

Michelle Shocked

bringing friends

The Band,
Taj Mahal
at Greene

EARLY in her concert last year at the Academy of Music, Michelle Shocked claimed to be so mellowed-out from life in California that she might not be able to rise to the expectations of an eager Northampton audience. Then she proceeded to bend the crowd every way she pleased.

"I hope you won't resent me," she told the mostly female and very vocal audience, "when I tell you I have a boyfriend."

(Delighted laughter.)
She went on. "His name is Bart." Pause. "Here's a song I wrote when I was very angry at Bart."

It's a lovely, wry song, mostly about driving 500 miles and never leaving L.A., and it turns up on her new album, "Arkansas Traveler."

Shocked is now married to Bart Bull, a Spin magazine writer, and she credits him with having played a large role in her musical education. Specifically, he introduced her to the history of blackface minstrel music, a genre to which she calls attention in "Arkansas Traveler."

While the recording is spiked with Shocked's personality — the playful voice, the uppity attitude evident in lyrics like those of her "Prodigal Daughter" — the music is almost all traditional. Some of the songs are old fiddle and mandolin tunes that she learned from her father and to which she added her own words, and some come from, or allude to, the minstrel show repertoire: "Jump Jim Crow," for example, or "Hold Me Back," a respectful version of the Frankie and Johnny ballad.

It would be a terrific album even if all it contained were Shocked's own splendid voice, her well-tutored guitar and her backing band, but she is joined on the recording by an all-star cast to rival that of the Nitzy Gritty Dirt Band's "Will the Circle Be Unbroken."

Appearing on various cuts are veterans Doc Watson and Gatemouth Brown, contemporary fiddle star Alison Krauss, The Band's Levon Helm and Garth Hudson, Taj Mahal, and the St. Louis punk band Uncle Tupelo. Usually when an artist makes



Singer Michelle Shocked will bring The Arkansas Traveler Review to Smith College's John M. Greene Hall at 7:30 p.m. Saturday.

Weekend Time Out

by John Stifler



such an album, you hear the famous guests on the record but then, when she comes to town, she is backed by a traveling band of people you don't recognize.

Not this time. Taj Mahal, Helm and Hudson (plus the Band's other remaining member, Rick Danko), and Uncle Tupelo are themselves part of this tour. You

can see them onstage Saturday night at John M. Greene Hall, first by turns, then all together. 7:30 p.m., tickets at the Northampton Box Office (586-8686) and at the door.

Julia Burrough

At some radio stations these days, a musician who hopes to get airplay needs to have recorded a compact disc. Tape cassette albums, the reasoning is, can be recorded on a shoestring by anyone; a CD is a serious commitment.

Well, okay. But Julia Burrough, who recently released her third cassette album, "Brighter Road," demonstrates a

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