

NEW WHEELS, NEW MUSIC

Folk songstress **Olivia Awbrey** has a love affair with writing. Like any relationship, there are good times and bad times, times when moving seems easier than staying, and growing together is a key to success. Awbrey's been forced to make some changes since her days as frontwoman for Small Joys, a folk-rock group that enjoyed the winning slot at WOW Hall's 2013 Bandest of the Bands competition. Her latest EP, *New Wheels*, is an intimate look at the changes she's undergone.

"I was focused on not shying away from personal issues," Awbrey says. "I was writing [songs] about Small Joys breaking up, I had just moved and I was going through a personal break up, too. So there was a ton of huge changes that all happened at the same time. It's kind of a breakup EP."

After leaving Eugene and moving to Portland, Awbrey bought herself a new bike, hence the new wheels title. It's an obvious metaphor. When Small Joys formed, Awbrey was quiet and shy in her ambitions. The songs were beautiful, the lyrics sound, but they lacked the energy that eventually came from working with a band. Four years later she's confident, ambitious and unafraid to bare her soul. The EP has a bonus track called "The Fifth of July" that Awbrey says was one of the most emotional things she's written.

"It was really a demo," she says. "I recorded it a week after writing it and it was so new and so raw. It's definitely the most emotional because it most directly relates to a breakup I had and another physically traumatizing thing that happened to me over the summer."

Someone once said that all emotion is good emotion, and in Awbrey's case that smacks of truth. Pouring her soul out through a pen has been great for this chanteuse, and going it alone has been all the better.

"Small Joys was a folk band with some electric instruments," she says. "That was fun, and I was leading, but it was also really driven by all the members. I kind of let [my bandmates] take the helm a lot of the time. I'd write the songs but they would direct things and I kind of just stood back. Now I feel like I'm taking ownership over what I'm making, and I feel really confident in it. It's brought out some really vibrant music that I didn't know how to write before."

So she's a grower, but she's also a show-er. Awbrey plans to play 150 shows this year. At this rate, there's no telling how tall she'll stand in another five years. Keep your eyes peeled, Eugene, Olivia Awbrey is one to watch.

Olivia Awbrey plays with **Ryan Davidson** and **Wanderers & Wolves** 9 pm Saturday, Jan. 31, at Tiny Tavern; by donation. 21-plus. — *Andy Valentine*



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