



Punk-folk rocker Michelle Shocked performs Oct. 5 at Maine Center for Arts

Shocked Waves

Michelle Shocked goes back to her roots with 'Arkansas Traveler'

By Alicia Amstead
NEWS Feature Writer

If you've been following the career of singer-song writer Michelle Shocked, you know that the first public photo of her was on the cover of her "Short Sharp Shocked" album six years ago. She looks as if she is being strangled by a police officer (who arrested her at the 1984 Democratic National Convention in San Francisco). Then there was the Bob Dylan look-alike drawing of her on the "Captain Swing" recording in 1988.

To further de-glamorize her crew-cut look, in concerts she wore black T-shirts, black bikini shorts, and heavy black boots.

In fact, like a lot of punk-folk-country-bluegrass-blues rockers, Shocked (a stage name) is widely known for wearing black and traveling around the world as an activist and dissident. At 16, she ran away from the "fundamentalist environment" of home and, once, her mother had the runaway committed to a mental hospital. Later, she left American as a protest against Reagan, and wound up in Amsterdam and England, where she shored up her image as a tomboyish populist.

So don't be surprised when you see the new photos of the rebel-child looking womanly in a flowery country frock, straw hat, lacy anklets, and tap shoes, which is the outfit she

donned in publicity shots for her newest album, "Arkansas Traveler."

Not only that, but in some photos, she's wearing a wedding ring (thanks to the new Mr. Michelle Shocked, journalist Bart Ball formerly of Spin Magazine).

That's what's new with Michelle Shocked. That, and "Arkansas Traveler," which she calls the final segment in a trilogy of music tracing her varied musical influences including Doc Watson, Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown, Alison Krauss, Taj Mahal, and Ireland's Hothouse Flowers — not to mention back porch picking sessions in Gilmer, Texas, where she grew up.

Shocked will bring the Arkansas Traveler Tour, including Doc Watson, St. Louis punkers Uncle Tupelo, funky bluesman Taj Mahal, and members of The Band to Maine on Oct. 3 to the Portland City Hall Auditorium and Oct. 5 to the Maine Center for the Arts.

Her concept for "Arkansas Traveler" was to travel around the country recording in the many traditions that inspired her. On a riverboat in Missouri, at a festival in North Carolina, in a barn in Arkansas and an antique store in Georgia, she recorded songs and fiddle tunes with her "all time heroes."

"The project's emphasis," said Shocked in a New York Times interview earlier this year, "is the music I grew up playing with my father. The melodies I've taken are from fiddle tunes he taught me. Then I put my own lyrics See MICHELLE on next page

who finds suspenders too cumbersome. Another tacky touch: wearing a belt as well as suspenders. Problem to a mechanic, the answer is always a pressure test and the threat of a new radiator core. Be-

Michelle Shocked changes her image

Continued from previous page

to them."

For example, in the song "Prodigal Daughter," she gives a new twist to the old fiddle tune "Cotton Eyed Joe." Tipping her musical hat to feminist concerns, Shocked stings with the story of a young girl who comes home pregnant and has an abortion:

"Had it not been for Cotton Eyed Joe/I'd have been married a long time ago" and "Out in the cornfield I stubbed my toe/Called for the doctor, Cotton Eyed Joe."

Shocked also added to the recording a political statement about blackface minstrelsy as the unspoken roots of American music. But with "Arkansas Traveler" — as with her other three recordings (including the acoustic "The Texas Campfire Tapes") — the political message is wound in wry rural-humor, bucolic settings, and storytelling about plain folks.

And, Shocked's deep voice, wailing guitar, and farm-girl spirits still shine through — dress and all.

For tickets, call 775-3458 for Portland and 581-1755 for Orono.

New Designs in Kitchen & Baths

The Bangor Daily News will celebrate Na-