A Conversation with Michelle Shocked
by Frank Goodman (Puremusic 5/2002)

This afternoon I spoke for the most of an hour with one of the more controversial musicians of our age, Michelle Shocked. I had planned to interview her live on the day of her recent appearance in Nashville, but hadn't gotten over a bad cold, and certainly wasn't about to expose a touring artist. But I did go down and catch a half dozen or so songs at the show.

The band was very sharp. They were awaiting an Irish guitarist hung up on papers (and Michelle made a crack about how one apparently had to be from the Middle East applying to flight school to get cleared in a hurry). Two buffed black cats on bass and keys, both super good; two white guys on drums and trumpet, the latter used effects and had an impressive range of hip sounds. It's a shame I don't know anyone's names, but I was sick, like I say. The only player I met was Bart Bull, who I believed to be her husband, though no one mentioned that. Aside from handling the tour manager duties, he also played accordion and pedal steel, no less. Michelle was on a Strat up front, handled it real well. The basic groove was an R&B/Gospel affair, but with a number of other elements freely woven through it: dub music, folk music, punk music. Not a collection of things one is used to hearing from one band.

I was a little dismayed by what I thought were confrontational moments between the artist and the audience. After the first song, she asked did the audience really like living here in Nashville, and we said, yeah, that we did. To that she responded that that just confirmed her suspicions, that we really didn't know any better, did we. I didn't know quite what to make of that, or of the half jesting admonishments of the people who made requests or the guy selling roses, but I won't belabor what in retrospect seems less important now. I see all that now as just a kind of confrontational interaction, she's an engager. It may not always be hearts and flowers, but Michelle Shocked is showing up and sounding great, and she is definitely interacting with you.

Our conversation was warm and friendly. I was very impressed by her uniformly. She was focused and eloquent, compelling, and yes, charming. Before we share that conversation with you, some background on this rather unique character is in order. The following is culled and edited from many sources on the Net, some of which wouldn't even let me back later, when I looked for whom to credit. Whatever.

The eldest of eight, she was born Michelle Johnson, in the city where Kennedy was shot, 21 months before the event. Her dad was a teacher, then a carpenter and a musician; her parents divorced in three years. Her stepdad was a Mormon, her mom converted, and this union brought with it a rather nomadic life of army base living around the country and in Germany. When she was in her mid-teens, her stepdad retired and they moved to Gilmer, in East Texas. A year or two later she left home to join her real dad, who encouraged her musically and took her to festivals. Apparently there was little or no contact with the family after that.

Her dad quit teaching school and fixed up houses in East Dallas, she'd help out. Through his collection, she got turned on to the great TX songwriters and bluesmen like Lightnin' Hopkins and Big Bill Broonzy. She started becoming more of a songwriter in her 20's in Austin, when she was getting a bachelor's degree in Communications, specifically "The Oral Interpretation of Poetry," which turned out prophetically. She mentions having spent some time in a songwriter music collective in NYC, so it was likely the Fast Folk community led by Jack Hardy. Michelle apparently became more political in the 80s, moving between San Francisco and NYC, squatting in abandoned buildings and verging on homelessness. She became involved with the squatter's movement, and hardcore bands. (That's a photo of her on her second record, *Short Sharp Shocked,* getting dragged out of a fair housing protest by police. She was arrested a second time at a protest about a defense contractor, and other times after that at political rallies.)

San Francisco cops picked her up around this time and put her in a psychiatric hospital, for the first time. Michelle went back to live with her dad. When she returned to her wild lifestyle, her mother got her tossed in another psychiatric hospital, where she was subjected to shock therapy. Luckily, her mother's insurance ran out after a month, and Michelle was released, and changed her name. She soon headed for NYC, where her kind were in greater numbers.

Mid 80s, disillusioned with the political climate here, she left for Amsterdam. Caught a ride to Rome, got raped (and then offered money), and wound up in a women's separatist commune in Comiso before she was tossed out of there, too.

Then she caught a break. At the Kerrville Folk Festival, in TX, Pete Lawrence of the Indie UK label Cooking Vinyl liked what she was doing, and recorded her around the campfire on his Sony Walkman. The music was released on Cooking Vinyl as *The Texas Campfire Tapes,* and reached number one on the English Indie Charts. (At the time the recording was made, she'd just been living as a squatter in Amsterdam.)

Michelle went to London, eventually *The Texas Campfire Tapes* (more likely the sales than the music) got the attention of American record companies, and Mercury/Polygram was the first to ink a contract. And the legend grew. Polygram offered her a 130k advance for the second record, she only took 50 and went for a licensing deal with them instead, so in 10 years, ownership of the masters would revert to her. The second record, *Short Sharp Shocked,* was also a success, though made simply on a lean budget, with Pete Anderson producing.

End of the 80s, *Captain Swing* comes out, foretelling a brief national craze still some years in the future. Michelle had a conversion experience in the early 90s in a South Central L.A. black Pentecostal Church. Then came *Arkansas Traveler* in '92, and the following year Mercury balked first on a project that she wanted to do with Soul/R&B artists Tony! Toni! Tone! and then a proposed gospel record. She showed up to the studio, and the label had not submitted the purchase orders, so she couldn't record. Originally she was told that the reason was that the music she was proposing to do was stylistically inconsistent. Michelle says that in the business affairs office, she was told

that when she negotiated for the rights of all her recordings, she cut too good a deal for herself, and that they were not going to promote her records.

A three year battle began. Michelle put out a stripped down version of *Kind Hearted Woman*, greatly influenced by the death of her grandmother. She filed a million dollar suit against Mercury/Polygram, and went on an Underground Test Site tour with Fiachna O'Braonain of Hothouse Flowers. They also put out a quick record for that, entitled *Artists Make Lousy Slaves.* The label finally settled the suit (for violating her 13th Amendment rights, the amendment outlawing slavery) out of court and released her from her contract. As part of the deal, they got to release an anthology and Michelle had to let her previous CDs go out of print for a while.

Kind Hearted Woman was re-recorded and released on Private Music. Two years later, Michelle herself released *Good News,* sold only at gigs and by mail order. Likewise *Dub Natural* was released and sold two years after that. When the recent *Deep Natural* came out, *Dub Natural* was included in the set's packaging, along with an insert announcing that all of her recordings are now available (in deluxe editions featuring previously unreleased tracks) from her own Mighty Sound label.

Michelle Shocked: Hi Frank, it's the very late Michelle Shocked, calling to talk with you.

Puremusic: Not so late. Are you doing phoners today?

MS: Well, I have a couple. I got distracted because my father called; we're in Dallas. We're playing Houston tomorrow night and have a day off today, and the band thought it would be a lot more fun to spend it in Dallas.

PM: I don't really know much about Texas, but you do.

MS: Actually, it's been 15 years since I was here, it's a lot of old haunts for me.

PM: Did you say at the gig that you divide your time these days between New Orleans and L.A.? Those are two completely different atmospheres.

MS: Tell me about it. Night and day. You can decide which is which. I know what I think.

PM: I would say that New Orleans is the night and L.A. the day.

MS: Bingo. [I ask if she might know some notorious busker friends of mine in New Orleans, Frank and Mary Schaap. Alas, no.]

PM: I've been doing some reading about you, preparing for our conversation. I was surprised to find that, besides being a high profile personality, you've also sold way more records than I ever knew. It said somewhere that you've sold in excess of a million and a half units. Is that accurate?

MS: It's accurate, but it's on the same level as trying to measure your fame. My first records came out before Soundscan [where sales figures are actually married to retail cash registers, and not a matter of "reporting"], and if you go by royalty reports, you always come out on the losing end of that. On the other hand, I've never seen record sales as the measure of my artistic success. I feel I've made a huge contribution in the development of AAA and Americana Radio, and in the American heritage scene, carrying it on to the next generation. Those are the accomplishments I value. I'd like to be part of building a bridge, and I say be part of because no one person can do it, in our culture that's still so segregated, when our musical heritage is so intertwined. I can't understand how it's come to this.

PM: You're so genre-bending, the whole of your career is in absolute defiance of those rules that govern most careers.

MS: Just so you know, there is a method to that madness. Our society is so genrefied and stereotyped, people get divided into demographics, into housing developments, on very superficial criteria. I couldn't take a straight path from one thing to the other; I had to take a winding road. I hope you trust me that there has really been a method behind it all. Music used to be the vanguard that would break down cultural barriers, but over the last 25 or 30 years, it's become the means for resegregating us. And I got to the point in my career where I couldn't justify participating in that practice. So I had to jump off the deep end.

PM: And there are so many levels thereof. I was writing this morning about Newgrass Revival. It was extremely cool how many elements they incorporated into their music, but you are even more so.

MS: Perhaps, but Newgrass was a huge influence on me. I'm standing on the shoulders of those who came before me.

PM: And that seems to be one of their greatest gifts, being that influence. A whole generation of artists is saying what a big impact that band had on their development.

MS: My dad was taking us to festivals like Winfield where they were akin to the Rolling Stones or something. They were the rebels.

PM: I was on the phone interviewing my buddy John Cowan just the other day and mentioned that I had a similar conversation coming up with you. He went on about what a great artist he thought you were, and said that I should give him a call back, let him know how it went.

MS: Well, ditto. I think he's the funkiest white boy on the planet.

PM: On that subject, that was a great band backing you up the other night.

MS: Thanks, I love those guys.

PM: Are they New Orleans guys?

MS: They're not New Orleans guys, and that probably says something. In all of my years living in New Orleans, and my efforts at working with New Orleans musicians, I encountered a lot of frustration. I came to the conclusion that many people do, that it's a nice place to visit, but you can't take it on the road. The musicians there don't ever like to travel. They feel like they're already in the nicest place, why would they leave? And if they will leave town, there's always a lot of chaos involved. Disruption follows in their wake. I remember when Counting Crows tried to bring The Soul Rebels, I think it was, out with them on tour. Whatever advance money they'd get sent to get them to the gig would be up in smoke beforehand, and things like that.

PM: But are the New Orleans players super deep?

MS: They're very deep, but not wide, in my opinion. And that is my favorite way of knowing music, but when it comes to working and hiring, you really look for the range, and the vocabulary. Not everybody's like that, but my music does require that.

PM: Do you play other instruments yourself?

MS: I play bad fiddle, did you see that the other night?

PM: No, I was sick, and had to leave after a half dozen numbers.

MS: I saw on the fiddle, and pick a little mandolin, though that's lain fallow now for some time.

PM: You're a good electric player.

MS: I've been working on that for seven years now, I started out just acoustic.

PM: I hang in the middle a lot and play an old jazz box, so it feels acoustic and sounds electric.

MS: Oh yeah, I know your type. When I crossed over, I committed fully. But I stick with an old Fender Deluxe Reverb, I don't get into any fancy electronics.

PM: It's great to see you out with a fully produced record. I couldn't access the website, www.mighty-sound.com, there seems to be some kind of temporary glitch. So I lack some

information about players and other credits. Who's that fabulous steel player on *Deep Natural*?

MS: That'd be Dave Pearlman. Isn't he amazing? Secret weapon #1. He did his roadwork in the 70s, with Hoyt Axton and Dan Fogelberg. He told me some wild story about playing in a volcano in Hawaii. He had the gig at The Palomino in L.A. for some years. But in recent years, he runs a studio in the valley called Rotund Rascal. He's one of those great road players that eventually turn themselves into secret studio weapons.

PM: Who produced *Deep Natural*, and where?

MS: It was recorded in about four different places, up in Cotati…

PM: Cotati? [Northern CA] That's my old stompin ground.

MS: Yeah? We did some work there, and we also recorded in Austin, in Dublin, and at Rotund Rascal in the valley. Bart Bull, my husband and collaborator, with Fiachna O'Braonain, we write songs together, they co-produced the record. Except one song produced by Peter O'Toole.

PM: It's a great record. I like *Dub Natural*, too.

MS: Thank you. Yeah, *Dub Natural* is a little twist, right?

PM: Yeah, I got a kick out of it. One more example of how individuated you are.

MS: Outta my way, comin through.

PM: You know, at the beginning of the show, there was a little ripple, where you were giving the Nashvillians the business about living here. Did we really like living here, and all that. I wondered if you hated it here for some reason.

MS: Well, it's a little bit of the Steve Earle rant. Nashville has so thoroughly indemnified its segregated culture that it's almost a lost city in that regard. He talks about it in discussing his drug days, about having to go to the other side of town to score. I don't know, it reminds me of East Texas. That drove me so crazy that I finally decided to go somewhere where I didn't feel like such a strange bird.

PM: Does New Orleans have a different feel in that sense?

MS: [laughs] I like to say this about New Orleans. You know how the basic idea behind racism in this country is that white folks think they're better than black folks, right? New Orleans has a long tradition of an entirely different race known as Creole. They think they're better than everybody. That comes as quite a shock to Yankees and other white folks. They encounter a particular kind of black superiority that they'd never imagined in their life.

PM: That's interesting, and new to me.

MS: They're more refined, more cultured, more civilized. In the French days, they were the ones that were marrying interacially, and skilled and schooled in the arts. Jelly Roll Morton is an example of that, actually, the "we do it better than everybody else" mentality.

PM: So they share the stereotypical superiority of the French.

MS: Yes. That's a fair comparison. They figure if you have culture, that's all you need. So I thought I knew a lot about race relations when I arrived in New Orleans, but I quickly learned to shut up and observe.

PM: And are the Creoles amazing, in fact?

MS: The Creoles are amazing. Allan Touissant, for example. He was someone I went down there to work with. It's an amazing heritage.

PM: I've never spoken with anyone personally who's worked with the great Allan Touissant. What's he like?

MS: Bart says he'd rather watch Allan Touissant fold his jacket and lay it on the side of the piano than hear most musicians perform. Allan said to me that he regretted being raised so Creole Catholic, because it made him feel like he was way too inhibited. And he's drawn to funky stuff as much as anybody.

PM: And he's still alive and well, in good health?

MS: Yeah, he's doing pretty good.

PM: I liked the insert inside *Deep Natural* about owning your whole catalog. It said the question is not "Why does Michelle Shocked own her entire major label catalog?" but "Why is she the only one?"

MS: It was very satisfying to see that in print there.

PM: Does that refer specifically to the battle with Mercury over *Kind Hearted Woman*?

MS: No, not at all. Sorry for the confusion, I caused a lot of it by my peripatetic target. What that refers to are a lot of the battles that are currently going on over artist's rights. We'd like to point out that a major label record contract is the only contract in existence of its kind today. It's akin to doing a deal with the bank when you take out a thirty year mortgage on a house, and, after it's paid for, they tell you that you have to move out—that you don't own it.

And that's just the tip of the iceberg. The whole relationship is skewed. You read in the media about fights going on at the state level. In CA, for example, there's a clause that prohibits indentured servitude. That's the reason that a lot of CA artists are wined and dined to NYC for a big ceremony to sign contracts that aren't legal in CA. The only thing that protects you otherwise is the 13th Amendment, which is a federal law. They're now pushing the finer points of that legislation in CA. On top of all that, the record labels got an exemption independent of all other industries, so that they weren't even bound by the seven year indentured statute.

PM: So, all that said, what does owning your catalog mean? Did you do something about that that other artists need to understand and try to do, if possible?

MS: Yes, they need to know about this. It's probably too late for most of my generation, they've already been sold down the river in most instances. But for upcoming artists and future generations, it's important. When they cast you adrift, rather than floating upon a huge ocean with no oars, you've got a quick little sloop.

I'm launching a new label with this new record. But I will have what's known in the capitalist system as cash flow, that comes from the sale of my catalog. Where a lot of indie labels go down is that they put out so much money to record, manufacture, market, and promote their first or second release, and there's a 90-120 day period before any money comes back, if it comes back at all. You won't see any money from distributors for a solid year. If you don't have the cash flow to survive that period, the best laid plans will go down with the ship. By owning your catalog, you've got a sales base.

For instance, when the format changed from vinyl to CD, the people who owned the catalog profited from the winds of change that blew through the market. The whole thing crashed in the late 80s and early 90s with the consolidation of so many labels, and those that made it to the other side survived with their work intact.

PM: I really want to make sure I understand the bedrock of what you're saying. Does that mean that you own the publishing to the songs, or the master recordings?

MS: That's a good question. It took me eleven years of operating in that system to make all the necessary distinctions. There are three kinds of income for a recording artist. The first is mechanical royalties, which comes from record sales. Most artists never see any mechanical royalties, because the record companies have such an interesting way of accounting for all their expenses.

PM: Breakage, and all those clauses.

MS: Right, and you never see any mechanical royalties. That's why, in the late 80s/early 90s, when Beck got that huge advance, bigger than anybody had heard of, that's basically all the money he's ever gonna see from his mechanical royalties, in spite of massive sales figures. Because they always find ways of deducting costs in their accounting reports of your sales.

The next income stream comes from publishing, and that's where you have the edge on everyone in the business if you're a singer songwriter. If you're not a singer songwriter, you're at a huge disadvantage in this arena; you're more of a pawn in their game.

When Whitney Houston cut that Dolly Parton song ["I Will Always Love You" from *The Bodyguard* soundtrack] she didn't receive anything from the third income stream, which is performance royalties. I thought that because she performed the song, that this third stream came her way, but I was wrong. I knew she didn't write the song, so she wouldn't get any publishing royalties, and because of all I've laid out, I knew she wouldn't be getting any mechanical royalties, but I figured she'd be collecting performance royalties. But I came to know that the writer of the song, not the singer, makes the performance royalties as well. The performance is the broadcast, not the recording, in other words.

So, when I negotiated my contract with Mercury, I basically did a licensing deal with them. For ten years, they owned the masters and just paid me a royalty. But after ten years, ownership of the masters reverted back to me. If they want to manufacture any of those records now, they have to pay me a licensing fee, which is different than a royalty.

PM: Now your stroke of genius is better revealed. How did you know to do that, and how did you get it together at that point in time? Was anyone advising you?

MS: Three things, I would say. First, the goodwill of Nanci Griffith, who told me "Own your work." The second thing was my own hard headedness, and my background in radical politics. I looked at my understanding of global politics, and knew that if Brazil had not gotten so far into debt, it would not have had to sell its natural resources. So I structured a deal based on those two pieces of information that kept me from going into debt. I didn't take a big advance up front; I just took enough to record the record. So I was never in debt to them.

The third thing was that the success of *The Texas Campfire Tapes* was so unexpected that, unlike with most artists, they came knocking on my door, instead of the reverse. At that point, all I had to do was stand on those two principles. Under the circumstances, they had the predictable fear that if they didn't give me the deal I was looking for, somebody else would.

I don't give much credit to my manager or lawyer of the time, because they were busy doing a backdoor deal for themselves, which was a custom label on Mercury. They didn't reveal any of those conflicts of interest to me at the time. So I feel very strongly that I was looking out for myself, and following my political instincts, and my own personal values. These days, I know that God was obviously watching out for me, because artists need a way out of the wilderness. And it had been so egregious for so long, how was this chain ever going to be broken, and then someone like me came along.

PM: And the first credo was the simple one passed along by Nanci Griffith.

MS: Right, and then I heard Prince say it later: “If you don’t own your masters, you’re a slave.”

PM: He went his own way, right? How did that turn out?

MS: We were just talking about him last night. I’m not exactly sure, but my understanding was that he was so embittered with his fights with Warners that he was determined to go back and re-record the songs from those albums he didn’t own the rights to.

PM: Are you allowed to do that?

MS: Yes. But it would be a huge challenge, for instance, to record “When Doves Cry” 15 years later and make it sound like it did then. And I give myself credit for that, too. When push came to shove and they started shoving, I had to sit on the hot seat for what turned out to be three years. They know that as an artist you need to create and record and that your creativity can get really twisted and cause you to buckle in. So I feel that God protected me from getting too engaged with that feeling of being trapped. There were moments that I felt, “I need my freedom, just let me go.” But I knew they couldn’t take away my creativity, and touring just made me stronger and better, and gave me the validation that I could no longer get from recording and having new records be broadcast and go over.

PM: Have you stayed on the road all along?

MS: There was only one year I took a sabbatical, ’97. I just went to church. Other than that, I give minor credit to my understanding that, when most acts were out there touring to promote their records, I was out there promoting records so that I could tour. I consider that to be the foundation of what it is I do. I perform and I communicate with my audience. I never took tour support. I made sure my touring budget was fiscally responsible, so they could never say “Do it our way, or we’ll cut off your tour support.”

PM: It’s interesting how your personal politics and your background in radical politics had everything to do with the way you handled your career.

MS: I feel that way, too, and I also feel like this emerging spiritual politic, if you like, also goes hand in glove. Things are really integrating in my life. The choices that I’ve made, and the values I’ve developed, and the principles I’ve stood on, have really served me well.

PM: I want to talk about spirituality. I was at the show when you talked about your conversion experience, and then how you were taken back when a “new members” leader made the ridiculous reference that in the Bible it says Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve. You went into “Peach Fuzz” at that point, and then I drifted on out. I didn’t get to hear where your faith led you after that negative experience. Where do you stand with Jesus and the Church, and all that now?

MS: It led me to this. That I had been raised a Mormon, and a lot of the Mormon doctrines were extremely racist. I thank God for having given me an instinct early on that that was not right, even though I was surrounded by it. You know how a cultural collective can indemnify a misguided consensus. But my early rejection of those values turned me towards politics for my idealism. So it's not unusual that my political orientation was basically an anti-racist one. A lot of my politicking and feminism were informed by racism. I realized much later in life that politics were only going to get me so far.

By nature, I am a spiritual person. By turning back to organized religion, I was taking a risk, because it had let me down so many times in my earlier life. When I had that negative experience, I realized that I'm older and wiser now, and that it takes all kinds of people to make a world. And, rather than let this narrow minded type of bigotry drive me away again, I was going to stand on my own beliefs and principles. Just because we're part of the same church doesn't mean that we have to agree on everything, and share a common understanding of it. Because the Baptist church used the Bible for a long time to prove that slavery was intended and endorsed by God.

PM: Just the way that they're using it now to say that homosexuality is not endorsed by God.

MS: Exactly my point. Let God decide what is beautiful. I don't think we humans have any business deciding for anyone but ourselves where we find beauty and grace. If you want to use the Bible to prove or disprove that, I'm sure you can. I have no interest in being a heretic among believers. Everything I agree with, I do so wholeheartedly. When I disagree with something, I just quietly accept that we can't all think alike. We just can't.

PM: And that's an interesting evolution of radical politics. And a beautiful one, I think.

MS: Well, we'll see where it takes me. It's the politics of tolerance. I know where radical politics came from, and took me. That this stuff is really messed up, and not to be tolerated. We'll see. It's probably going to be one of those full circle dialectics.

PM: So where does a person as individuated as you are stand with the literal approach to the Bible?

MS: I have a real advantage in that I was raised as a Mormon Fundamentalist. They're really different than your garden variety Fundamentalist. They were not big Bible thumpers, since they had their own book, The Book of Mormon. So I hadn't had Bible Fundamentalism shoved down my throat, but I got to understand and experience Fundamentalism itself. It's much more concerned with the letter of the law than the spirit of the law. Once you understand that, you can be like Brer Rabbit in the briar patch. You can run for cover when you need to. And you can embrace it when it yields insights. There are things that come out of Fundamentalist Preachers' mouths that I find inspiring.

PM: In the same way that your album *Captain Swing* predated the swing craze of the early 90s by some years, one could say that *Arkansas Traveler* foresaw or predated the *O Brother* phenomenon. What do you think of the almost bizarre success of that soundtrack and the spike in Bluegrass interest?

MS: It goes through cycles, you know. I would place *Arkansas Traveler* as mindful of *Will the Circle be Unbroken*, as certain people did at the time. Although I wasn't conscious of it as a big influence at the time, apparently it was a big influence on my dad to become a hippie going to bluegrass festivals, and hanging out with the old timers. And *Arkansas Traveler* was a tribute to those times hanging out with my dad and brother going to Bluegrass festivals.

PM: Are you much of a Gillian Welch fan, do you like what she's doing?

MS: I'm not a huge fan, but when I saw the documentary [probably the movie *Down From the Mountain*], she was doing a duet with Allison Krauss. She had developed a vocal technique, and that's really important in that world, to have a signature style. So I respected that accomplishment. It was a little bendy thing she was doing with her voice, no small feat, and it sounded really good. I appreciated that, and thought she'd done a great job with that song on the documentary, "I Want to Sing that Rock and Roll." I don't think it's on the album.

PM: Oh yeah, it's on their latest record.

MS: She's probably too cool for the likes of me, I'm a little backward and hillbilly in my ways. It's not exactly my cup of tea.

PM: Read or heard anything lately that turned you on?

MS: I'm having a love affair with the new Leonard Cohen album [*Ten New Songs*]. I'd never been a fan before, but this really got me. He's written some amazing stuff here.

PM: A lot of years sitting with his legs crossed.

MS: He says he's been in that Zen monastery sweeping a broom, and so now he writes these songs that are like sweeping the mind clean. There's not much left to say when he's said something as startling as "The God of Love, preparing to depart." It scared me to death.

PM: Are you what you call a driven person?

MS: Yeah. I remember one of my first boyfriends was kind of a hippie dude, a few years younger than me and lacking direction. I basically dragged him off to college with me for company. His mom was pretty happy about it, she thought I was a go getter.

PM: Reckon she was right. What's driving you these days?

MS: I still have this vision, this God given vision: that America has an amazing legacy to fulfill, and it's so far from doing it. This is the land where slaves were brought on shore for white supremacists. Somewhere along the way, they learned a little bit about each other, and realized there was more than meets the eye.

PM: You're a fascinating person, thanks for your time.

MS: Thank you, I enjoyed your style.

●