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Emily Haines: Sharp as a Blade

By Brian Orloff

Emily Haines, Metric's cool, commanding lead singer, had two possible titles in mind for her first solo album. Inspired by a "dreamy and kind of psychedelic" sound, Haines considered calling the album either *A Teenage Daydream* or *A Sunlit Field*. As she recalls, the songs evoke "lying on a grassy field with headphones. I have this sci-fi imagery in my head of a postnatural world."

As it turns out, however, Haines picked neither. Instead, she called her seductive album *Knives Don't Have Your Back* (Last Gang), perhaps a nod to the spacey, dystopian images she drew on for inspiration. Due September 26th, and written and recorded sporadically over four years everywhere from Toronto to Montreal to Los Angeles, the twelve-track album consciously turns away from the jerky, new wave-inspired grooves that propel Metric's sound. Instead, piano, strings and twinkling, atmospheric embellishment set *Knives'* contemplative and sometimes eerie mood.

"It's not precious," Haines insists. "It's music to listen to in your house but not the kind of house that I'd go insane from claustrophobia in. It's not overly sentimental, it's just ideally good for if you're alone," she says.

And *Knives Don't Have Your Back* earned the approval of Haines' Metric bandmates, especially on long bus rides. "It's been playing in the bus a lot," she says. "I really didn't want it to be the kind of thing that's a party killer when you put it on. Obviously it's not rocking, but you put it on with a group of people and you can still talk."

Recorded with producer John O'Mahony (the Strokes, System of a Down), and flecked with guest stars including Broken Social Scene's Justin Peroff, Star's Evan Cranley and Metric's Jimmy Shaw, the album foregrounds Haines' supple singing, pasting her voice over cascading melodies as in the churning "Doctor Blind." Haines attributes much of that organic feel to another key collaborator, Sparklehorse's Scott Minor, with whom she traded recordings. "I can't believe I got to work with Scott," she says. "I'd been listening to [Sparklehorse] so much because I felt what they captured in their records was this soft music that's not so introspective that you feel uncomfortable."

If anything, Haines says her mission with this record is to prove that "piano and voice can be glam." "That's what we wanted it to be," she adds, "not a domestic person sitting down at the piano but someone who's coming off heroin sitting down at the piano—very different—and the stadium is roaring in the background."