

UNDER THE RADAR



Summer 2006



Emily Haines: *Knives Don't Have Your Back* (Last Gang)

Metric's fine singer, Emily Haines, offers a haunting collection of piano driven tracks on her first solo album. Often sad and critical, *Knives Don't Have Your Back* suggests a woman at odds with herself and the world around her; but despite her somewhat desperate state, you sense her resiliency. Musically, you could liken Haines' output to some of Tori Amos' more menacing material, perhaps even the starkest of John Lennon's solo output—"Oh My Love" comes to mind—but mood-wise, many of the songs recall the beautiful, depressive laments of The Smashing Pumpkins' overlooked fourth album, *Adore*.

Featuring contributions from Sparklehorse's Scott Minor, Justin Peroff of Broken Social Scene, Evan Cranley of Stars, and Metric's Jimmy Shaw, the album offers a number of exquisite turns in the music—from chord changes to gentle tempo shifts—and surprising charm in the arrangements, which makes up for the album's overall slow pacing. Unlike so many of her contemporaries, Haines possesses vocal and lyrical prowess that encourage listening. Her warbling wisp of a voice is a little easier to figure out at times—it's Metric's trump card, after all—but her writing is more often than not provocative over confounding. "A lack of light, a hollow sea, poisoned beaches, limousines, toothless dentists, cops that kill/My baby's got the lonesome lows/Don't quite go away overnight," she sings on "Doctor Blind," and she could be speaking to a troubled celebrity lifestyle, or simply the hells of chemical dependency.

A song like "Mostly Waving" finds her in good company with a singer like Portishead's Beth Gibbons, but "Crowd Surf Off a Cliff" may stand as the album's finest offering. It doesn't hold the same comfort as The Smiths' classic, "Asleep," but it's nearly on par as a song. Again, it could be about suicide, or it could be about juggling a life on the road with a lover at home. "The

Maid Needs a Maid" allows for similar interpretation. Read one way, it could be about sex with a prostitute, or it could be about a man simply looking for more out of a relationship. Then again, it could be about both. Regardless, it's a sweet song. And this is a lovely record. (www.myspace.com/emilyhaines, www.lastgangrecords.com)

8 Blips out of 10

By Gary Knight