

INTERVIEW: DANIELLE FRENCH

👤 RJ Frometa ⌚ 6 hours ago 📁 Artist Interviews 👁 4 Views



How would you classify your music?

Adult Alternative/ Dark Cabaret / Dark Folk – “Beautiful Strangeness”.

Who are some of your top 5 musical influences?

Tom Waits, Kate Bush, Leonard Cohen, Tori Amos, Eleni Mandell,

What do you want fans to take from your music?

I am drawn to the darkness. We all have a shadow self that I feel is often denied or repressed in our culture, but it is part of our psyches and only acts out stronger when repressed. Through exploring in the darkness in my music, my intent is to consciously or subconsciously speak to the shadow self of listeners, putting them in touch with the darker elements of the psyche through resonance with the music. It is only through acknowledging the dark that we can transform it into the light (by shining the light of consciousness).

Can you tell us a bit about your latest album? When will it be released and how does it differ from your previous work?

My latest CD “Danielle French Presents: Miss Scarlett & the Madmen- Dark Love Songs” was released to radio June 7, 2016 and I am just planning the official CD release party in my hometown of Calgary, AB for August or September. This is my 5th CD over the past 20 years and marks a definite turning point in my career and expression as an artist/ songwriter.

This album evolved from a series of songwriting intensives I took part in over the past 4 years at The Holiday Music Motel in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin.

Three times a year dozens of songwriters of varying genres are housed at the Motel for a week at a time to co-write, record and perform together. Songwriters are paired through a random “spin-the-bottle” process, and this is where the magic happens...

I hadn't done a lot of co-writing up to this point and in reflecting on some of the material I had co written over the years, a group of songs emerged that proved to be transformational, inspiring me to conjure up this latest project: Danielle French Presents: Miss Scarlett & the Madmen~Dark Love Songs. Through co-writing I have learned more about songwriting, arranging and performing than I have in all my previous years writing on my own. Experiencing how other songwriters approach the writing process and collaborating so intimately with them over a long period of time has helped me expand my vocabulary and has helped me find my own voice among them.

What do you love and hate about the Music Business?

What I love about the Music Business is the sense of community I have everywhere I go with other artists and musicians I have met in my travels in touring across North America. I am considered a local in Reno, NV and Sturgeon Bay, WI and have many other homes away from home. So much so that I consider myself very nomadic and I am blessed to have communities all across the continent that I feel part of. Music has a way of connecting people and musicians are a breed unto themselves. What other career is there that you can meet someone at a gig at a bar you are playing at, be invited to stay at their house that night, and they instantly become your best friend for life? I have formed many deep and lasting friendships thanks to music.

What I hate about the Music Business is the current state of affairs where the artist has to do everything themselves. These days not only do you have to be a proficient performer, writer, musician, but you also have to be a proficient booking agent, manager, blogger, web designer, publicist, grant writer, social media expert, publisher... speaking as one person (as opposed to a band) it is simply impossible for me to do each of these jobs at the level they need to be done at in order to advance my career. And I find my art suffers- at the end of the day, I often don't have enough time to pick up my guitar and practice, or write a new song because of all the other administrative "business" tasks I have to do. I wonder how many songs have not been written because of this need to be everything to everyone as an artist?

What is the best concert you have been to? What do you like most about playing live?

I have been to many wonderful, life-changing concerts including Tom Waits, Leonard Cohen, Peter Gabriel, Flaming Lips and many many more... but the best concert I have ever been to was when I flew from Canada to London, England in late 2014 to see Kate Bush perform live for the first time in 35 years at the Apollo where she did a month-long residency. It wasn't just her span of time away from the stage that made the show that much more coveted... it was the whole-hearted artistic expression she put into the theatrical show she developed that took the audience into a full musical journey.

Her voice was wonderful as she delivered the expected "hits" every Kate Bush fan would want to hear, but then a helicopter swooped out of the ceiling with a spotlight on the crowd and with full set changes, a cast of actors, puppeteers and stellar musicians she took the audience on a journey through "the Ninth Wave"- a concept album. And after an intermission she continued with another set change and moved into a theme from another concept album "Aerial". So it was much much more than a "concert"- it was a whole theatrical experience and performance piece that perfectly suited the music.

What do I like most about playing live? At the songwriting intensives at the Holiday Music Motel in Wisconsin, the musicians are holed up at the motel for a week writing and recording together and it's exciting to share our journeys with each other and pat each other on the back as we hear the play backs of our newly birthed creations. But at the end of the week, we perform these new songs out for the community at the Third Avenue Playhouse, and came to realize that it's only then that the circle is complete. The songs are not fully realized until there is an audience to appreciate them! It's this connection with the audience that I like most about playing live.

Is there a song on this latest CD that stands out as your personal favorite, and why?

I would say the song "It Must Be Roses" because it was one of the first songs I co-wrote at the Holiday Music Motel (with a fellow named Charlie Cheney) and little did I know that it would, four years later, become the theme song for my new CD. I have incorporated the rose theme all through Dark Love Songs, in fact I have even hand-scented the CD's with a high quality rose oil, the CD's actually have a smell associated with them (the first scented CD I am aware of!).

In preparing to record the vocals on this CD, I worked for a month in Nashville with vocal coach Julie Christensen (who sang with Leonard Cohen for 10 years) and her advice on this song was to sing it as if it was already in the public domain- as if it was written at the turn of the century in early 1900. In getting into character on this song I like to pretend I'm an aristocrat, demanding of my suitor that if he really loves me he will bring me roses... it must be roses.

How have you evolved as an artist over the last few years? What made you decide to come back into the music business?

I have probably evolved more in the past 4 years thanks to taking part in the co-writing intensives at the Holiday Music Motel than in my previous 16 years writing on my own! I feel on this project I have found my unique voice and I am looking forward to exploring it further on future projects- I feel this is just the beginning.

And it's the support and encouragement of Holiday Music Motel Creative Director pAtmAcDonald who invited me to take part in these intensives- and thanks to all the musicians, co-writers, producers and Holiday Music Motel staff- that chose to pursue and release this new CD project.

If you could meet, play a gig, co-write a song, have dinner, get drunk with any band or artist (dead or alive) who would it be?

Tom Waits. Hey Tom, I've got a song idea...

So tell us what's next?

I already have the seeds sown for the next Miss Scarlett album planted based on more songs I have co-written at the Holiday Music Motel. I know the next CD will be called "Arcana", but the details are a mystery still waiting to unfold...

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