

Danielle French – Dark Love Songs



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

The product of a rare communal songwriting experience, Danielle French's *Dark Love Songs* is a nine song collection emanating from the wilds of northern Wisconsin. French has traveled to the city of Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin to visit the Holiday Music Motel and participate in the intensive songwriting clinics founded by Timbuk3 member Pat MacDonald. The clinics use a "spin the bottle" approach to pair various artists together randomly for writing, performance, and recording with the hopes that magic emerges from these collaborations. French developed *Dark Love Songs* over the course of four years and the finished work ranks certainly as one of the more imaginative efforts anyone will hear in 2016, but one of the more original works from an American songwriter in recent memory. Make no mistake, despite the deeply collaborative process that produced this album, French stands out as its undisputed star and commands the sonic stage with confidence and ample technique.

Both of those qualities come through in the opening song, "Last Goodbye" could have easily slid into maudlin territory when placed in a lesser performer/songwriter's hands, but French guides it to its inevitable conclusion with impressive confidence considering its unusual structure. Melodies accumulate throughout the song's duration rather than emerging full-bodied from the sonic ether and there's a great deal of ambient swirl with specific purpose that never meanders. "Did You Want Me?" takes a far different approach. The full gamut of French's influence is fully displayed over the course of *Dark Love Songs* and she rips a page from top shelf 80's/early 90's Euro rock on this one. Few of the influences dominating *Dark Love Songs* are resolutely American, but French is unafraid to raid folk traditions from other cultures that call to mind their Americana descendants. The lyrical themes of *Dark Love Songs*, particularly on tracks like "It Must Be Roses", might be paired with decidedly Celtic and/or quasi European touches, but they recall much more than a narrow slice of history with its largely acoustic instrumentation and familiar narratives about heartbreak and doomed romance.

"Splinters" has a unique swing and spins in tight circles throughout without ever losing its way. Tight construction distinguishes each of the songs on French's album and afford her the chance to add atmospheric touches, like the blowing wind heard here, without ever seeming too pretensions or attempting to mask inherent weaknesses in the content. "This Is Why We Drink" is full-on theatrical cabaret, but it ends French's album with an authoritative statement perfectly in keeping with the earlier tracks. She never backs off the thematic tilt of desperation and despair, but the songs on this album are often tempered by wonderfully fatalistic black humor and this is no exception. French challenges listeners' expectations about limitations in pop music and delivers a work full of rare vigor that never flies over the head of its intended audience. These are nine solid songs and there really isn't a slack moment on the release.

I-TUNES: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/album/miss-scarlett-madmen-dark/id1119843019>

9 out of 10 stars.

Montey Zike



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