

# Shocked gets sharp outside schools' "radical ghettos"

By Michael O'Keefe  
Canadian University Press

**I**n March and April she will go on tour again and expects to hit Vancouver, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and several university towns in the United States — but she says she will not play any school.

## arts

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She won't play at colleges or universities, Michelle Shocked says, because students too often form "radical ghettos," impressing each other with their political correctness but not taking their message where it is seldom heard.

"When they leave they're like Peace Corp. volunteers in their own country," she says. "I tell 'em to go to rural Arkansas and places like that. There's lots of work for them to do there."

The second album by this 25-year-old singer-song writer performer from East Texas, "Short Sharp Shocked," is a big hit these days on many campuses.

It is a follow-up to the cult success of "Texas Campfire Tapes," her first release, and a new twist to her 10-year long odyssey. "Short Sharp Shocked" may be more than just a popular album, however.

Along with artists like Tracy Chapman or Suzanne Vega, Shocked, — who describes herself as an "anarchist, populist and femi-



nist" — is one of the new voices in folk rock, progressive female musicians who have risen incongruously toward the end of this conservative decade.

Unlike the more overtly political Chapman however, Shocked articulates her hunches and experiences into vignette like songs that, for many students, have become personal soundtracks.

"I tell stories," she says. "They're very political. It's just that conclusions can be drawn in many different ways."

Though most of the songs on the album aren't overtly political — except for "Graffiti Limbo," about Michael Stewart, a New York graffiti artist who died in 1985 in the custody of transit police — Shocked's on-stage patter revolves around denunciations of sexism, racism and militarism.

From there she talks about her concern for the environment and her hope for an end to homelessness and poverty.

Even the black and white cover photo on "Short Sharp Shocked" establishes her image. It features

Shocked grimacing as San Francisco police arrested her at a protest during the 1984 Democratic convention. It was after that arrest that Shocked (who declines to reveal her real name) adopted her stage moniker because, she says, it described "the way I felt. It said it all."

Nevertheless, these days, Shocked finds herself working for Polygram, one of the world's largest record labels. The company provides her with the resources to reach a large audience and the freedom to convey her message undiluted. "I don't know if I can do anything within the system," she says.

Years living in Europe schooled her in opposition politics. In recent months for example, she has played benefits for the Youth Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, World Of Music And Dance Festival (WOMAD) and the Christic Institute, a Washington, D.C., public interest group that has filed suits claiming contra leaders and their American supporters are connected to drug running and terrorism.

She says her roots are in America's counter-culture tradition,

in which she includes not only protest-singing beatniks but also influences as diverse as blues songwriters Leadbelly and Big Bill Broonzy, bluegrass music, Guy Clark, Townes Van Zandt and hardcore bands like the Circle Jerks and the Dead Kennedys.

"It's real subversive music unlike other commercial stuff," she says. "The only thing they rock is the cash box."

And although she is only 25, her life has already taken so many unusual twists that she writes with the authority of someone much older. Episodes in her life story include being a squatter, traveller, rape victim, Mormon, inmate at a psychiatric hospital, expatriate, runaway, jailbird and skateboard punk rocker, to name just a few.

The oldest of eight children, she was inspired by her "hippie-atheist" father's love of adventure and music. At 16, she ran away from her strict Mormon mother ("a real Tammy Baker type") and her stepfather, a career Army man.

Shocked moved to Dallas then, in 1981, to Austin, where she attended the University of Texas, migrated to San Francisco, where she moved into a squatters' commune and immersed herself into that city's homeless culture, an experience that radicalized her, she says.

She returned once again to Austin and took up a wild life that concerned some of her friends, who let her mother know of their fears that she was going over the edge.

"It was the opportunity she was looking for," Shocked says. Her mother committed her to a psychiatric hospital in Dallas. Her release came a few months later when her mother's insurance ran out.

"I love that side of it," she says. "You're crazy as long as the insurance is there."

She fled to Europe, again settling in with the squatter movement in Amsterdam. "They say 'America — Love it or leave it.' So I left."

And although she has fond memories of the friends and communities, much of the expatriate's romance faded when she was raped in Italy. In 1986, Shocked decided to come home to Texas for a visit and to attend the Kerville Folk Festival, a laid-back Mayfest she had always loved.

At Kerville, Shocked was "discovered" in a punk-folk fairy tale-like way by Pete Lawrence, a British music entrepreneur.

Using his Walkman, Lawrence recorded Shocked — and the background crickets — during one of the festival's ubiquitous late-night campfire sessions. He returned to London and released what became known as "The Texas Campfire Tapes." It soon became a big underground hit and led to a contract with Polygram Records.

Although her permanent address is still a houseboat in London, England, Shocked says she will spend a lot more time in the United States performing and recording.

"I felt like I'd come to a dead end," she says. "And now, without compromising myself in any way, I've been given a barrelful of resources."

This way, she can help people "learn about what's going on in their country," Shocked says.

"Students are in a time where they need to take the time to learn about what's going and about dissent. Dissent can make you more articulate."

# If I can't revolution, it's not my dance

by Christine F. de Leon

I was twelve when I decided I wanted to become a ballerina. Ballet was so enchanting, the women were so beautiful and always desirable, and the leading men were absolute gods. Tutus and satin pointe shoes were a girl's initiation into the ballet world and from there on you worked to become the next Karen Kain or the next Gelsey Kirkland.....you and thousands of other little girls with the same ideals in mind.

However, the fairy tale quickly fades when young dancers get rejected or thrown out of company schools like the National Ballet or the Royal Winnipeg. Usually the decision to accept or deny entrance into these schools has nothing to do with your artistic abilities as a dancer, but rather your body type. I was fourteen when the National rejected me, and I noticed that the girls who got to stay for the rest of the audition were all about 5'6", blonde and very, very thin.

The anorexic ideal for the female ballet dancer is derived from Suzanne Farrell, a famous American ballerina in the sixties with the New York City Ballet. The artistic director for NYCB, George Ballanchine was obsessed with Farrell's long lines, and thinness. He

demanded the same mould of all his female dancers, Gelsey Kirkland being the most famous.

The ideal female image in ballet is that the dancer is very young. If you're not in a ballet company by the age of 21, chances are you never will be (if you are male, your chances are higher). Generally, you must be tall. If you are 5'3" or less, you must be exceptional to make up for the lost height. You must have good "turn-out" which is a distortion of the legs that exposes the inner part of the thigh. And of course you must be very, very thin. This means no bum, no hips and no tits. The Ballanchine body type strips women of their curves and makes them look like little girls—surely a turn-on for most males. It is rare for a female dancer to retain any sort of voluptuousness in comparison with have adopted the anorexic ideal.

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raphers, artistic directors, head administrators and patrons of the ballet.

In the Romantic Era, European ballerinas such as Marie Taglioni and Fanny Essler kept their voluptuousness because it was what the audience wanted to see. In an age where Victorian morals prevailed, being able to see a woman's cleavage or exposed calf was akin to watching a live sex show. In fact many of the dancers at the Paris Opera Ballet during the Romantic Era were mistresses for male ballet-goers.

So, at fourteen I began to starving myself to fit an image that was created by a man. Most teenage girls can't wait to begin developing curves. I hated my body for it, considering the change a betrayal. For the next four years I thought that being thin was my ticket to a ballet company. After high school graduation, reality

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Ailey image of the female dancer encouraged women to look like women. Unlike the male ideals for women dancers in the Romantic Era, the purpose behind the Ailey image of the female dancer was to accurately portray women's role in Afro-American culture.

For the first time in my training, I realized I could still dance and not have to compromise my own body.

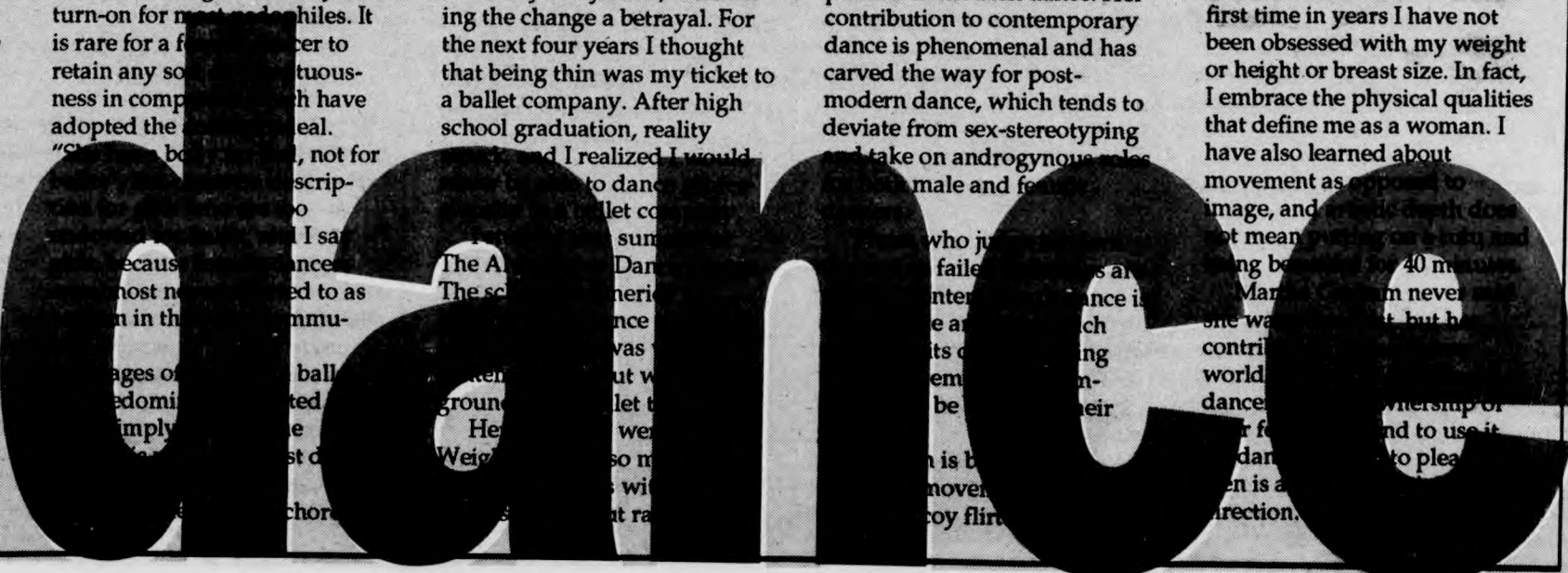
This was my first introduction to the Dunham and Graham dance technique. Katherine Dunham was a leading Afro-American in contemporary dance. She worked closely with Ailey and the company is partially based on her choreographic style. Martha Graham was a pioneer in modern dance. Her contribution to contemporary dance is phenomenal and has carved the way for post-modern dance, which tends to deviate from sex-stereotyping and take on androgynous roles of male and female.

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most ballets between men and women. The energy behind Graham's movement is found in the use of breath which makes the body contract or release the contraction. Graham requires a mature knowledge of one's own body because it has a very sexual nature.

Graham is movement, choreography and image that was invented by a woman. In many of her dances, women are not portrayed as weak or irrational, nor are they placed on a pedestal. She often takes on roles such as Jocasta, Clytemnestra or a strong pioneer woman of the American frontier.

I am now in my second year in the dance at York. For the first time in years I have not been obsessed with my weight or height or breast size. In fact, I embrace the physical qualities that define me as a woman. I have also learned about movement as opposed to image, and... does... 40 man... Mar... never... she wa... but b... contri... world... dance... ownership of... and to use it... to plea... n is a... direction...



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13  
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