

In Romantic/Gothic fiction it's common for someone to fall head-over-heels for a person they've never met. All it takes is a brief glance across a crowded room or a striking portrait hanging on the wall. One view and the Hero is swept away.

"Monsters" by Marie-Josée Houle is like that, but a CD.

Marie-Josée is a mixture of French Canadian and not-so-French Canadian heritage, a classically trained accordionist who cut her teeth in a punk band. Her lyrics remind us that a sultry pout or a pixie like smile can hide quite sharp teeth.

The album opens with "Shallow Breathing" where Houle is wrestling with her broken heart, and ends with the meditative instrumental "Grace". On these bookends and the numbers in between she reveals her heart, her humor, her lovely voice and her talent with the piano and hammond organ (as well as the accordion, of course).

She's written most of the tunes here but her cover of Jolie Holland's "Old-Fashioned Morphine" is especially sweet in its Tom Waits-like glory. For those not so laid back "That Off-Key Blonde" is bound to grab you with its klezmer rock bounce. Fans of Amanda Palmer should check out "I am Not the World". But there are no missteps on this CD, I found myself swept away by each piece be they based in French chanson, folk or tinged with South American rhythms (as "Hush" is).

I find Ms Houle wonderfully complex and mystifying. Listening to "Monsters" gives us a tiny windows into her soul but these brief revelations only make her more intriguing. This just draws our heart out more.

This CD reminds me of the days when I'd buy lots of 45 records and you could tell my favorites by the wear on the sleeve. I've only had "Monsters" a short time and already the cover is showing serious signs of wear.

I recommend this CD, and for those who love accordion it's practically a required purchase.

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