

Polaris Potentials – Week 7: Metric

By Nelson Tam

Emily Haines is in a car on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. Metric has just finished playing the Leeds festival and will follow with a performance at the Reading festival the next night. Of this year's shortlisters, they are the closest to a mainstream success. Perhaps, as a result they have also been the band that's received the most criticism for being recognized.

Though I don't want to give the haters too much eye contact, it's a necessary point. Again, there are people that think Polaris is an award for emerging artists. And then those who simply don't think Metric *need* the recognition or the \$20K prize that is Polaris. Still, *Fantasies* is a solid record. The songs are bright and catchy, the kind that subconsciously loiter in your head until you realize – perhaps sheepishly – that you actually might like them.

Their first new record in four years, *Fantasies* took just about that to complete. After touring 2005's *Live It Out*, the band realized that maybe they couldn't do just that. They were tired and spent. So everyone went to pursue different projects: Emily with her solo recordings and a sojourn to Argentina; Jimmy with producing and building a recording studio; Joules and Josh with *Bang Lime*.



(Photo: Justin Broadbent)

With such a break in between records, the renewed and refreshed perspective is palpable on *Fantasies*. The songs are well polished – with an electric sheen – the result of repeated live plays and honing. Lyrically, the Toronto natives have veered away from the socially and politically charged poems of the past to pave way for nostalgia whilst allowing glimmers of hope for the days ahead. One might think that Ms. Haines and co. are getting soft in their older age. I say they're more a band with big, calloused hearts, enduring souls and the accompanying wisdom.

When I ask Emily about the most rewarding part of the process of making *Fantasies*, the heartthrob frontwoman responds: "I know you're looking for a sound bite but there isn't just one answer." (Funny enough, my digital recorder failed on me, leaving that to be the only one in this entire piece.)

After reminiscing on various recording locales and her time in Argentina, she finally chooses the finishing of the record at Electric Lady studios in New York as the highlight: it was where her and Jimmy first met Joules and Josh – a nice wrap up for a chapter in the life and work of Metric, I gather.



Regardless of what they've achieved so far, hard work and heart still sit high on Metric's sleeves. It's evident in their decision to release the album through the non-traditional, varied channels they've built over the years, all in effort to find better avenues for their fans to access the music. Despite their seemingly level minds, success and fame weigh heavy on

Fantasies. It's overtly apparent on track titles like Front Row and Stadium Love and perhaps less so in refrains like: "I wanna leave but the world won't let me go" and "Is it ever gonna be enough?" I ask Emily about the band's fame and she brushes it off, beaming about how they just saw a surprise stageside performance of current super group du jour Them Crooked Vultures (consisting of Dave Grohl, Joshua Homme and John Paul Jones.) She looks at them and feels that Metric has done nothing.

Many fans and peers would challenge that. After all, this is a band that helped put Canadian music on the international map. Maybe they don't need the Polaris Music Prize as much as others might. But it doesn't mean they don't deserve to be there with the rest of the shortlisters. And one thing's for sure: they definitely deserve more respect than they've been given in their nomination for Fantasies.