

# Honest tribute to musical past

Michelle Shocked's recording odyssey brings her to Edmonton

PAUL CHAREST

Edmonton

Where does this road go?  
In trying to find an answer to that question of her album *Arkansas Traveller*, Michelle Shocked embarked on a recording odyssey that saw her crossing international, racial and musical barriers.

This Sunday the *Arkansas Traveller's* never-ending voyage brings Shocked to Myer Horowitz Theatre at the U of A.

Shocked is the first to admit she still doesn't where this road goes. On the phone somewhere between shows on the Canadian Prairies she talks about all that has happened since she came into the public eye six years ago.

Shocked's recording career began rather unceremoniously when a British producer taped her on his Walkman at the Kerrville Folk Festival. The result was the *Texas Campfire Tapes* and, while it served as a raw introduction to her talent, Shocked was dismayed at its release.

"I don't call it the Campfire tape, I call it the Texas Campfire Theft because I practically had nothing to do with it. I didn't chose the songs, I didn't chose the artwork, I didn't even chose to have it released as a record. ... That thing on a silly Walkman with weak batteries that makes me sound like Minnie Mouse, and unedited and stuff like that. That's not my idea."

## Musical plan

As Shocked tells it, once she was signed by Polygram she developed a short-term musical plan resulting in the folkrock of her debut album *Short Sharp Shocked*, the jazz-blues of *Captain Swing* and the traditional country and folk tunes of *Arkansas Traveller*.

"I was working with this album as the completion of a trilogy, and the trilogy, the concept of my three albums was to basically docu-

## PREVIEW

### Michelle Shocked and Hans Olsen

Where: Myer Horowitz Theatre, U of A  
When: Sunday, 8 p.m.  
Tickets: Ticketmaster

ment where I come from. In other words, my past and my influences. On this album in particular a very clear emphasis I wanted to make was the fiddle tunes that I grew up playing with my father."

It would be simple to write off the album as a tribute to the past, but the album holds an honest mirror to the past and present.

## Traditional tunes

To ensure this, Shocked has taken a number of traditional fiddle tunes like *Cotton Eyed Joe*, *Jump Jim Crow* and *Frankie and Johnny* and rewritten the words.

"When I talk about dragging the past kicking and screaming (into the present) it is with no sense of disrespect to the past. It's because change is a very difficult thing to take place. It's not something we look forward to, it's not something we like dealing with."

"I have such a love for the past that it's my love and respect for it that makes me want it to be part of the contemporary dialogue. I don't want it to just be put on a shelf somewhere and dusted off."

The album did present it's share of problems though.

In her quest for historic accuracy and honesty, Shocked originally planned to perform the tunes in blackface. This idea was scrapped when it became apparent too many people would misunderstand her depiction of the Blackface minstrel tradition. It is a practice she finds deplorable, but believes pretending it never happened amounts to re-



Michelle Shocked's trilogy of albums unites past and present

writing history.

"Well, really, another way I look at political correctness is that it's just historical revisionism, especially with regard to this blackface minstrel history. ... Political

correctness has just been an effort to rewrite history with a contemporary understanding, as if history is irrelevant. I'm just trying to find a middle ground. Let's live with the past and the present."