

EMILY HAINES
MID-METRIC
DIVERSION

BY BRYAN BORZYKOWSKI
PHOTOGRAPHY BY GEOFF BARRENGER

With a dreamy, late-night lounge album under her belt, an ever-restless Emily Haines contemplates the terrifying thought of solo-success, life outside Metric or anything beyond the present.

If everyone needs a vacation now and again, then Emily Haines, Metric's always-on-the-go lead singer, must be in desperate need of one. At the time of this interview, the brooding, Toronto-based pop star had just wrapped up a two-week tour of England, on the heels of a five-week jaunt around North America promoting her debut solo album, *Knives Don't Have Your Back*. So she must have been kicking back at home, catching up on some sleep, right? Wrong. She was still overseas. "What the f*ck am I doing?" says Haines on the phone from London. "I should be back at my house in Toronto. Why am I still in England?"

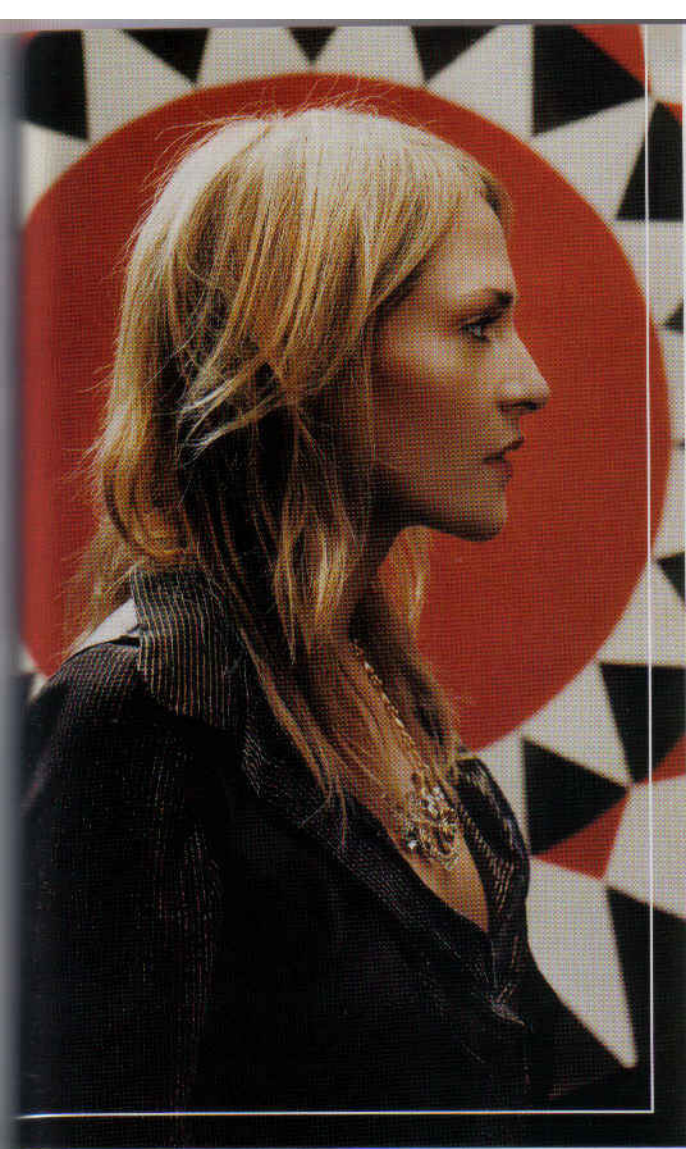
It's a good question. Since Metric released its sophomore record, *Live It Out*, in September 2005, the band has been touring pretty much nonstop, even opening for The Rolling Stones at Madison Square Garden. So no one would fault its lead singer if she spent her time off at home relaxing. But if there's one thing you need to know about Haines, it's that she's arguably Canada's most restless performer. For her, getting too comfortable is a dangerous proposition. "The unknown is where I've always found everything," she explains.

The singer's inability to settle down is precisely why Haines is so successful. After releasing two strong Metric albums, which have sold 350,000 copies

worldwide, the daughter of acclaimed poet Paul Haines recorded her first solo LP. *Knives Don't Have Your Back* sounds, naturally, a little like a Metric album. Haines' affection for minor chords and haunting melodies remains intact, while her famously distant vocals create the same anxiousness that Metric has so skilfully honed. But, without loud, crunchy guitars and her band's manic energy, the solo Emily Haines is exposed. Songs about her father's death and her struggles with success are emotional and bare. It's the perfect mix – edgy, original and emotive – for a successful post-Metric career.

Predictably, Haines won't admit to having any desire to go it alone. "We're in it for the long haul," she says, delivering the standard, humble lead-singer line. But after speaking with her, it's clear she's feeling conflicted. There's no doubt she's committed to Metric; she's even uncomfortable calling her record a "solo" album, referring to it as a "multidimensional" collaboration instead. However, while Haines appears to be content with her day job, the singer is also unsure of what her future holds. "Happy endings are easy to construct in the fantasy realm of music or film," she says. "But... it's not that simple to ever really gauge whether you're going forward or backwards."





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Toronto. The duo recorded what should have been Metric's first release, but their label went bankrupt and the disc never saw the light of day.

Good fortune would finally come their way once Haines and Shaw moved permanently back to Canada. In 2003, Last Gang Records put out Metric's critically acclaimed debut, *Old World Underground, Where Are You Now?*, and, with a second, well-received disc to its name, Metric is now one of the most sought-after Canadian indie rock acts.

She reveals that she often feels like her life could suddenly derail. (It's her music that keeps her going.) In fact, it might be that the only thing stopping her from planning a life after Metric is that, without the band, she'd be lost. "I try not to dwell too much on my sense of impending doom and keep myself focused on the world I can control," she says. "It's the world at my fingertips, at the piano."

Haines says she has never had any grand plan, besides simply making music. But looking at her career, it's hard to believe that the keyboardist's journey didn't come with a set of directions. The Delhi-born, Toronto-raised artist started playing piano at around the age of eight, but it wasn't until high school that she took her talent seriously. Still, Haines says she never set her sights on becoming a professional musician; she just didn't have any choice. "I'd love to say I knew what I was doing and I planned it all out, but I didn't know what I was doing and I don't know what I am doing now." During university she met her musical confidant, Metric guitarist James Shaw, and the two moved to New York, England, back to New York and eventually to

This sort of success doesn't just happen, as Haines would have you believe. She knows she works hard, but prefers to oversimplify her accomplishments. "I feel people can't really understand why I do as much as I do. But musicians can understand that the only goal is to do it and keep doing it. It's not a means to an end for me. Happiness is the road."

Having said that, Haines is "totally terrified" of where her life is headed. The more popular she gets, the more unsure she becomes. She's aware that setting concrete goals might be a worthy exercise, but this conflicted vocalist can't bring herself to think past the present. "There's a bit of a warning bell in my mind that I should have an awareness that things are finite," she says. "If you accept that to be true, though, then you've pretty much eliminated the point of rock and roll."

So, if Haines has no plans for the future and no tangible career aspirations, where does that leave the tortured, talented artist? While she's adamant that there's no solo career in the cards, Haines does admit to one thing: "I'm realizing that there are fatal flaws in my strategy." ●



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