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## Unplugged

*With her sophomore full-length album due out next summer, folk-rock songstress Nadine Khouri breaks down how London life and Lebanese roots fuse musically*

Slide into Nadine Khouri's world of sound; its rush of vocals, drums and guitar will embrace you. The 26-year-old London-based folk rocker mixes her unique blend of influences from life in the US and UK with lyrical and melodic references to her Lebanese origin.

**When did you first get behind a microphone?**

The first time I got up behind a mic was with my high school rock band. The memory is kind of a blur... I remember I broke a string and people danced to our cover of "Badge" by Cream. It wasn't until I was 19 that I really started performing my own songs in public.

**What's changed since the days of singing in university cafes in the US?**

After making my first album, I learned a great deal about the process of recording and songwriting – something I've always done, but never considered as a form. I think that working with other people made me more aware of my strengths and weaknesses as a musician, so I'm always trying to push my own boundaries, but also remain true to my instincts... I don't really have a set formula. In a lucky sitting, the bulk of a song will come in one go; other times it'll be a melody without words. Ideas usually spring from something that feels out of the ordinary. Or something that grabs my attention.

**You take a stand in "Wail" [on 2005's *Cuts from the Inside*] against what a lot of young Arab 20-somethings see as the essence of Beirut - its superficiality and party scene. What is the real Beirut to you?**

I don't think my intention was to depict the partying as solely superficial in "Wail". It was more about the self-destructiveness and escapist abandon – and I don't think either comes from a superficial place, although I can certainly see a lot of artifice and superficiality all around... Beirut, in my heart, is far from being superficial. It's certainly hedonistic and reckless, but even in that lunacy there is something deeper at work.

**Where were you during the war this summer? Any musical inspiration from the total upheaval?**

I was in London watching it unfold on TV. It was horrible... I don't really have words to express how I felt... A couple of pieces surfaced in that time. One's called "Incessant Hum" and the other "Age of Midnight". I haven't yet decided if they will feature on the album or on a separate EP.

**When is your next album coming out and what can we expect from it?**

It'll be self-produced... [like *Cuts*]. What to expect? Much bigger songs. Bigger voice. More atmospheric and more guitar. ...DIY can be stressful, torturous, liberating, and spontaneous all at the same time.

**What do you listen to when you want to**

**...chill?** Amina, Billie Holiday, Low, Four Tet, Chet Baker.

**...get hyper?** Sonic Youth, Yeah Yeah Yeahs, Prince.

**...walk around London?** Whatever new thing I've just downloaded.

**If you could perform with any artist, living or dead, who would it be?**

Elvis.