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Danielle French – Dark Love Songs

Cyrus Rhodes 2 August 8:29



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URL: <http://www.daniellefrench.com/>

Canadian native Danielle French has a musical and performing talent cutting across multiple genre lines. There is a great deal of Renaissance and Celtic flavored folk, but there's likewise a smattering of blues, pop, and even rock and roll powering the nine song release. French is unafraid to experiment with ambient structures some and her dabbling is never without purpose – it adds immeasurably to key selections. The production quality has impressive uniformity but also a specificity on each track elevating them to signature parts of a larger and greater whole. It's really a skillful balancing act and extends even further. None of the songs play as some spotlight moment towering over the rest – instead, French aims for home runs on every song and doesn't miss once. It's a memorable feat.

It begins with "Last Goodbye". French's music has a distinctly theatrical, plotted air, but the clear design distinguishing multiple songs on Dark Love Songs, including its opener, never sounds bloodless. The arrangement and creative use of ambient sound effects gives it a cloudy, ethereal quality – as if it has just enough form, but can never completely coalesce. French remains at steady in its center however, adding form where it is needed, and brilliantly embodying the distant sorrows of the music with her dramatic rendering. Keyboards and flaring notes of reverb drenched guitar light up "Take My Love". It has an almost torch song quality, but its pop strengths are twisted with a strain of the baroque. "Did You Want Me?" is punctuated with physical and solid drumming, flashes of electric guitar and keyboard streaking like quicksilver over the tempo, but never tastelessly. French conveys the bittersweet regret in the lyric quite nicely.

The slow swing of "It Must Be Roses" has a powerfully shimmering quality lacking on the other songs. French is content to develop the song's melody with great patience and the length is perfect for piling its melodic detail just enough onto a potential listener that it impresses them just the right amount. Violin guides the dark "Black Sunday" and French imbues the narrative with the enough dramatic force that it immeasurably strengthens an already lulling, pristine melody. "Splinters" takes a similar approach sans violin, but the increased emphasis on acoustic guitar isn't a step down in quality and gives the song its different flavor. It also provides French with another chance to incorporate sound effects into her work. Undoubtedly, some will cry that they are deployed in a heavy handed fashion, but that's facile listening. French never allows their use to overshadow the musical elements of a song and they are a valuable accompaniment to otherwise evocative arrangements. The album's final track, "This is Why We Drink", has the expected boozy sense of community that the title implies giving it a thin veneer of gray hope quite unlike the album's earlier songs, but it's quite dark nonetheless despite even glimmers of black humor rising to the surface. It's a fantastic final lyric for the album to end on and stands as one of the prime examples why Danielle French's Miss Scarlet and the Madmen Dark Love Songs is one of the most imaginative works in recent history.

9 out of 10 stars.

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