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Danielle French - Dark Love Songs

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

Danielle French has always impressed devoted fans of indie singer/songwriters as a composer and performer comfortably at home with taking artistic chances. Her latest release Dark Love Songs is born from chance and takes wild swings at greatness that invariably connect. The risk taking began in the city of Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin where French participated in four annual songwriting clinics affording the opportunity to work with a variety of unexpected collaborators on this new collection. The

clinics randomly paired French with a variety of other participants and the new found songwriting partnerships often produced unexpected and bracing results. The nine songs on this album are products of those partnerships, but the songs are always brightly burning examples of her own temperament and ambition. Dark Love Songs might be a relatively compact work, but it covers a lot of musical ground.

The opening song brings listeners squarely into the territory of strange textures and haunting balladry. "Last Goodbye" definitely plays like a valediction and the pained spirit in both its slowly evolving arrangement and French's exquisitely delivered vocal definitely fills the song with a bittersweet air. The bittersweet atmosphere turns even bitterer, like it's laced with bad whiskey, in the dark percolating track "Take My Love". French delivers the song with considerable grace and technique, as always, but there's a sharper edge underlying her words as if she isn't far from slipping into outright denunciation. "Did You Want Me?" has similar suggestiveness lyrically and vocally, but the music buttresses that suggestion even more strongly with its strident movement and hard hitting drums. French's vocals are double tracked at key points, but she proves herself to be a capable rock singer in this context.

"Black Sunday" is one of the album's most emotional numbers and pulls the listener deeper into its heartbreak as the song progresses. The most critical piece to its power is the easy, effortless marriage between French's voice and the violin swinging beautifully in the center of the song. "Splinters" moves the needle firmly back into the folk music realm and gives French a stronger narrative than, arguably, any other song on here. French, as always, has a commanding and yet understated presence that always exactly what each of the nine songs on this album needs and never overreaches herself or the song's potential.

"My Shadow and I" and "This is Why We Drink" concludes Dark Love Songs on unusual notes. While the earlier "Black Sunday" will impress more than all the other songs on here, these songs are posed more as the bloody final end of that beating heart when the darkness encroaches in ever more on all of French's yearning. She surrenders in some ways to that darkness, particularly on the latter song, but there's an odd sense of fight left in her backed up by the thrashing instrumentation and unpredictable arrangements. This is, without question, the most creative moment on the entire release and takes Dark Love Songs somewhere new just when you think it might have exhausted its capacity for surprise.

9 out of 10 stars.

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