

DOWNHOME DALLAS DIVA

The cramped career of Michelle Shocked

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FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM

Although she says the roof hasn't fallen in on her career, Michelle Shocked says she recently played a club so small and sweaty that condensation from the ceiling rained on the band.

"Let me put it to you this way. It was called the Eight by Ten Club," said Shocked, calling from Washington, D.C., to describe the previous night's gig. "... There was a sign on the door that said 'Just say no to panhandlers.'" Shocked says the joint was so hot and swampy that it gave her band members diaper rash.

You figure a singer/songwriter who gets invited to play David Letterman's next-to-the-last show for NBC could smash the glass ceiling separating the club hustlers from the chart busters.

Unfortunately for Shocked, who brings her folk/swing/country show to the Caravan of Dreams on Tuesday, it hasn't happened yet.

How come? Well, for one thing,

she and her record company are splitting after three records: That means no tour support.

And, she adds, no payola. *Payola*? Wasn't that something they abolished in the '50s?

"I just know it's pay-to-play out there in radio land," Shocked said. "What little payola there was was spent in Northeast college towns."

But that lack of record company support doesn't mean Shocked, 31, is downbeat about her career.

Her second release, the widely hailed *Short, Sharp, Shocked*, features *Anchorage*, a poignant letter-from-an-old-friend tune that has become something of a signature song for the down-home, Dallas-born diva.

It's also the number that made Letterman, who first heard *Anchorage* on a European vacation, a fan.

Michelle Shocked performs at 8 p.m. Tuesday at the Caravan of Dreams. Tickets, \$17 in advance, \$19.50 at the door. Information: 877-3000.