

## MARIE- JOSEE HOULE

Friday, September 25th

"I'm a funky looking woman who plays the squeezebox in a non ironic kind of way, because it's not ironic, that's not what I do, but it is very passionate and very sultry music," Marie-Josée Houle tells me in a post sound check interview. "The accordion lends itself to, being nice, drawn out, slow and that's how I use it. I use it fairly sparsely but it's there, it's there for the drama and it's there for the passion."

No kidding.

Justin Timberlake may boast in a recent hit single that he is bringing sexy back but that's just plastic pop and wipes clean with a damp cloth. For that old school kind of sexy that buries its teeth into the soft fleshy part of your imagination and leaves a mark you really have to experience Marie-Josée live in concert.

Born in Quebec and based in Edmonton the flame-haired chanteuse sings in both of our country's national languages. I may not remember much of my high school French but, trust me, some things need no translation.

The bittersweet yearning of *Shallow Breathing*, the sense of carnal urgency in *That Off Key Blond* ("What do I have to do to get your attention!"), Marie-Josée can switch from a seductive croon to a throaty growl depending on the mood of the song while the accordion smoulders like a lover in her embrace.

Marie-Josée played electric bass in an all girl punk band for awhile but the siren wheeze of her first instrument called out to her (she began playing the accordion at age five "because my parents were too poor to afford a piano") and before long she was writing and recording her own tangy compositions for the accordion. (She has recorded two albums of independently produced original songs: "Our Lady of Broken Souls" and "Monsters". Both are available at [cdbaby.com](http://cdbaby.com))

As she launched into a lilting waltz like number called "Nuit Verglassante" I wrote in my notebook "If Edith Piaf had a punk rock granddaughter singing for her supper in an offbeat but intimate Paris bistro she would probably sound like this."

What is the most common misconception about the accordion, I asked Marie-Josée in our preshow interview. "That it is a boring instrument. An accordion can be incredibly sexy ... in the right hands it can be whatever you want it to be."

I'll drink to that. Make that a coffee, Georgia. (The Showroom is unlicensed. No servers talking over the music and ruining the mood.)