

Accordion player a master of moods

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Marie-Josée Houle's second album, *Monsters*, is a cathartic exercise about heartbreak that benefits both author and listener.

There are two sides to accordion player and singer Marie-Josée Houle. The red lipstick is your first clue to which one we're on. It's a marker for the side that drips sensuality and velvety vamp as documented on her 2007 debut, *Our Lady of Broken Souls*.

Her scrubbed, sleeves-up side is industrious with a lashing of kitsch -- heck, she knits socks -- that's helped propel her along to a second album called *Monsters*. It's a cabaret catharsis that was partially recorded in Oslo, Norway, (where her former flame lived) in the dead of winter. Houle's lyrics match the mood, and are the result of living in your head too much. She curbs the psychobabble into quips that basically sum up as "love me, dammit."

The combined burdens of jealousy and desire play out over nine songs, floating along on a moody bed of piano, Hammond, double bass, ukulele, drums, cello and that banner wheezebox that Houle has made her name with on the Ottawa music scene. A bit of black humour lightens the wrenching melodrama (the tune *That Off-Key Blonde* is particularly stabbing).

"There's a certain facade that you have to maintain when you've had your heart trounced on," Houle says. "No one wants to be around the person that's a downer."

And, so, while friends would trot out the usual clichés ("you have to move forward"), she would work through her real thoughts in silence -- that is until she recorded *Monsters*, where all her truths are laid out.

"Interacting with people during the day is very different from being alone with your thoughts at night," she muses. "When you're not distracted by the things that you should be doing, there's something that happens."

She calls that something "those dirty little thoughts" or the clashing that comes when trying to reconcile logic and heart. The album is a cathartic exercise that benefits both author and listener.