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Mood swings and roundabouts

MICHELLE SHOCKED

Michelle Shocked is tucked into a corner of the sofa in her Kings Cross hotel room, quietly apologising for the "mood" she's in. It's daunting. Her new CD is published by Mood Swing Productions and copyrighted by Minstrel Cycle music – and here she is telling me she's moody. It's even more daunting when you consider Michelle Shocked's last CD, *Kind Hearted Woman*, was her *Nebraska*, a litany of sadness and pain.

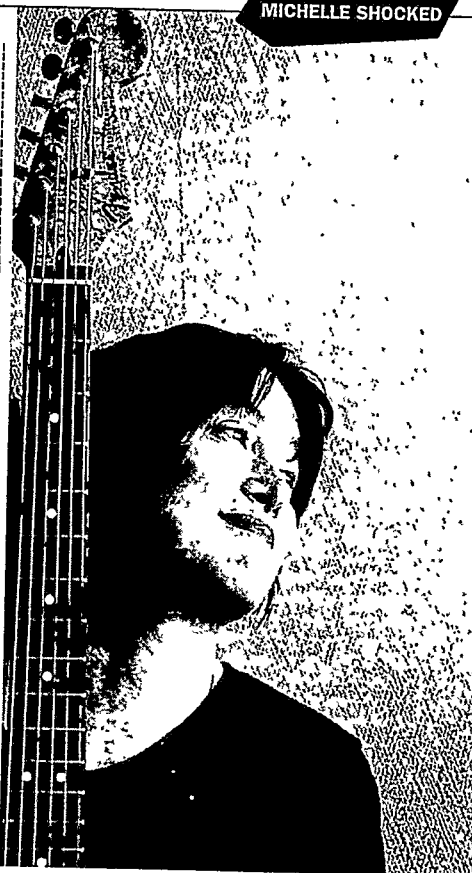
"I consider the last album an anomaly," she says. "It was material which, even after I had written it, I knew wasn't exactly the direction I was trying to go in. I wasn't even sure it was a set of songs I wanted to put out."

In Australia for her fifth tour in seven years, she's pale and beautiful – something that doesn't come across in her photographs – cat-black hair and thin, elegant hands which dance discreetly with each other.

The tracks on her new CD are a laugh in the face of her former record company, which she fought through the courts to gain control of her career and music. And just to be sure we get it, it's called *Good News*.

"Anything would have been a departure after the last album. This time, spontaneity is the operative word. The band is very lively, very playful, and I hate to admit it, but we don't rehearse and we don't practise. It feels much better."

It's still no stroll in the park, as you would expect from a passionate and uncompromising woman who has always worn her heart on her sleeve, but there is a fresh levity among the



serious stuff attacking trashy tabloid newspapers and factories making polyvinylchloride.

During the monologue on *You Take The Cake*, a lazy, '50s-style birthday song, she purrs "Happy Birthday baaaaaby. Did I mention you don't look a daaaay over 40 ... you're only 30? What I meant to say was ... a box of chocolates? A rose?"

"Why *You Take The Cake*? Just because I can," she grins. "Because it was there. I dunno, I have a real affinity for that old-style swing music."

For *Good News* Michelle went back to basics, flying the band in herself and putting them up at her "very beautiful" house in the French Quarter of New Orleans. "There were about seven of them and my husband was the cook because we couldn't afford to have catering."

The sleeve notes and lyrics for the new album are basic black type on plain white paper. "In a generation of computer graphics, this hard format is very deliberate. It's not about snazzy packaging, it's about the content, the songs and whether they resonate with people."

About this point Michelle's husband, Bart, leaps up to answer a knock on the door and his laptop computer crashes to the floor in a crunching shower of plastic and expletives. It does nothing for the interview process. Michelle is calm and placatory: "Hey, I started this interview on a very strange note, just go with it ..."

■ KEITH AUSTIN

Michelle Shocked's new album, Good News, is on sale exclusively at her concerts. She plays The Metro on Monday and Tuesday.