

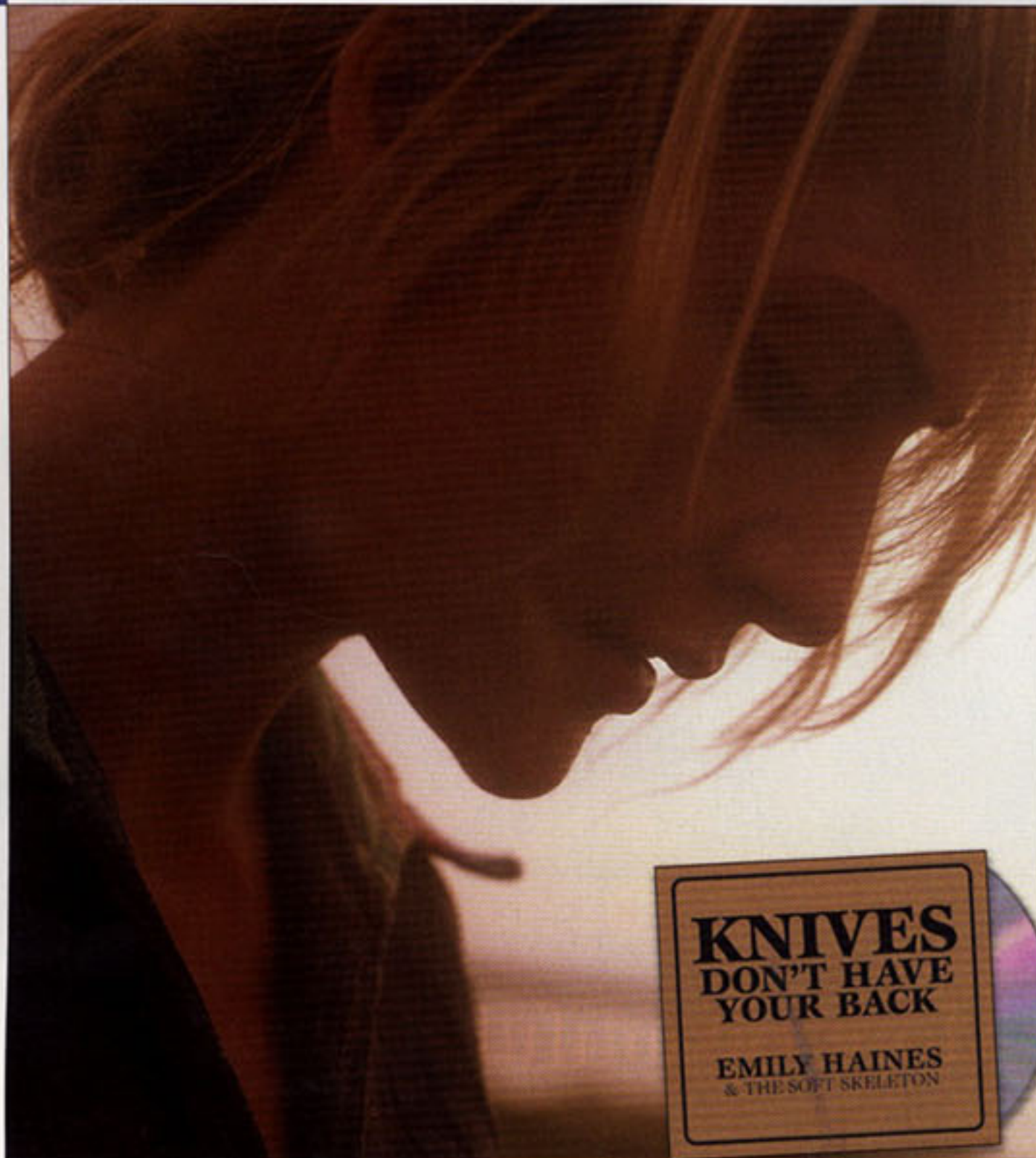
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NEW RELEASE SPOTLIGHT

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BY BOB CANNON

**EMILY HAINES** [ KNIVES DON'T HAVE YOUR BACK ]



When the Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, "The only constant is change," he may have been anticipating Emily Haines. Perhaps not—but the keyboardist-vocalist for the new-wave Canadian outfit Metric certainly lives by those words, and her solo debut, *Knives Don't Have Your Back*, is the evidence.

"As soon as I get a little bit comfortable, I'm really uncomfortable," she says from her Toronto home. "I find it inspiring to drop everything you think you are every time you hit a new place, and you're faced with people who have no real knowledge of you. It's pretty addictive, actually."

Ironically, Haines isn't the mysterious figure she fancies herself. There's a solid fan base for Metric, and though the foundation of the band is also solid, all of the members are involved with solo projects.

"A lot of the people I respect the most—writers, actors, musicians—have stopped themselves from becoming one-dimen-

sional," Haines says. "The last thing I want to do is break away from what I'm doing, but I'm encouraged by seeing that other artists have done this. I'm thinking of the Thom Yorke record [his solo debut, *The Eraser*]; it means that he's going to develop another part of his writing at the same time as being in a band."

On *Knives*, Haines has followed Yorke's lead by de-emphasizing Metric's synth-based sound in favor of a spare acoustic piano. "It's my primary instrument, and for me it's the most natural," she says. "The piano can be overplayed, especially in pop music, so I only play notes that I'm sure I want. I had a friend tell me once that when I played it sounded like spiderwebs."

That arachnid keyboard work can be heard on "Mostly Waving," a haunting tune that's heavy on two-note dissonance. "I'm more interested in angular harmonies," she says. "I wrote that many years ago when I was living in England. I was feeling like I had painted

myself into a corner. But if I was claustrophobic, it was my own fault."

Haines' track record bears that out. Growing up in Toronto, she studied harmony in Montreal, then English lit in British Columbia. Returning to Toronto, she hung out with a musical collective that grew into Broken Social Scene and met up with guitarist James Shaw. Their alliance grew into Metric, whose 2003 debut *Old World Underground, Where Are You Now?* drew comparisons to Sonic Youth and the Yeah Yeah Yeahs. The band, which includes bassist Josh Winstead and drummer Joules Scott-Key, released the follow-up, *Live It Out*, in 2005.

But remember that "constant change" bit? On *Knives*, Haines enlisted Sparklehorse drummer Scott Minor and Broken Social Scene's Evan Cranley, creating a sonic landscape that's at once spare, foreboding and vulnerable. "Nothing & Nowhere" depicts an urban isolation with lines like "Apartments are cages / I still don't know what is permanent," while on the grand finale, "Winning," the singer warns herself, "Don't even visit that place / They'll sharpen their teeth on your smile."

Haines admits that this record finds her approaching life more viscerally. "I wanted to be able to develop this other side of my life creatively," she explains, "but it's not all about me alone somewhere in a room. Music is about playing with other people!"

"I suppose before I sold my soul to rock 'n' roll I was one of those people who was more interested in living their life through their imagination," she continues. "Now when I sing [on "Reading in Bed"] 'With all the luck you've had / why are all your songs so sad?', it's a nostalgia for that feeling and that way of life, because I may have chosen the path where I'm going to be forced to actually experience my own life!"

And experience it she has. The *Knives* sessions kept her moving, from New York to Los Angeles, Toronto and Montreal, as well as Asheville, N.C., and Knoxville, Tenn. Hell, it should have been underwritten by Rand McNally. "Well, the record is a little about being in between places, in transit," she allows. "It's when you get a minute to take stock of where you've been, and you feel a little beat up by the world."

A beat, then a laugh. "But I come out fighting. That's the point." Even the Greeks didn't think of that one. ■■■