

Emmeline: PAO Productions Interview

Emmeline is an extraordinarily gifted musician and songwriter from Dallas, Texas. Her credits include a large number of songs and performances, commercial radio work, hosting a weekly open mic at the Crown and Harp pub, and the EPs Early Morning Hours and Someone To Be. Both CD releases have received favorable reviews in the Dallas Morning News and are available online as well as in physical form. Emmeline can be seen performing regularly in and around the Dallas area and beyond.

Emmeline: The floor is yours, my friend.

PAO Productions: Okay, the floor is mine. Let me start by saying I appreciate you agreeing to speak with me.

EM: Of course.

PAO: Let's begin with your most recent success, the *Someone To Be* CD release. How did that night feel for you?

EM: It was incredible. It was... It's so rare in life that things work out the way you imagine them in your head. And listening to the record, it was something that worked out the way I imagined it in my head. But the CD release was better than I could've ever pictured. I mean, to come back to the venue where I first played, way back when I started playing open mics, which, you know, we won't talk about how long ago that was, but... I played to three people, one of whom is a friend who... we're strangers at the time, and I was shaking, like I was petrified. I didn't want to play at all. But it was something that I felt like I had to do, so I got up there and I did it. And to be able to come back three years later and play to... I mean there was standing room only, like people couldn't find chairs, I was freaking out. I expected to be worried about how many people were gonna come at all, and to be worried about making sure that everybody had a seat was an incredible blessing. It will never cease to amaze me how gracious the people that are kind enough to listen to my music have been. Just the fact that I had... that... you know they were nice enough to show up - it was just amazing! It was really cool, and to see them all singing the words, it was just... it was nuts. It was a dream come true in so many ways.

I mean, things like that... When you do something that you're proud of, when you're little you put it on the fridge (*laughs*). No, but I mean, when you do something that you're really proud of, when you're little you wanna put it on the fridge, like you want your parents to put it on the fridge with a magnet and you wanna share it with everyone, you want them to show everybody,



and to be able to share something like that with everybody that I care about was really, really cool. It was a great night.

PAO: I like the way the CD sounds...

EM: Thank you!

PAO: Especially the fact that the CD was actually mixed and mastered at an appropriate level. You can clearly understand everything in the mix. You can hear everything and it sounds full and vibrant instead of flat and lifeless.

EM: Thank you.

PAO: Real musical power and impact comes from the music, not from how loud it's made to sound on the CD. On your CDs, musical dynamics take precedence over sheer volume. Martin Baird produced your CDs?

EM: Yes, Martin Baird produced both of the CDs at a place called Verge Music Works.

PAO: Where did you meet him?

EM: At a show, actually. He was... He came to the *Girls Rock!!!* show at Poor David's Pub that I played with Suzanne Kimbrell and at the time he was recording stuff for her, and he came up to me afterwards and he was like, "I really like the song 'I Could Be Good,' it's a good little pop song, I like it. Have you thought about doing some studio time?" And you know this, I'm instantly enamored with anybody who likes anything that I do, so I was thrilled to bits and pieces that he came up and told me that he liked the song and that he said he wanted to record some stuff. I was like, "That's perfect 'cause he's enthusiastic about it."

I think the two of us work really well together. We have the same sense of humor, we're both grammar nerds, we crack a bunch of jokes, and he's very honest with me about what works and what doesn't, and I'm very honest with him about what I like and what I don't like, and he's not frustrated by the fact that I wanna maintain creative control of a project. A lot of producers are like, "Actually, you're wrong, the song should really sound like this," and I'm like, "Really? 'Cause I wrote it" (*laughs*). "Are you sure you know what it should sound like?" But the two of us, it's a very collaborative effort, and that's a cool thing. And he, like you said, is very in tune with the necessity of volume control and subtlety and how much those things say.

PAO: How did you decide to name the CD *Someone To Be*?

EM: You know initially it was gonna be called *Hope*, the whole project, and I felt like that was a little too Hallmark card. Um...

PAO: I would say you made the right decision.

EM: Well thanks! (*laughs*). Um I had been talking to a lot of friends about the journey of self-discovery, and we'd been talking specifically about how scary it is to finish your education and be thrust into this world where you have to figure out what you're gonna do with your life and, are you gonna do the right thing? Are you gonna do the wrong thing? Is it practical? Can you make money? All important questions to consider, but I spent a lot of time trying to deny that this was what I wanted to do, and trying to find a different, more practical way to live my life, and it kept coming back to music. And I think that a lot of people take that journey, where they feel like they have to do something that is going to be practical and stable and that's gonna put money in the bank and food on the table, and somewhere along the way we lose the belief in possibility that we had when we were little. And I wanted to try and recapture that on a record and let people take that journey over the course of the songs, and "someone to be" just kind of seemed like an important idea that resonated throughout each of the songs that I picked. I swore to myself when I started this that I would never, ever, ever do that thing where you name a record after a song, this just seemed so lazy. But nothing else seemed to fit quite as well as that did, so there you have it.

PAO: You've done this before.

EM: What, interview? (*laughs*) Not really, I just... Well okay, I'm gonna break for a second and tell you something stupid. I learned a long time ago that being super professional is overrated. You have to be real first. It's the most important thing. It has to fall into place. When I was little, I really wanted to do this. And I watched interviews with my favorite artists, so I used to sit down and pretend I was being interviewed. So it's like you sit there in the shower and you grab the bottle of shampoo and you pretend that you're accepting a Grammy. And it doesn't matter how many times you practice the speech, I guarantee you if I ever, ever, ever am blessed enough to get on that stage, all the words will *pffffff!*. There'll just be a giant pile of *ahhhhhhh!*, which is essentially what the CD release was, but you know, it works out.



PAO: You were literally jumping up and down for joy that night.

EM: It was... insane. I didn't... It overwhelms me constantly how supportive people are. It... I mean, I don't have a career without people who listen to the music. In a

very real sense, I don't have a job if people don't like what I do and if people don't like it enough to follow it. And I...

through some really incredible stroke of luck I ended up with a lot of really great people in my corner. And I'm... there aren't words for how grateful I am for that.

All right. Give me another question, let's go. Before the French fries attack me.

PAO: Does Steve Jackson still host that open mic at Opening Bell?

EM: Yes, he does.

PAO: That was the first place you played in public, wasn't it?

EM: It was. He wasn't the host at the time, actually. Mr. Troll was hosting then, and Steve was just there to play.

PAO: Was he the one who encouraged you to get up and play?

EM: No, um my friend Brent actually encouraged me to go. I had dragged him with me a few times - both of us were big music fans - and he played, actually, before I did, which is funny. He's a classical clarinet performance major, and so he got up and did three Stravinsky clarinet pieces and he was like, "If I can get up there and do Stravinski, you can get up there and play the piano." He's like, that's way more socially acceptable (*laughs*). So the week after he did that, I got up there and played.

PAO: The song, was it "Give a Damn?"

EM: It was "Give a Damn."

PAO: I think that's the first... if not the first, then one of the very first songs I ever heard you play. Any time I think of you playing anywhere I think of you playing that song. Maybe a little bit less now than I used to, because I know a lot more of your material, but that was the first one I remember, the first one everyone remembers. The first one you remember, too!

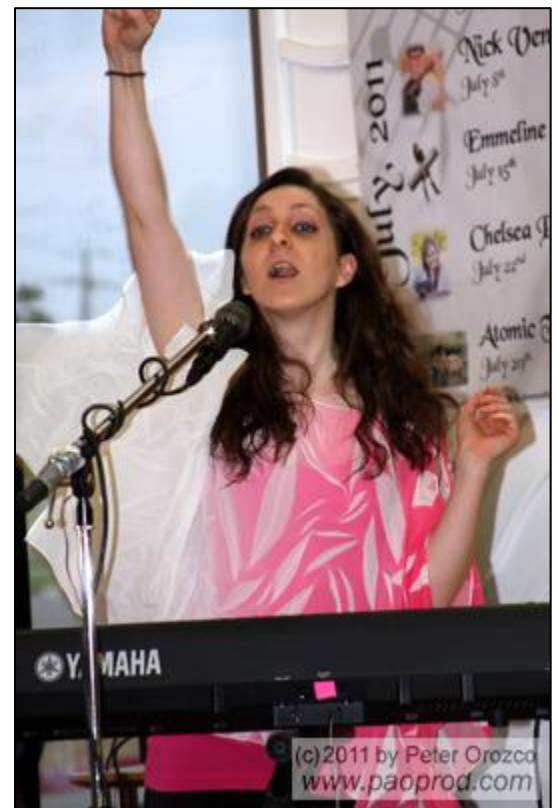
EM: It is, which is funny. I didn't ever intend to play it for people. I wasn't going to, it was... it was a song that acknowledged the worst parts of a relationship that at one point meant a whole lot to me, and the thought of facing that reality, musically, over and over and over again wasn't really a happy thought. But I played it for a voice teacher and she told me she really liked it, and then I recorded it in the studio 'cause I needed a song to record for this demo. And we recorded "I Could Be Good" and we had more time, so he said, "Do you have another song?" and I said sure. And this was a guy who I walked in there and I asked him if I could take my shoes off 'cause I wear these ginormous heels, and he goes "yeah," and I was like, "Kelly Clarkson performs barefoot" - like, word vomit! Word vomit! Justification! Justification! And he goes, "I know, I saw her do it at the Grammys." And I was like, *you were there?! (laughs)* And I got

done with “Give a Damn” and he goes, “That’s a really nice song,” and I was, like, ready to pee on the floor, I was so excited (*laughs*). I was like, “Really, you think it’s good? Really, really, really? My simple song of love and heartbreak, you like that? Awesome.”

Um, and the response to it was so warm, people were so kind, and they... What I noticed the most was every time I played it people would come up and tell me about their breakups. They would tell me about a similar situation that they’d had, and that was a defining moment for me, because that sharing that happens when somebody hears a song that really resonates with them, and they feel compelled to come up and share with you something about their life, something personal - that forges a connection that doesn’t happen all the time. People don’t talk to each other about those things, and to give them the opportunity to talk about it is really important to me.

PAO: A lot of your material has to do with finding yourself, finding your own voice, not losing touch with one’s own identity, or the process of personal growth that comes from moving forward in life during or after relationships, or dealing with loss, or in the case of “Where the Light Is,” realizing you can’t save everyone. Would you say [that] as an artist, these are things that you struggle with?

EM: Absolutely. I write songs to make sense of the world. I don’t... Very rarely do I sit down and try and write ideas, to sit down and try and write something that I think will resonate with people. I usually sit down and write a song as a journal entry. There’s something about taking something as ugly as anger or helplessness or frustration or rejection and putting it to pretty words and a melody that makes it a little bit more worth it. Like, I wouldn’t wish the situation that inspired “Give a Damn” on anybody. It sucked. In every possible way it sucked. Um, heartbreak sucks. But... that song came out of it, and that song essentially launched this, and so I can’t regret it. And I think that the beauty of music for me is that it’s a manifestation of the idea that everything happens for a reason, like I go through these things for a reason, and I write about them for a reason, and then somebody else will come up to me and tell me that they’ve gone through something else and I’m like ok great if I can make somebody else feel less alone then maybe these horrible things that I deal with and then write about may not be so terrible after all. Like maybe that’s the point, is that we’re all in this together. It’s like the end of *High School Musical*. (*singing*) “We’re all in this together.”



PAO: What?

EM: It's the end of *High School Musical* - they do this number, it's called "We're All in This Together" (*laughs*). Really? You never saw *High School Musical*?

PAO: The closest I've come to a high school musical is *Grease*.

EM: Ah, that's a good one.

PAO: Although they let me down a little bit with the ending: Dress like a tramp and you get the guy.

EM: It was the fifties, man. You know. I mean, it works for me.

PAO: Really?

EM: No, not at all! (*laughs*).

PAO: Can I quote you on that? (*laughs*)

EM: No! (*laughs*) I mean yeah, but it's clearly sarcastic. You'll never find a picture of me baring cleavage. That just won't happen. I've never been interested in that side of the industry.

PAO: I've been playing some of the Lost Art recordings made of you. I'd forgotten that you did a song medley in the middle of "Your Fault." It's funny how well - how seamlessly - you integrate those into your music.

EM: Thank you.

PAO: If you didn't know the songs, you would never realize that they weren't your compositions.

EM: Thank you.

PAO: But with that having been said, when you mention [having] "Cover ADD," I think that your medleys show very well that the structure of a lot of popular songs is essentially the same...

EM: Mm hmm.

PAO: ... because you're able to segue from one to another without missing a beat. So as a songwriter would you say that you deliberately try to avoid those types of clichés and formulas, or do you embrace them?

EM: Um...

PAO: Or is it just whatever happens to come out in the middle of the night?

EM: That's a really good question. I had a theory teacher, actually, and this is kind of what started the medley thing, in addition to having seen... it was an artist from Boston named Sid who does something similar, and I... I remember watching him and thinking, "this is genius, I love it!" He did way more than just like the first verse and the chorus, like he went through multiple songs, and it was really cool to watch. And as a theory composition major, I knew that that was the basic structure, that it was 1, 4, 5, minor 6, and that was kind of the chords upon which most songs were built. But I had a piano, or a theory teacher, in college who was like, "all pop songs only have 1, 4, 5, and minor 6." So I make a point to throw in something with every song that I can that's not 1, 4, 5, or minor 6. Like whether it's a 7 chord, if it's a deceptive cadence, if I switch to a minor 2, if I modulate... I try to do something interesting, just so that people who do have a musical background can find something with which to identify as well.



PAO: As opposed to people like me, who have no idea what you're talking about! (smiles)

EM: (laughs)

PAO: You're speaking a foreign language.

EM: Ah, you know. Um, music is math. The chords have names, the scales have names. Most of them are numbers, and so... yeah. In essence it's math. But I do, is the answer to that, throw in things that are not 1, 4, 5, or minor 6, just to prove a point. "A Hundred Years" is basically a pop song, but there's a part in it where I have weird suspensions and chords that don't match, and...

PAO: I'll take your word for it.

EM: (laughs)

PAO: Where did you meet the other musicians who play on your CDs?

EM: Um, Kevin Hood - who plays vibes on "The Story" - I met through a thing called Camp Jam, where I taught rock music to kids. Um, funny story, Scott Hoying, whose band just won *The Sing-Off*, number three, was one of our students. Um, so I met Kevin through Camp

Jam, he played vibes; I met Guy Cramer through Martin, actually - I needed a drummer, and this guy was like... Martin was, like, "I know this great guy, Guy Cramer. He's really good, you'll like him." And so he came in and did the first record, and then when I did the second record he and I worked so well together that I was like, "let's bring him back." Um, Brittany Hendricks plays trumpet for me and she's been my best friend for a really long time, so...

PAO: Has she come to a show?

EM: Yes, she comes when she can. She is in a doctoral program in Alabama right now, so I go lecture for her kiddos. Yeah, and so she's a personal friend.

PAO: Sammy Blaze.

EM: Sammy Blaze is a friend as well. Sammy and I met at SMU Catholic - the two of us are both a big part of that ministry - and, um, we worked together on putting together a coffee shop called the Bean, which is something SMU Catholic puts on every Thursday for a month. We invite artists to come play, the kids hang out, and I would bake and he would, you know, make coffee, and he... we were sitting down at this thing that they have called Sunday Supper and he was talking about how he was looking for artists to play a coffee shop, and at this point none of them knew that I played music, but I was like, "I know a few musicians." And he was like, "Really? You know people?" And I was like, "yeah, I know a few!" (*laughs*). "I could maybe help you book that." Um, so I called some of my friends and they came out, and Sammy is like, "You didn't tell me you made music!" And then I found out that he raps - he's a Catholic rapper, and he's fantastic. He just released an album called *The Phoenix* - it's amazing. And the two of us were talking about collaborating, and I thought it would be really cool for "Someone to Be." And it worked out, I think, really well. I think he's quite talented.

PAO: What happened to the Bean?

EM: It still goes on. It's once a semester for a month. It's like four weeks of Thursdays.

PAO: But it's weekly for that month.

EM: Yeah, weekly for that month.

PAO: That explains it.

EM: Well, once the month is over we don't talk about it till the next semester.

PAO: Then there's Josh Cooley, of course.

EM: Yes, Josh was one of the first people I met doing this. I was writing in a Backstreet Boys notebook, and he sat down next to me and was like, "I like the Backstreet Boys," and I was like, "Really?" 'Cause people do that when they're being facetious. But Josh was genuine about it -



he was like, “No, I really do.” And we ended up talking about the Backstreet Boys and Matchbox Twenty and, you know... I walked out of that open mic and had a really long conversation with him and Steve Jackson about songwriting, and it was the first time I’d really sat down and had a conversation with musicians like myself about songwriting. Before it had just been something that I had done. And so that was really cool. It was a really cool experience. They’re really... I mean, you know Josh, he’s fantastically talented.

I try and explain the Dallas music scene to people who aren’t in it, and they’re like, “Wait, it can’t be that tight knit.” It’s such a wonderful family, like even in the fragments, it’s such a wonderful family. The people are so... so talented, ridiculously talented, but most of them, if not all, are also incredibly grounded and gracious and just good people to be around.

PAO: There was something that you touched on earlier that I wanted to go back to.

EM: Go for it.

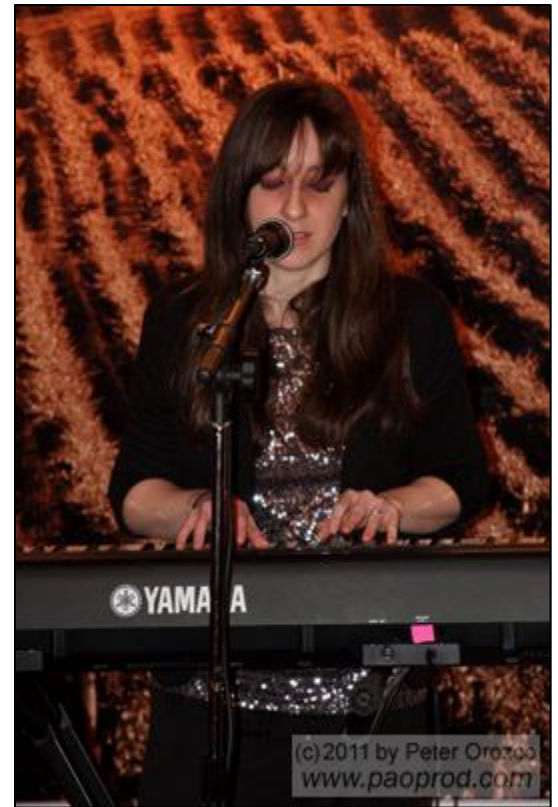
PAO: I’ve been to a lot of shows. In fact I used to be part of a group called the Deep Ellum Enrichment Project, which is what got me into the scene in the beginning, in late 2006. Their goal was to try to revitalize Deep Ellum. They never really met with any success, but one of the things that they tried to raise money was to hold... I don’t remember what they called it, but it was Tuesday nights at the Curtain Club. They got Whit [owner of the club] to agree to host a show and turn over all the profits to our organization after the sound guy had been paid. They did the best they could with it, but the first concert we put on, when Meat Goat played, it was four heavy metal bands, very low attendance, and when the last band played, Alex [Pogosov] pointed out to me that the audience was essentially zero. We had the five guys in the band, we had the sound guy, who didn’t count, we had a girlfriend and a wife of the band, and Alex and me, and that was it. And we didn’t count because we were part of the organization. So you’re always gonna have those kinds of nights...

EM: Oh yeah.

PAO: ... and I always really feel bad for the musicians when it’s one of those shows where it’s the band, their significant others, and their one or two best friends or maybe the other

bands in the audience. But you know, there are inevitably gonna be nights like that, where you're playing in a venue and either there's low attendance, or you're having to compete with something like a game on the television, or a loud hip hop group playing upstairs.

EM: I've played through so many playoff series at this point. Um, the beauty of that though, is, I as an artist, there is so much reward in having a situation like that where you're competing with a baseball game, or you're competing with a football game, or you're competing with a basketball game. When you can bring the audience in despite the fact that there's a game on television, that's an incredibly rewarding experience. And there are nights, yes, where you're only gonna play for the other bands, and the sound guy, and the bartenders, but if it's a brand new venue, these are people who have never seen you before, and regardless of how many people in the audience, as an artist, I believe that you have a responsibility to put on the best show you can. Because if you've never met those artists before, just the fact that they're musicians doesn't mean that they can't be fans, and they can't be friends. Every single person in the audience, regardless of their station or their job, is an opportunity to make a connection, a real, honest, meaningful connection with the music. And I think that when you stop looking at it that way and you start looking at it as "oh well you know we didn't bring anybody in," then yes it's really easy to get discouraged. But when you acknowledge the situation for what it is, which is an opportunity to connect with people, you're just gonna do what you have to do. You're gonna go up there and, you know, give them the best show you can because you wanna make that connection as meaningful as possible.



PAO: If you have those situations where your audience is distracted or inattentive, or you're having to compete with sports, or you're having to compete with a noisy group of people having a party in the corner of the room, or say you're booked with some type of totally dissimilar act like a metal band...

EM: Never happens! (*laughs*)

PAO: Of course not.

EM: (*laughs*) Never happens! I've never opened for the Gallows! (*laughs*) They're a fantastic band, they're great. They're just not my genre of music at all. I love their stuff, but we don't play the same style. They play an amplified washboard.

PAO: What advice would you give to somebody in that situation?

EM: The best advice I think you can give any musician in that situation is not to have a set list. And I realize that sounds really backwards. Bring a song list, don't bring a set list, because you cannot judge the way your audience is gonna react. You don't know who you're playing for until you get there, and different people are gonna like different stuff. And in a lot of cases, especially when I was playing with Lakewood Bar & Grill, I didn't know who I was opening for until I got there. And, I mean, I got there a few times and there were a bunch of tattooed, pierced, leathered metal fans in the audience and I was like, *oh great, you know, here I go, me and my flouncy brown curls, up to sing a bunch of pop songs for a bunch of metal fans.* And so it's... *(laughs)* Woo hoo! This is gonna go well! But in a really shocking turn, those were always really great audiences. They really enjoyed it. And I think that what you learn the more you do this is that you have a responsibility to put on a show for your crowd, and you have to figure out who your crowd is in order to put on the best show possible. A bunch of very tattooed, pierced leather fans are not going to enjoy "About a Boy." It's slow, it's melancholy, it's a very, like, Sarah McLachlan, Tori Amos kind of ballad. They're not gonna like it. But they're gonna be into "Shout." They're gonna like "The Fact of the Matter." And I think that... those were tricks that I didn't learn immediately. But I think that when you do this enough you start learning how to read an audience. And, I mean, you're there as entertainment, like, it's not their job to fawn over you, it's your job to entertain them, and you need to, you know, give an emotionally honest performance, figure out what you think they're gonna like, and share that with them. Give them an experience. You know? I will tell you this, though. Every single time I played Lakewood Bar & Grill I did "Up to the Mountain," even if there were metal fans in the audience. Every single time! *(laughs)*. Everybody needs a little gospel in their lives *(laughs)*.

PAO: While not a big fan of gospel music myself, I would concede that there are many, many cases of people working gospel themes, gospel sounds into other genres that work very well. I think a lot of it just depends on the artist.

EM: Yeah.



PAO: You can pull it off.

EM: Thank you. Thank you, I appreciate it. There's a great energy when you play something on stage. And I think that the beauty of being on stage and really owning that moment is that you have the freedom to do whatever you want, because as a musician there's no... nobody's recording it, well, most of the time *(laughs)*. Sometimes people are recording and you don't know! But, I

mean, most of the time, you don't feel you're gonna be beaten over the head with every mistake that you've made, you can just make it and make your peace with it and move on because you've got a whole host of other notes coming up that you better, you know, be on your game for. And I think I personally take a lot more risks live, especially vocally, than I do in the studio. I'll go for notes just, you know, for fun. I'll go for riffs for fun. I mean "Shout," the jazz version, is a really good example. I'll just riff, I'll spend five minutes, you know, playing around at the top of the scale just because that sounds like fun.

PAO: You do that on more than one song.

EM: That's true, I do. But I like to think that... I like to think that that's an experience for the audience as well, you know. 'Cause you do . . . I do make it a point to do the songs differently every time, like the riffs are different every time. Something in them is different.

PAO: The arrangement of some of the songs has changed since I first heard them.

EM: Mm hmm. Yeah. I just, I change it up for my own sanity. And also because there are days where you feel a song differently, where it's gonna hit you differently. It's the same with listening to a record - sometimes you're gonna listen to one song on a record and it's not gonna mean anything to you, and then maybe a month later you will have gone through something really, really, really parallel to that song. All of a sudden you're in that moment and the song is playing and you feel it more than you ever have before. And songs speak to me, the songs that I write speak to me differently. There is one in particular that I wrote about a friend situation, and later I went through the same situation, and all of a sudden the song had a totally different dimension to it.

PAO: Any song that I know?

EM: ...

PAO: Okay. We'll move on (*laughs*).

EM: I feel like I'm gonna get in trouble if I admit to that one (*laughs*).

PAO: Based on your own experiences...

EM: Yes...

PAO: ... what would you say, or what do you think is a good way to try to break into the scene for someone who's just starting out? Some people do open mics, some play coffee houses, some do Myspace and Facebook promotions, some do ReverbNation. You've done all of these, so if you were just starting out now, or someone were just starting out, what would your advice be?

EM: Open mics. Play wherever you can, whenever you can. Bust on the street. Like, seriously, because I don't think you're ready for a real show until you've played a few open mics, I just don't. I don't think you know how to work an audience, I don't think you know anything. Playing... and I know, because I played in front of a *lot* of stuffed animals before I ever played in front of people - not the same! (*laughs*) Playing to a closet full of clothes, not the same as playing in front of people! And some people are mean, and they're gonna be mean, and they're gonna say things, and they're gonna heckle, or they're not gonna listen, or they're gonna crack jokes, and it's much better to let that trip you up at an open mic than it is to actually schedule a show where a venue is expecting you to bring in people and expecting you to entertain them for two hours, and learn those things then. Like, had I not played open mics where people were watching the television, the first time I played at Lakewood Bar & Grill I would've been so confused. I would've been like "*Oh god I'm the worst artist ever! Nobody's looking at me!*" But it's not a reflection of you, it's a reflection of, like... if the basketball game is on, people are gonna watch the basketball game. It doesn't mean they're not gonna watch you, it means that they're gonna watch the basketball game. And rather than fight that, which is what my initial reaction would've been, I learned to incorporate it into the show: ask about the score, talk about what's going on. Then you bring 'em in, and then they become part of the conversation, and then they become part of the show.



And that for me is the most rewarding experience, is when you can make an audience part of the show, and I think that that's something that you learn from playing live. I don't think that you can learn that in any other way. Like, online promotion's great, but nobody's gonna care who you are if they've never seen you or heard of you. When you play an open mic you have the opportunity to network with artists, you have the opportunity to meet other people, and you have the opportunity to be there and make people care about what you do. You can't do that online. I mean, maybe you can with YouTube, but I think it's so much harder. And you don't get to go up to people and shake their hand, you know, introduce yourself, and meet them.

PAO: How important would you say that is to your success? Because out of all the musicians and artists and bands that I know, I can name every person that I know who does that.

EM: Wow.

PAO: Really?

EM: You mean that comes offstage and like shakes people's hands?

PAO: Talks to people, gets to know people, remembers people's names, makes them feel like they're a part of something, shows their appreciation for coming... Very few artists in Dallas do that.

EM: Really? I get teased a lot because I say things like "we," like *we* released a record. People are like, "Who is *we*? It's just you!" (*laughs*) "What do you mean *we*?" But I wouldn't get to do this without all the people who are supportive. If people didn't come to shows, I wouldn't have a career. If people didn't buy the record, I wouldn't have a career. And really... it sounds cliché, but the input that people give has a lot to do with what goes on the record and what doesn't. I *hated* "Give a Damn." I wasn't gonna play it *anywhere*, but people told me that they liked it and so it went on a record. I felt the same way about "Where the Light Is." I didn't ever want to play that song live, ever. It killed me. I didn't play it for the first few months after I wrote it because I couldn't play it without crying. And... and I played it for somebody and they were like, "You have to play this song, you can't *not* play it."

PAO: If it affects you that much, it'll affect other people as well.

EM: Yeah, yeah. And the songs that are most personal are the hardest to play, but they're the most rewarding to play because they hit people the hardest. And I wouldn't know those things without the audience that I've been blessed with. It floors me that there are as many people that come to shows as there are. It floors me that there are people who are as dedicated as there are. I mean, when we first came... Well, when I first proposed the loyalty card idea to Mandy she was like, "Do you really think people are gonna come to ten shows?" and I was like, "I don't know, maybe! Wouldn't that be cool if they did?" And there are people who have come to twenty, thirty... like, it's ridiculous! I can't... I pinch myself all the time. And so it doesn't make sense to me *not* to go up to people and thank them, because I don't have any of this without them. I don't get to do what I love if people don't come. So... I mean, "*fans*" feels like such a weird term to use - I mean, they're friends to me. You know this. We go off to... We go out after shows and hang out, or we sit on the sidewalk and I talk to people, and I mean, the stories are, their stories are important to me. Learning who they are is important to me. I... I don't know. I guess this part of me has a really, a lot of trouble believing that there are real people who are truly interested in this (*laughs*). So it's... no it's, it's really cool. I mean, I had to fight my parents



like nobody's business to do this. So I kind of expect to go into everything fighting, and the fact that I don't have to fight people to listen is a wonderful shock.

PAO: Well, on that note...

EM: Mm hmm. Go for it.

PAO: In your on stage banter, you mention often that you're the offspring of a CPA and a tax attorney.

EM: Yup.

PAO: So, that being said, and [given] the fact that you were a mathlete in high school...

EM: I was.

PAO: ... what made you want to play music?

EM: What made we want to play music? Um, I can't remember a time when I didn't wanna play music. I think a lot of people go in to college and they're, you know, they find themselves, and they decide what they want, or they get out of college and they still have no idea. Um, I knew when I was really little and Whitney Houston came out with *The Bodyguard*, and I remember watching her music video on TV where she's sitting in the folding chair singing "I Will Always Love You," which is... you know, elbows on her knees, just bent over, belting out a song like it's "*oh you know, a normal Tuesday, this is what I do, I go floor people with my voice,*" and, you know, that's what happens. And I... I wanted to do that. I wanted to write songs and, like, I wanted to do that. I wanted to play for people like that. And, when I was little, when most people were playing with Barbies I would set up stuffed animal orchestras and conduct them, which my parents loved 'cause it meant that there were stuffed animals all over the floor. So this is also why, when I decided I wanted to do music, they were... and they were like, "Really, music? Really? Really?" I would [say], "Do you think other kids did this?" (*laughs*) "That was a sign to you, maybe?"

I... so I guess the short answer is that I can't remember a time when it wasn't in my life. There were so many times where I've put on a record and felt better about something, and I think that music does that for a lot of people, and I think that it saved my life in a very real way. And I've felt called to give back to it... to the music, what it had given to me. Which was, you know, hope and faith and now a really great community of friends and family. I mean, we really do have a family of people who come to the shows and they... It's incredible, but it's such a cool thing because it's a family that we all chose. And there's so much power in that. It's just such a cool thing to see, and to even be a part of it is a blessing. It's really, really cool.

PAO: You're a classically trained pianist, isn't that right?

EM: I am.

PAO: On the albums you've also played bass, cello, and you played guitar.

EM: I have, yes.

PAO: What else do you play?

EM: Flute. I play drums. I play... oh, kazoo. I play a really mean kazoo (*laughs*). Uh, what else do I play? I play bass, I play drums, I play guitar, I play flute, uh, keyboard... I played violin for a semester in elementary school. I wish I'd kept up with it. Now I can fake it, but not well. Um... I constantly want to learn new instruments, though. Like I would *love* to learn how to play sax. I think that would be *sick*. I'd love it. Um, and I'd love to play the upright bass, but I'm not tall enough. So I'd have to stand on a stool, which would be really awesome, and not at all awkward to watch.

PAO: It would be memorable, though.

EM: Y'know, yeah (*laughs*). Yes it would be.

PAO: It would be a good thing. The streets would be abuzz before you know it.

EM: Remember that tiny girl who sat on a stool? (*laughs*) Little Girl, Big Stool.

PAO: When you write songs, is it primarily on guitar, or is it on keyboard?

EM: No, actually. Um, I write words first, which is weird for most people. But I write words with melody. There's a melody in the words as I'm writing the words, and then I sit down at the piano and figure out exactly what that sounds like. And I'll figure out what key it's in, and I'll play on that riff, see what I like, see what speaks to me, and then I'll kind of put it together. I've changed genres, so... and songs take different directions. "Mine" was not supposed to be a happy song. It was supposed to be this really sad song about being lonely. And "Apathetic" is a pop song, but if you listen to the lyrics, it's not a happy song at all. Um, I enjoy musical tricks like that. I enjoy doing something musically that makes people listen more than once.



PAO: You don't really have any really, really sad songs. I can only think of one. Because there's usually a little bit of humor in your sad songs.

EM: (*laughs*) Or in the intro of the sad songs, yeah.

PAO: That's true. Always in the intro.

EM: Yeah.

PAO: You don't really write anything that's really, could really be characterized as sad. "You Every Time" is the only one I can think of.

EM: That is a sad song. It needs the right kind of venue. You can't play that song in a bar, I mean you can, but you... people cry. Um, drunk people cry, which is just depressing. And not cute.

PAO: You have a little sardonic humor in most of your songs, or there's a little twist to it, or there's sort of an undercurrent of mirth in it.

EM: Thank you.

PAO: Would you say that as a musician, it's your responsibility to try to uplift the audience?

EM: I don't know if "uplift the audience" is the right way to put it. I think that as a musician I have the responsibility to say something important and to deliver a message in which I believe. I'm not gonna go write a song about getting trashed and finding, you know, guys on the street, stripping for them, you know, throwing a party in which people puke in my closet, like that's not gonna happen because I don't think that that's a good way to spend a Saturday night. And I think that those songs are fun, I think that they have a place in pop music, I don't think that I feel like I'd be saying anything real if I did that. It's really important for me to... try and say something honest, and I think that hope is an important undercurrent. And if not hope, closure and peace. "Where the Light Is" isn't a happy song, but I put it in a major key to combat that. And the melody goes up pretty frequently. And I think musically I did that so I could try and weave hope into the feeling of helplessness. 'Cause sometimes the hardest things to do are the things that are gonna give you the most peace. It's just the doing of them that's difficult. Kind of a roundabout way to answer that question. There you go.

"Nothing Magic in the Water" is sad, too. I don't know if there's any hope in that one (*laughs*). Like, it's just, *sad*.

PAO: But it's not as unremittingly sad...

EM: As "You Every Time?" (*laughs*)

PAO: That actually was the first recording I heard of you...

EM: Really? Huh.

PAO: ... before I even had the CD. It was on ReverbNation, or somewhere...

EM: Yeah. It was on Myspace, way back in the day.

PAO: Oh no, by the time I met you I was pretty much done with Myspace.

EM: All right, then I... yeah, then I think it's on ReverbNation. In fact I'm pretty sure it's a free download.

PAO: So tell me about the Crown and Harp. How did you come to host an open mic there?

EM: Um, I have this really great friend, Chris, who runs the *Ghost of Blind Lemon* blog in Dallas, and he called me and said, "Hey I'm booking for this really cool venue called the Crown and Harp. They're looking for an open mic host. Would you be willing to do that?" And I was like, "Yeah, absolutely. Let me know." And so he gave my number to a friend of his named Neil who runs the Crown and Harp, and he called me and said he was looking to do a singer/songwriter night, and we made it happen. I feel like every success in this industry happens because you know somebody. And the only way you're gonna know somebody is if you get out and play the open mics (*laughs*).

PAO: Do you teach students regularly?

EM: Yes.

PAO: Private lessons?

EM: Mm hmm. I teach private lessons in piano and voice.

PAO: So if someone wanted to reach you, how would they do it?

EM: emmelinemilesmusic@gmail.com. Yeah. E-mail is the best way.

PAO: What does the future hold for Emmeline?

EM: Immediately? Um, this Friday I'll be at Dunn Bros Coffee in Addison, TX from 8 to 10 PM (*smiles*).

PAO: I think by the time anyone reading this sees that... (*laughs*).

EM: (*laughs*). Um, hopefully more shows. I... the CD release this year was twice as big as the CD release last year.



PAO: And the one last year got a couple favorable reviews in the *Dallas Morning News*.

EM: Yeah, and this year the record got a favorable review in the *Dallas Morning News* and I was... I couldn't believe it, I was so excited. I didn't really... This record is a departure, and I acknowledge that. I don't know if it was the right direction or the wrong direction in which to go but it was the direction that felt right, and so that was where I went, and it felt right for this record. I can't speak for the next record.

PAO: Are there plans for a full length release?

EM: There are, actually! Funny you should mention, we're going to begin work on the full length in January and it should be done by November of next year. I had somebody tell me that they thought that the November release parties should be a yearly tradition, so that's the challenge. I think that's what I'm gonna try and live up to, is to release a record a year, be it an EP or a full length, and just kinda keep the music coming. It's, it's been a blessing, and it really makes sense for me to put it on Thanksgiving because this is consistently the thing in my life for which I am most thankful.

The music is... if you listen to the songs you'll know this... the music is the one thing in my life that is so beautifully imperfect, but it has gone so well, and I, I don't have any control over that. I work as hard as I can and that's what I do. I just keep my nose to the grindstone and hope good things happen. But the outpouring of support from this community, the way people have treated it, the warmth with which people have greeted the songs and remembered them and sung along, it's, it's been incredible. And I, I hope it continues. I hope I can keep entertaining people, I hope people can keep enjoying it, and I hope it can keep getting bigger. I hope we can reach more people and our family can grow even more, and... I've been really blessed and I hope it continues. Um, so for the future, we're going on tour. We're hitting more cities now. We're going outside of Texas, which is really cool. People are paying us to play, which is the most

fantastically hysterical thing ever. Um, it's like *wow I might actually get to do this for full time!* Um, yeah, just more music, more, hopefully more people. The more the merrier. I love our little family. I hope it gets bigger. What does the future hold for you, Peter?

PAO: Oh, let's not go there! (laughs) Is there anything else you'd like to add?

EM: You've become a huge part of our family, and I'm very grateful for you.

IHOP, 12/1/2011

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