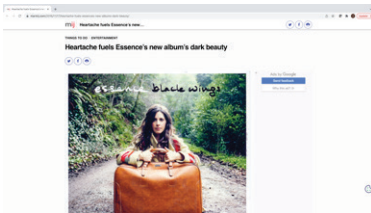


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Heartache fuels Essence's new album's dark beauty

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For musicians and songwriters, heartache and pain can sometimes be the inspiration they need to get their creative juices flowing again. She probably wouldn't have wished it on herself, but, for Essence Goldman, the breakup of her 10-year marriage gave rise to the dark Americana songs on her new album, "Black Wings."

Essence (she goes by that one name), a familiar performer at Sweetwater Music Hall in Mill Valley and on other Marin stages, found catharsis and healing in writing songs like "Over My Head," an expression of the dread she felt when she dialed a suspicious number on her husband's cell phone, realizing her worst fears. On the gut bucket blues "She Said," she sings about a wise old woman telling her, "You should have left that man a long time ago. You're strong enough, honey, to go it alone."

The first single, "Headed North," is about what's sometimes known as "pulling a geographic," trying to find escape and relief by getting in a car with a full tank of gas, lighting an American Spirit and driving away from trouble, "following the broken yellow line, nothing behind me."

All her anger comes out in the album's final track, a ticked-off tune that calls out her cheating spouse, labeling his lies and deceit for what they are. She titled it "B.S.," but without the abbreviation.

After her divorce, and with her subsequent return to songwriting and recording, she found a support system in her co-writers, including Ira Marlowe, Rhys Williams, Alec McChesney, Merkley and Jeffrey Pease. A crew of top-notch musicians and producers, among them Roger Rocha, Danny Leuhring, Daniel Berkman, Jackie Greene Greg Ramirez, Ari Gorman and David Simon-Baker, played guitars,

banjo, keyboards, ukulele, glockenspiel, bass and programmed drums, giving Essence's heartfelt and heartbreaking songs an authentic Americana instrumentation that lifts them above the slick and superficial.

Ironically enough, Goldman's previous album, "A Dog Named Moo and his Friend Roo," was a collection of children's songs. Looking back on it, she has jokingly said the experience made her want to shoot herself. But it led her to the spare, mostly acoustic and ultra-modern sound that's so special about "Black Wings," a record by a grown-up woman dealing with the kind of personal sorrow that can either ruin a person or do what it did for her. It turned her into a real artist writing real songs about real life.