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## SUZANNA CHOFFEL

POISED AT THE  
EDGE OF AN AXIOM



# Suzanna Choffel

Poised at the **Edge** of an Axiom

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**SUCCESSFUL MUSICIANS CAN BE DEFINED BY A PAIR OF NEARLY IMMUTABLE AXIOMS. THE FIRST REQUIREMENT STATES THAT SUSTAINED SUCCESS REQUIRES A CONSTANT DRIVE TOWARD PROGRESSIVE CHANGE. THE SECOND STATES THAT THE BEST MUSICIANS ARE THOSE WHO CAN REMAIN TRUE TO AN AUTHENTIC ARTISTIC VISION. SUZANNA CHOFFEL IS ONE MUSICIAN WHO, UPON EVEN A GLANCE, SEEMS POISED TO PROPEL INTO ARENAS OF EXPRESSION AND EXPOSURE EXTENDING FAR BEYOND THE LIMITS OF HER CENTRAL TEXAS HOME.**

An Austin native, Choffel performed her first singing gig when she was 14 years old, sitting in with established players at the Saxon Pub. Her mother purchased Suzanna's first guitar for her when Choffel was suffering from a teenage breakup. Whatever Choffel lost by way of love is our gain – her playing is at turns polished and delightfully raw, aggressively rhythmic, crafty and melodic. She was able to follow her musical drive through years of formal training and has, in the process, developed a strong, workwoman-like ethic to developing a solid musical career.

Self-released in 2006, Choffel's debut album, *Shudders and Rings*, provides 12 tracks of introspective and relaxed tones. Spacious arrangements and

exacting, encompassing production place Choffel's voice at the forefront of the mix where it flirts with vibraphones, lightly brushed drums, and electronic accents. The majority of the album's songs evoke pleasant rainy day moodiness. The album is a strong entry, and it quickly garnered wide critical and fan praise. Not content to rest on her laurels and far too restless to follow any tried-and-true formula, Choffel soon began thinking about developing more permanent collaborations. "I feel like my first album was me a lot younger. I wrote a lot of those songs when I was 20 or 21, in college or just getting out into the real world, feeling a little bit jaded but also hopeful about the future." With a refined perspective and keen maturity, Choffel began a progressive reinvention of her musical approach. She engaged outside musicians into an established band and moved away from acoustic-based folk and into the more electric, bouncy motifs that characterize her current sound. "Suddenly I shifted. I was like, 'This isn't what I want.' I want to play electric guitar and I want to have a funky, bad-ass band. That was kind of what I always pictured."

Choffel specifically wanted to work with hardcore, professional musicians. To that end, she first hooked up with drummer Eldridge Gloins. "Eldridge is one of those people who has his finger on the pulse of the city music scene," Choffel explains. "He knows every-freaking-body around." After experimenting with Gloins and a short series of bassists, Choffel chose Johnny Vogelsang. With a basic trio established, Choffel began thinking





about instrumentation. "I definitely had a vision that I didn't want to have a crazy lead guitar player who was just like, wailing over everybody. I'd seen that so much growing up in Austin. I've always been very much more attracted to jazz instrumentation: horns, piano, vibraphone, stuff like that." To that end, Choffel and Gloins invited Brad Houser to play baritone sax. Feeling that the final piece needed for the completion of her musical puzzle was the addition of a permanent vibraphone to the group, Choffel contacted Laura Scarborough, whom she had admired for some time. "When we approached her, I was worried she wasn't going to like me. She listened to *Shudders and Rings* and she, like, *loved* it. She said, 'I'm in, let's try it.'" Weekly gigs in spring of 2008 allowed the band to develop a natural approach to the arrangement of Choffel's newer songs. "I completely trust them. That's the beauty of this band, that they're all such badasses. We just gel so well."

What has resulted from the collaboration is a more varied sound that pushes elements of atmospheric soul and rock more to the forefront. The shift has not gone unnoticed. 2008 has been exceptionally busy for Choffel and her strong presence playing shows in Austin has been joined by exposure much further afield. Choffel and Gloins spent the summer representing their home turf on a "Texas on Tour" romp at state fairs across the country sponsored by Texas' Tourism board. Choffel recalls "I called it 'The Carry Tour.' I definitely ate my fair share of funnel cakes and corn dogs...and then came back and got a personal trainer!" A tour with the full band through the Southwest in fall of 2008 was punctuated by a rapid-fire "three coasts in two weeks" run, with gigs played in Los Angeles, the CMJ Music Marathon & Film Festival in New York City and the South Padre International Music Festival in Texas. Choffel was a top ten finalist in a recent *Cosmopolitan* magazine online contest called Star Launch: Search for the Next Fun, Fearless Female Rock Star, and that parlayed into over 350,000 hits on YouTube for her live video "Raincloud."

Negotiating the demands of this intense schedule has caused Choffel and the band to spend perhaps more time than originally imagined on the recording and refinement of their new album. Many of the songs for the new record were laid down earlier in 2008 at Gloins' Mixorama studio. Choffel expresses overall happiness with the results, but the necessities of tours and travel allowed her time to revisit the production on certain tracks. "I'm suddenly a lollygagger," she chuckles. The new album is expected to drop in Spring of 2009. "There's something that I like to call 'janky' production," Choffel explains, "where you allow things to naturally... happen...in the recording process, and then you don't necessarily go back and redo things. I feel like my first album ended up categorizing me as a subdued folk singer, which is not something I ever really was aiming for." Choffel expects that the new record will expose her to a wider audience, and plans to begin shopping the work around for possible label support once the final product is closer at hand.

If adherence to the axioms gives any indication, then the extra time spent refining her approach will solidify Choffel and Co.'s position on that upwardly marching slope of success. With an insistence on authenticity and following a work ethic that borders on obsessive, Choffel can expect the future to yield very sweet fruits indeed. **am+e**

