

Escaping the Trap: The Miika Canon, December 15 at Huckleberry's

Written by Jeff Ignatius

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Listening to Miika Pauley play and sing "All the Same Mistakes" in her [Daytrotter.com session](#) released earlier this year, it's hard to imagine somebody who at one point loathed her music.

Using just her voice and an acoustic guitar, she is defiant and forceful yet also surprisingly supple, muscular but precise. The version that appears on her 2008 album *Elijah Drop Your Gun* is prettier and more delicate and takes advantage of her full band, but the Daytrotter version smolders, builds, and ignites.

Yet in early 2007, Pauley said that she felt ensnared by that voice-and-guitar combo. She had what she called "a very sad epiphany" while looking in a bathroom mirror: "What am I doing?"

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In an interview earlier this week (promoting her band's Tuesday show at Huckleberry's), she explained: "In my head there was always a bunch of dynamics and soundscapes and stuff, but there was no way for me to turn that into actual sounds. ...

"What I produce is very close to a type of folk music that I've never had any love for. ... It was never anything that quite moved me. To all of a sudden find myself surrounded by that genre exacerbated the problem"

There was also just her on stage, and "it all became so tied up in me as opposed to just being the music."

Once the realization became "conscious, it became a lot harder for me to write," she added. "Anything I was going to write was going to be folk music. It wasn't going to be what I heard in my head."

Yet even with a Harvard degree (in biological anthropology), she never considered quitting music. "I felt it was all I could do," she said. "I'd done it for so long, it was financially feasible, and there's nothing else I'd want to do."

At about that time, she began working with a band on *Elijah*, and the evolving relationship - with the guys starting as a backing group and eventually becoming collaborators - has freed Pauley. Guitarist/producer Brian Cassagnol, in particular, helped her realize her vision for her songs, to build those soundscapes that she heard but couldn't create.

"It has changed my mindset," she said. "A lot of hating my music was because I was trapped in it, and there was nothing else available to me. Now, I know that's not my only option."

Re-christened the Mieka Canon, the band last month released the *From the Mouth of Paris* EP, which is available for free download at

FromTheMouthOfParis.com

. The recording session was one of the prizes for winning *Cosmopolitan*

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magazine's StarLaunch contest last year, and the band believes that it's more important to get the EP into the world than to get paid for it.

"We just wanted as many people as possible to have the music," Pauley said. "I didn't want any extra impediments in between what we're doing and the people listening to the music. I wanted to make it as easy as possible."

Pauley certainly takes the long view with such things. When *Cosmo* was promoting its contest, *Elijah* was available as a free download from Amazon.com. (There's a pattern here, although Pauley confessed that it didn't come from a conscious philosophy: "Our decisions were not that well thought-out.")

In addition to the StarLaunch win, Pauley won the Starbucks Emerging Artists Award in 2005 and the New York Songwriters Circle Contest last year.

Beyond that recognition, there's an obvious chemistry between the singer and the band. The EP's "Colossal" melds Pauley's powerful voice with the band's musical color in a way reminiscent of Aimee Mann, but with serious soul and some arena-rock aspirations. Lovely gives way to a big-rock climax, and it's nearly undeniable.

The Mieka Canon will perform on Tuesday, December 15, at Huckleberry's (223 18th Street in Rock Island). The bill also includes Holy Ghost Tent Revival, and the show starts at 7 p.m. Cover is \$5.

To listen to the Mieka Pauley Daytrotter session, click [here](#). To download the *From the Mouth of Paris* EP, visit [FromTheMouthOfParis.com](#)

For more information on Mieka Pauley, visit [Mieka.com](#).