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

Canadian mopehead makes banality sexy

It was always clear, somehow, that Metric's Emily Haines was more than a pretty voice backstroking through Broken Social Scene's guitar swirl. Clearer now is that she's also more than a Canadian indie-rock femme fatale mugging for cultural capital with slick hooks and faux misanthropy. On this more intimate solo album, Haines's musical accompaniment is spectral and emaciated — everything except her piano billows around the pleasant remoteness of her vocals like stale smoke.

That minimalism reveals what distinguishes her from scores of other mopeheads. Like Thom Yorke, she's capable of being both bitterly cynical and sentimentally optimistic ("Our hell is a good life," she sings blithely), which is tricky. Furthermore, her facility with melody and words reveals that she's a poet by nature but doesn't exude any self-aggrandizing obsession with sounding poetic. In fact, most of her best moments derive from the fact that she's really, really good at writing about banalities. Artists like Haines and Jeff Tweedy seem to have come to the same conclusion about coping with accelerated culture that online porn moguls — always more sophisticated in these matters — came to about a decade ago: In a world that's been saturated by fantasies, the last vestiges of romance and perversity lie in a kind of heightened normalcy. Stripped of their cosmetics, some tunes on *Knives Don't Have Your Back* seem underdeveloped, but they prove what always needs to be proved in the vortex of postmodern pop — that an artist like Haines can do more than hide behind her influences. It's refreshing, not having to disdain someone this unabashedly hip. **BRET GLADSTONE**