: Tuesday night at 8.

Where: The Coach House in San Juan Capistrano.

How much: \$22.50.

Ticket availability: General admission seating available.

Call: 496-8930.

cord for Polygram and most sophisticated studio outing to date, is bound to surprise a lot of her fans, delighting some and troubling a few more.

Why? Because Shocked refuses to conform to any formula.

"With 'Captain Swing' I'm upping the ante," she says. "I am throwing a monkey wrench in the process by which artists get marketed. In a way I'm making it more difficult for people to know what's going on behind my music by not coming out and doing the same old thing."

"I don't mind people in the record industry thinking of me as difficult, because the opposite of that is adventurism. I'd like to think I'm adventurous."

In fact, for her latest tour Shocked is

backed by a six-piece band, Captain Swing Revue, and the music is decidedly up-tempo, the sort one would revel in on a Saturday night at the dance hall.

There's still room for Shocked's introspective acoustic songs, of course. But the emphasis is on toning down the message and getting people to stand up and boogie.

Touring with a band has allowed Shocked more artistic freedom, but it's also created some new challenges.

"I have been touring solo for three years. Some of that was pragmatic on my part to create a situation where I could tour without depending on the record label for tour support," she says.

"The advantage of a band is that I have a lot more dynamics to work with, and I love the interaction and the travel and the people in the band. I'm also learning; the band sets a standard for me to work toward, so I'm growing as a performer and musician."

Is there a motto that defines the contradictory nature of Shocked?

"Sure," she says, suppressing a giggle.

"Just because I don't know what I'm talking about doesn't mean I'm going to shut up."



Michelle Shocked's 'Captain Swing' is her most sophisticated studio outing to date.