

CD REVIEW: DARK LOVE SONGS BY DANIELLE FRENCH

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It isn't bold to say that Danielle French is one of popular music's most fascinating talents. There are certainly ample reference points for her music. However, few singers and songwriters turn their hand to existing forms with such individualistic flair. The Calgary born talent fueled this release, recorded over four years in a small Wisconsin city, through a DIY aesthetic perfectly in line with the passion and dedication powering the album's nine songs. To say that the songs are invested with unique style is an understatement. A number of influences are immediately obvious, but French's work on Dark Love Songs is the product of an artist singularly unwilling to rein herself in. Virtually nothing escapes her wheelhouse.

She goes for the poetic first. "Last Goodbye" has a relatively modest length, but plays with wonderful expansiveness. French has paid studious attention to layering this song with evocative textures without ever, refreshingly, risking self-indulgence. Her clear penchant for melody comes through as well. Doomed romance pervades many of the songs, naturally, and "Take My Love" is no exception. The slight hop in the melody gives it a understated shot of energy. Some might recall Tom Waits' unconventional, twisted musical landscapes when listening to this track, but French's vocals are an infinitely more musical instrument and she has clearly absorbed vital lessons of taste and brevity. French is never odd for the sake of being odd alone. The same theme of thwarted connections haunts "Did You Want Me", but the music tackles it in a much more physical fashion. There's a high brow pop sheen laid over the top of the song and it has the same striding energy one might associate with a rock track instead of the idiosyncratic material French has offered thus far.

"It Must Be Roses" will remind some of Blackmore's Night or other neo-minstrel type acts. The definite retro and folk-themed quality of the song is apparent from the outset and its carried off with genuine melodic grace. The following track, "Black Sunday", abandons the relatively upbeat rise in mood of the previous two songs for another folk aimed effort steeped in dread and darkness. The mournful violin is the song's principle melodic vehicle, but French takes the rising and falling vocal melody to its fullest potential. "Splinters" is, arguably, the album's most lyrically involved number and the arrangement matches its inventiveness. French, likewise, does an imaginative job with the song's phrasing and gives it enormous dramatic appeal. The second to last track on Dark Love Songs, "This is Why We Drink", hints at a bit of revelry, but there's such final despondency and desperation lurking beneath the surface that its impossible to completely clear. French fills the black, however, with great beauty thanks to her wonderful voice.

CD BABY: <http://www.cdbaby.com/cd/daniellefrench3>

by Lydia Hillenburg

In Short Words

Criteria - 90%

Dark Love Songs easily rates among the year's best albums from anyone. There's rare creativity and daring here that makes the work a charged listening experience. It isn't just some sonic mope fest either. There is emotional depth here that never flirts with melodrama and features superb musical talents.

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90%
Rating