

Michelle's 'trial by fire' with her heroes

MUSIC

EARLY in her career, Michelle Shocked was too happy that anyone liked her music to be surprised by the fact.

Since the release of her first album, *Texas Campfire Tapes*, the singer-songwriter has received vast critical acclaim for her brand of folk rock and helped blaze the trail for her contemporaries.

In Australia for the third time in as many years, Michelle finds a special audience affinity here because of what she perceives as an apparent market for "real" music.

"Early on, I was just too happy Australians liked the music to be surprised and now I'm not surprised at all.

"Now I'm thinking if you deal with not just the cultural cringe but the whole colonised mentality, if you feel you get force-fed this marketed stuff, when something like this comes through, it seems more real to people.

"It also means people like Paul Kelly who's in Los Angeles trying to get a break, maybe has more of a chance if real stuff is getting through."

Paul and Michelle have more in common than their styles of music.

The Texan native borrowed the Messengers for *Weaving Way*, a track on her latest album *Arkansas Traveller*.

An ambitious project, the album involved the songwriter recording and producing with some music legends including Hothouse Flowers, Don Was, Mitchell Froom, Kenny Aronoff, Clarence Gatemouth Brown and Doc Watson.

It was almost never made.

"It was like standing there and looking up at a mountain and thinking it was going to be impossible to climb it. But once you're at the summit and you look down at all the ground that you covered, it was pretty amazing," she said.



Singer and songwriter Michelle Shocked is in Australia for the third time in three years. She finds she has a special relationship with Aussie audiences

'I just wanted to shrink away'

entertaining and articulate artist appreciate collaboration, despite subsequent unpleasant experiences working with other people.

It also doubled her confidence.

"Not only was it the trial by fire of meeting my heroes but I was in the producer's chair and I was having to ask my heroes for what I needed," she said.

"So many times I just wanted to shrink away from that and every single time I went into one of those sessions I was nervous, intimidated and scared.

"Going from the second track with the Messengers to finally the last tracks made me supremely confident."

Michelle says her future is full of options.

After the completion of the Australian tour, she returns to "sort out" the business side of her career.

Creatively, there are several avenues to explore, including a move along the "chick" singer path, working towards more of a rock career and ultimately the search for the "perfect" band.

● Michelle Shocked plays the State Theatre tonight and December 16.

"We conceived it, we called all the people, made the arrangements and the day before we left, we got a call from the record company saying we're not going to pay for this.

"I flew that night into New York and went in and said to them, 'By your own royalty accounts, I owe you less than \$1000. Are you going to sit here and tell me I can't have my money to make my record?'"

"And so they gave me the money. They say that managers are buffers for the artist but I'm beginning to realise it could be the other way round."

Artists and songs for the album, which some have called a throwback to a forgotten America, were compiled in wish list form and then were matched up.

The process made the

DAILY TELEGRAPH-MIRROR
Sydney, NSW