

Swiss Songbird Emilie Weibel Presents Her Debut Album, *Omoo*, a Beguiling Journey into Multi-Layered Melody and Rhythm

Omoo – to be released on May 17, 2014, via Inner Circle Music – features Weibel the solo vocalist and soundscape artist in lovely original songs and fresh interpretations of Wayne Shorter’s “Footprints” and Reynaldo Hahn’s “L’heure exquise”

“Weibel – with an assortment of entrancing lo-fi electronics, loop devices, a cheap music box and voice effects – creates minimalist vocal magic, occasionally with a honeyed backdrop of Stereolab-like la-la’s but always with an aesthetic all her own that is downright otherworldly.”

– The Village Voice

Singer **Emilie Weibel** – whom *The Village Voice* calls “a subtle songbird with a mesmerizing presence and a DIY ethos” – releases her debut solo album, *Omoo*, on **May 17, 2014**, on CD and download via **Greg Osby’s Inner Circle Music** label. With *Omoo*, Weibel has created a confection of sound, where the invention and accessibility of the best art-pop mixes with the improvisational fluidity of jazz. Born and bred in Lausanne, Switzerland, but now resident in Brooklyn, Weibel sings in English and French, with her expressive vocals atop loops, beats and soundscapes of her own devising. Along with her winsome originals, she interprets jazz great Wayne Shorter’s classic “**Footprints**,” adding her own lyrics to the infectious melody. Weibel also covers the lullaby-like “**L’heure exquise**” by early 20th-century Venezuelan-French songwriter Reynaldo Hahn, a favorite of Proust. You can see the video for “L’heure exquise” here:

<http://vimeo.com/87930301>. Osby, contemporary saxophone star and director of Inner Circle Music, says about Weibel: “Emilie has successfully defined a new category for vocal performance art. With *Omoo*, she presents a **world of color and possibilities**, while simultaneously raising the bar for solo vocal sound-shaping and improvisation. Her music is amazing at once, and better still after successive listens. **It’s impossible to not be moved.**”

On **May 22**, at 8:00 p.m., Weibel will celebrate the release of *Omoo* with a performance in the beautiful, acoustically ideal 100-year-old hall of the **Greenwich House Music School** in New York City’s West Village, as part of the Sound It Out series in a double-bill with Sara Serpa. (For listings information on the concert, go to <https://www.facebook.com/events/612659575483003>.) The May 22 concert will be Weibel’s second solo performance in the Sound It Out series at Greenwich House, and she has also performed at such New York venues as the Stone, Glasslands, IBEAM, Nublu and the Brooklyn Museum. On **June 11**, at 9:30 p.m., Weibel will perform on Stage 3 at **Rockwood Music Hall** on the Lower East Side, and on **June 24**, at 8:30 p.m., she will make a return engagement at the **Cornelia Street Café** in the West Village. Later this summer, Weibel will be touring Europe on behalf of *Omoo*.

On stage as on the album, Weibel’s *Omoo* performances see the singer go fully solo, her voice in play with a sampler, live looping and a customized music box. She titled the album after a book by an American literary obsession of hers, one with multiple resonances with her work. **Weibel says:** “I took the title of my solo project from Herman Melville’s book *Omoo* – the title means ‘island wanderer,’ or ‘rover.’ Melville traveled alone and loved nature, and he was a writer who gave voice to outcasts – immigrants, sailors, women, even slaves. The lyrics of my songs are about travel, freedom, solitude and humanism, and the songs have a lot to do with my experience living on my own far from home, as well as the challenge of being a solo performer. **Being solo means you have to see things with your own eyes, hear with your own ears.** The music also has a lot to do with my experience of nature, particularly the Swiss landscape – like Lake Geneva, which is a beautiful place and where I recorded some soundscapes I use on stage. Nature can bring you to another state of mind.”

Weibel has had a group of high-profile mentors in New York. One of the most influential on her has been rising-star singer Sara Serpa, who has recorded multiple albums with jazz icon Ran Blake and leading her own ensembles, as well as working with Osby. About Weibel and *Omo*, Serpa says: “I watched Emilie’s music evolve since its performance and am very happy to have witnessed the evolution of an amazingly creative artist. I love her inspiration from literature and the atmospheres she creates with the beats, voice and poems. **Everything Emilie does has a lot of thought and love put into it – that’s why her music is so special.**” Another key mentor is saxophonist Darius Jones, a questing and prolific figure on the New York avant-jazz scene who has invited her to sing at his shows and open for him with her *Omo* music. “Hearing Emilie for the first time was like finding a rare jewel,” Jones says. **“She has this quality that reminds me of magic and innocence poured into wine.** There is something so fearless in her artistry. Her music is like stumbling into another universe that you don’t want to leave. I’m a fan.”

Weibel grew up in the French part of Switzerland, singing along to her mother’s jazz and French pop records. She first came to New York in 2006 to study with trumpeter Ralph Alessi at the School for Improvisational Music, learning **to compose through improvisation.** She eventually got a scholarship to study music and literature at the City College of New York, and she also studied with influential vocalists Gretchen Parlato and Jen Shyu. Further inspirations for Weibel’s sound range from exploratory pop artisans like Björk, Tune-Yards, Goldfrapp, Camille and Ghanian-Swiss singer Oy to such jazz figures as Betty Carter, Abbey Lincoln, Shirley Horn, Andy Bey and Theo Bleckmann. Weibel even incorporates her love of the sounds of nature when discussing certain singers. “When I hear Goldfrapp, it evokes weird, dreamy fairy sounds from the forest,” Weibel says. “Even a singer like Betty Carter I hear as animalistic. **I think about animal sounds when I sing, too – birds and other creatures, the sounds they make.**”

The first track on *Omo* is the alternately ghostly, grooving **“Lemania,”** which is Weibel’s made-up name for the area around Lake Geneva. “I come up with a lot of ideas for songs when I’m walking in the forest or in the mountains,” Weibel explains. “Nature can be soothing and scary at the same time. There’s a peaceful energy in the mountains, where it envelops you and you become part of it. But it changes quickly.” Another sort of nature song is the tune-rich **“Hello, Léa,”** which sees Weibel create a female analog to the archetypal wild man of Enkidu in the ancient *Epic of Gilgamesh*, “someone who lives among the animals in the forest.” Weibel came up with **“Paola”** while hiking in the Alps, with the slow-burning rhythm mirroring her walking pace; it’s a song about women and relationships, Weibel says, “about how I’d like to be a survivor, independent of heart and mind.” A sighing, sultry mélange of the urban and the bucolic, **“River Song”** is about “finding home wherever you are,” the singer says. “It’s for my mother, because she’s always trying to find the perfect place to live – she’s restless. I recorded soundscapes for that on a Sunday in Prospect Park, in my new home of Brooklyn. There’s a kind of ‘river of sounds’ there in the park.”

Loving Wayne Shorter’s evergreen **“Footprints,”** Weibel was inspired by Gretchen Parlato’s wordless, vocalese rendition, as well as pianist Marc Copland’s arrangement of the tune. She decided to put her own lyrics to the piece, the words about “forgiveness.” Her version is as magical a re-creation of a classic as one could imagine. The other cover on the album is Reynaldo Hahn’s beautiful *mélodie* **“L’heure exquise”** to lyrics by poet Paul Verlaine. Weibel got to know the song while studying classical voice and listening to a recording by mezzo-soprano Susan Graham, another vocal love. “The title translates as ‘The Exquisite Hour,’ or the special moments when you’re with someone you love and it’s beautiful all around you,” Weibel explains. “It’s a very romantic song. I liked the rocking rhythm of the piano accompaniment – it sounds like a lullaby to me, so I thought it would be ideal to sing it with a music box.”

Weibel explains her playful original **“Tu Dis (To My Dad)”** this way: “My father had been a navigator and sailboat builder but opened a restaurant later in life – a dream of his. He’s a great cook, like his grandmother, who had a restaurant. My parents were worried about my path in life as an artist, but once my dad heard the dedication in my music, he encouraged me to follow my own dream. He even helped me build my music box.” The album’s gently polyrhythmic title track, **“Omo,”** reflects the Melville story of a loner, a solitary traveler in search of freedom, with Weibel connecting to the character in her own solitary journey as a solo performer. “To perform solo like this, you’re sort of naked on stage,” she says. “It takes a

lot of practice to sustain an audience's interest, to focus a listener's energy with your own energy. For the soundscape of this song, I went to Coney Island to record the sound of the ocean's waves and the ambience of people. I fell off a rock on the shore when I was hit by a wave – you can hear me cry out on the record!"

In addition to her solo *Omoo* project, Weibel has a duo with drummer-producer Jason Nazary in gestation. Weibel has also performed or recorded with Scott Tixier's String Theory, Joe Phillips' Numinous Ensemble, Foldersnack, Blonde Valhalla, Molly Herron's Pretty Machines and Keiichi Murata's Sangatsu. Weibel has shared the stage not only with the likes of Sara Serpa and Darius Jones but also Lonnie Plaxico, Gerald Cleaver, Devin Gray and Jean Carla Rodea, among many others.

A review of a recent *Omoo* performance by John Osburn speaks to the rare charms of Emilie Weibel: "What is striking about her is that she travels light, just her voice, a looper, a sampler, a few essentials to connect the devices to the speakers, a book of poetry by Mallarmé and a homemade music box with a player strip she punched herself. She uses the looper to accompany her own voice with itself and build layers of sound live and mostly in the moment. **The effect is exceptionally delicate at times, playfully idiosyncratic, and sometimes stirring**, a sort of musical bricolage that reminded me of everything from the Symbolist poets, to Dada and the Futurists, the onomatopoeic conceits and childlike fancies of "The Banquet Years" and, given the technology she was using, the eccentricities of more recent artists in the vein of Björk. The fruitful irony of all these associations is that **they add up to something original rather than borrowed.**"

Emilie Weibel: Omoo

1. "Lemania"
2. "Footprints"
3. "Paola"
4. "Tu Dis (To My Dad)"
5. "L'heure exquise"
6. "River Song"
7. "Omoo"
8. "Hello Léa"

Emilie Weibel: vocals, music box, percussion, electronics, keyboard, xylophone

All music and lyrics by Emilie Weibel, except for track #2 (Wayne Shorter/Emilie Weibel) and track #5 (Reynaldo Hahn/Paul Verlaine).

Recorded by Emilie Weibel at Nikita Recording Studio, Brooklyn. Additional recording, mixing and mastering by Dave Darlington at Bass Hit Recording, NYC.

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