

## THERE'S NO OTHER RAY

*She's the rockabilly up-and-comer who likes a bit of knife-play and dresses as though recently arrived from another era. But beneath the trappings Gemma Ray has a lot to say.*

*Jennifer Guay, 05 Oct 2012*



**Gemma Ray is full of quirks. For instance, she plays guitar with a carving knife.**

"Most things I do are born from a combination of laziness and lack of stimuli," laughs Ray, who holsters the blade into the neck of her instrument and pulls it out during performances to create a dramatic droning sound. Ray discovered the effect experimenting with her guitar at home.

"I just grabbed a kitchen knife because it looked like the longest thing made of metal," she says. "Now, I ask people to lend me knives at every venue. It isn't exactly something you bring on a plane!"

There has, she admits, been the occasional mishap.

"I was in Oslo doing a show once, and I kind of threw the knife up in the air and caught it in a euphoric moment. The blade went straight into my hand. At the time, I was so pumped up I didn't notice. After the last song I passed out and had to go to the hospital."

After a similar move at Austin's SXSW, the songstress cut her hand next to the original scar.

"I'm very accident-prone!" she laughs again.

The 31-year-old pop noir warbler has just released her fourth record, *Island Fire*. It's eclectic to say the least. Ray flits between surf pop, retro cabaret, sci-fi psychedelia, shimmering ballads, brooding folk, orchestral alt. rock and a myriad other styles and genres.

"I don't really start writing with a theme or genre in mind, because I don't like to restrict the songs. I like to keep it mysterious. When I write a song, I tend to become a servant to it. It naturally leads to another one."

Ray attributes her unique approach to songwriting and recording to her unusual musical upbringing. She never took formal lessons, and hardly listened to music growing up. Her first influence was Buddy Holly. After that she discovered Leonard Cohen, Nick Cave and The Beach Boys.

"I felt my way around blindfolded, which helped me develop my own style," she explains. As a young girl, she fell in with an older crowd of musicians who exposed her to a variety of genres. Her three most-listened-to albums are an LP of old prison and chain gang songs, Bo Diddley Is A Gungslinger, and a Peggy Lee LP. The last, in particular,

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perfectly fits Ray's campy, '50s and 60s-inspired persona.

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"I don't want to look like I'm living in the past. I'm often drawn to vintage clothing worn by people from past eras." Her tone turns more serious when she's asked about 'I Can See You', a mysterious, emotionally engrossing song.

"It's the most personal track on the record," she explains. "It's about Greece, and missing someone. The way I see it, once you write a song you're giving away your own story, and it becomes someone else's. Consciously, I keep my lyrics very ambiguous, and it's interesting to see how other people interpret them."

Island Fire is out now.

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