

## Putting the squeeze back in squeezebox

John Sekerka

Ottawa XPress, November 27, 2008

*Marie-Josée Houle on the accordion swing*

"My baby is about 50 years old!" declares Marie-Josée Houle. "It's black, Italian, not very intrusive." In this instance, that "baby" is an accordion, but it could very well be fine wine. "It's a little bit sharp. It tends to cut through everything. I have to confess that I cringe when I hear some accordions, but I do like the Italian ones."

All Marie-Josée Houle ever dreamed of was a rock and roll life, but instead fate would deem a career as a squeezebox queen. Since a piano was too expensive, the accordion was plopped down on her at age 5. It was the next best thing.

"I didn't realize how uncool the accordion was until I got into my teens and was sporting a purple mohawk. How am I going to play this in a band? I always wanted to play in a band. By then I was playing the piano and the alto sax, but like most people who pick up instruments, they lay it all to rest when they start university, and that was the end of my accordion playing days, until about five years ago."

Houle picked up the electric bass and realized her dreams with several stints in rock bands. She then moved from rocking Edmonton to Ottawa with two objectives: civil service employment and a heavy metal band. She found neither.

"What I did see, however, was an accordion played in a jazz band and it blew my mind. Because of my classical training I never really thought to explore the instrument, or to listen to other kinds of music that might have accordion in it. So for the first time in my life I really did prick up my ears, and listened, and noticed that accordion was used in all kinds of music, not just the stuff that we associate with your old uncle's wedding."



Houle: "[It's] not just the stuff that we associate with your old uncle's wedding"  
**photo: courtesy of Marie-Josée Houle**

Houle's rekindled accordion relationship has resulted in wonderful levels of sultry mood frolic over two primo albums that not only feature her instrumental dexterity, but also a splendidly saucy vocal styling in three languages: English, French and Romance. If guys with guitars get the chicks, then chicks with accordions get the guys.

"Well, if you listen to my last album [*Monsters*] then you realize that she may get the guy, but she doesn't keep him for very long," says Houle.

Who needs the rock when you can swing?

**Marie-Josée Houle**

W/ Library Voices

@ Zaphod Beeblebrox

Nov. 28

@ Avant Garde Bar

Dec. 6