

# Weekend music includes Michelle Shocked, Nada Surf and others

By Amy Hutchinson  
Broadside Senior Staff Writer

The carefree title of Michelle Shocked's fourth album, "Kind Hearted Woman," betrays the loss and suffering contained in its 10 dark tales. Stark imagery so honestly conveys the raw pain and despair of "Homestead," "Cold Comfort" and others.

"Once you listen to the narrators, it's a real shock," Shocked said. "I didn't try to soften the initial blow. I even risked being perceived as stark or bitter. By the end of the album I've reached a crossroads and I don't look back."

Although the 35-year-old singer-songwriter hasn't had an easy life, it has never been revealed quite so bluntly in her work as in the poetic sorrow that is "Kind Hearted Woman."

"I'm now the age my mother was when I ran away from home at 15, and so I can see things from both points of view now," she said. "I can see how the world looked to my mother and I can remember how things felt as a 15-year-old and I have a lot of understanding and patience for the confusion a 15-year-old girl can feel."

"My previous work tended to emphasize the pain, the good that came out of that. Here this one deals much more directly and honestly with the process of pain and despair leading to redemption," she said. "There is an undercurrent of bitterness or frustration or pain, but I tried to sugar coat it in some ways and this album does the opposite. It takes away the sugar coating and leaves that bitter aspirin."

The album has a much more mature sound and outlook than her previous work. "I think that I'm more mature than I was. It's just the natural process. Years down the road I have a different perspective."

"Kind Hearted Woman" started as a collaboration with modern dance choreographer Mark Morris. So great is his appreciation for music that he insists on having live musicians at his performances. He enlisted the talents of Shocked and Rob Wasserman for his company's 1993 performance at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. The program included "Stillborn" and "Winter Wheat," two tracks that later ended up on "Kind Hearted Woman," and two fiddle tunes composed by Wasserman.

"He approached me for the collaboration and I learned a lot, not only about dance, but about protecting your creative world," Shocked said.

"Kind Hearted Woman" was recorded, distributed and promoted despite Shocked's much-publicized four-year battle with Mercury Records. After the label refused to make studio time available to her, one of the basic commitments made to an artist in a

contract. Mercury refused to promote her album she said because they felt she'd cut too good a deal for herself.

So Shocked was forced to produce the album in her garage studio. She sold this bootleg at concerts to raise money for the actual studio version of "Kind Hearted Woman" that has been released.

"At first they were telling me the music was stylistically inconsistent, but they hadn't even heard it," she said. "We finally came to terms of a separation."

It was a battle of honor and courage, and Shocked walked away with her hard-won artistic freedom. Soon afterward she entered into a rare, almost unprecedented, non-exclusive contract with Private Music, the label that released "Kind Hearted Woman."

"Before I approached Private, I was able to negotiate terms that worked for me," she said. "Because she insisted on resolving the issue with Mercury independent of becoming engaged with Private, she avoided the situation created when one label buys out a musician's contract from another label."

"To some artists it would be impossible to consider doing what I did," she said. "I sacrificed four years of hard-earned momentum to resolve this stand on principle. It was well worth it."

"The alternative would have been to bow in submission to business considerations of accounts and lawyers and to com-



Courtesy of Elektra Record

Nada Surf play the 9:30 Club Nov. 17.

pletely sacrifice artistic integrity." Michelle Shocked will play the 9:30 Club Nov. 14.

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