

# **A one-time punk rediscovers the accordion**

**Eclectic influences cohere on singer's second disc**

**Roger Levesque, Freelance**

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Moving from punk rock roots to French chanson and upbeat accordion seems a stretch, but Marie-Josée Houle is negotiating the musical journey just fine.

Disparate musical, travel, educational and career experiences have come together for the Ottawa-based singer-musician in a surprising, cohesive fashion on her recent, second CD, *Monsters*, recorded in Oslo, Norway, and Ottawa with a mix of Norwegian and Canadian jazz and roots players.

Despite such varied ingredients and influences, it's Houle's zest for life that comes out.

"I'm not really concerned about labels," she admits. "You could call some of it sultry French cafe accordion music. All that matters to me is that it has allowed me to present myself for a mix of performing opportunities, and to both folk and jazz festivals, but I can't predict where it's all going."

The long, winding road that brought Houle to her present sound started with her birth in Val d'Or, Que., her family's move to Edmonton at age four, and the start of classical accordion lessons at five which lasted into her teens. She also learned piano, picked up alto sax, and later taught herself electric bass to join the all-girl punk outfit Pangina and a faux-muzak unit, the Elevators.

It was only when Houle moved back to Ottawa that she began to play accordion again with a real passion for the instrument. The reconnection came when she was offered work in a now-defunct worldbeat group, which led to her own solo work and her debut CD, *Our Lady of Broken Souls*, in 2007.

Houle characterizes her new album as much more of an in-depth expression of her creative angst.

"The *Monsters* title is a reference to all those things in life you can't control, both internal and external. I think I really delved much more into my darker side and more personal subjects."

Houle plays tonight at Hulbert's, 7601 115th St. Tickets are \$10 at the door.