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Danielle French - Dark Love Songs

By [Shannon Cowden](#) on August 9, 2016

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Some albums win you over quick with their commitment alone. The fact Danielle French persevered with the recording of *Dark Love Songs* over a four year time frame, returning each time to the same location to continue recording, signals this is an artist absolutely convinced she has something to say.

The hit and run recording schedule might spook some potential listeners into believing *Dark Love Songs*, in terms of performance and songwriting, is a scattershot affair with variable quality. There is no need to worry. There is an uniformity of merit on this release that never relents for even a song – French clearly entered the studio each time with a clear vision or arrived at it, in cahoots with her collaborators, soon after embarking on each individual journey.

The album opener, *Last Goodbye*, embodies all of *Dark Love Songs*' strengths in a compact form. French is unafraid to experiment with a variety of textures throughout this release and the first cut offers a sample of her more experimental and daring edge. It has significant ambient overtones, but there is firm melodic development here strengthened by a stirring performance from French.

Did You Want Me? has an unique retro sound bringing together French's folkie fundamentals with an inventive invocation of eighties/early nineties AOR rock. It generates impressive energy without

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ever betraying the emotional authenticity of her sound and core songwriting virtues.

Probably one of the album's most melodic turns comes with the memorable **It Must Be Roses**. The beautifully developed melody is another of the album's pleasant surprises and the song is rife with the same sort of lyrical excellence propelling the material throughout *Dark Love Songs*.

Black Sunday ends the album's brief run of comparatively lighter-hearted musical landscapes in favor of a return to the same melancholic spirit defining most of the songs. French's quasi-cabaret style, veering close to bloodless Grand Guignol in its theatrical darkness, finds ideal expression in this material. It is well-conceived and presented without ever playing too emotionally narrow.

Splinter is another of the album's lyrical highpoints and features one of French's best vocal interpretations of the set. **My Shadow and Me** utilizes a little light humor to mitigate the theatrical darkness pervading so much of the material, but once again, French escapes any self-indulgence or hints of melodrama with a musically superior arrangement and strong lyric content.

The album ends with **This is Why We Drink** and an instrumental version of the opener. The first song is perhaps the album's ultimate expression of its pleasantly stagy vibe, complete with sound effects that ratchet up the atmosphere thanks to their tasteful use, while the latter is a highly appropriate coda for *Dark Love Songs* that gives the work appealing unity.

Many may read this review or hearing the opening minute of any song on this album and make a snap judgment. Such a verdict is hasty. French certainly is far removed from your typical pop balladeer or chanteuse, but that doesn't render inaccessible. Melody is the lynchpin of everything happening on *Dark Love Songs* and it never disappoints.

9 out of 10 stars.

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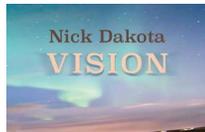
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