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Danielle French Presents Miss Scarlet and The Madmen – 'Dark Love Songs'

by Skope • August 2, 2016
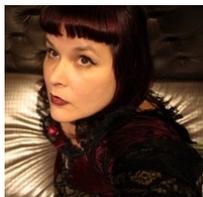
The high brow musical theater musings of Danielle French aren't so far removed from the common listeners' experience that they are inaccessible. This is a crucial component in the success of her release Dark Love Songs. She accomplishes this by holding tight to her melodic virtues and never lapsing too deeply into self-indulgence. There is a decidedly theatrical quality casting an enormous influence over Dark Love Songs and French isn't shy about incorporating ambient sound effects, but these are never merely vehicles for conveying a stagy concept. French and her collaborators demonstrate a deep musicality that informs the nine songs on her latest effort and it makes it all that much more memorable of a listening experience.

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

The opening song "Last Goodbye" swirls and weaves in an ambient swirl with beautifully cascading piano lines anchoring its musicality. French's voice is heavily treated with post-production effects, but it never obscures the ghostly magic present in her voice. There is a spectral quality surrounding her performance that develops the atmosphere tremendously. "Take My Love" is much more conventional in its approach and not weighed down with a plethora of post production additions. The vocal melody is quite compelling and strongly counterpointed by a loping and memorable arrangement. French turns in a vocal every bit as strong as the opener's performance, but the impressive clarity of her voice captures the listener's attention. "It Must Be Roses: has a deliciously Celtic feel, but it isn't ever overstated. Instead, the slow melodic spiral lures listeners in from the start.

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"Black Sunday" shows off similar qualities, but the development comes much more slowly than on the preceding song. The ethereal element heard in her voice on earlier songs returns here, but it has a carefully modulated theatricality that plays well against the minimalist arrangement and light-handed percussion. The album's dark mood continues to be felt on "Splinters" and, once again, French makes memorable and evocative use of sound effects to enhance the musical atmosphere. The lyrical content throughout Dark Love Songs is quite high and this is one of the album's lyric highlights. "My Shadow and Me" has a much stronger rock and roll pulse than the other songs on this release. The restless electric guitar melody snakes along and French imaginatively wraps her voice around its slinky progress. Some of that same spirit flows over into the album's final lyrically driven track. "This is Why We Drink" has a lightly raucous bounce and an atmospheric style enhanced by the sound effects of a surrounding barroom. It's one of French's most entertaining performances.

Dark Love Songs crackles with imagination, an expansive musical and lyrical vision, with an added surfeit of playfulness mitigating the darkness of her narratives. There is a strong storytelling quality pervading these songs and French does an excellent job of bringing the material to vivid dramatic life. Danielle French Presents Miss Scarlet and the Madmen might be a rather unwieldy name, but nothing on this album makes a similar impression. It's one of the year's most unusual and unified offerings.

4/5 Stars.

YOU TUBE: https://www.youtube.com/user/daniellefrench

Jason Hillenburg

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