

Shaela Miller explores new sounds on latest album *After the Masquerade*

Written by Richard Amery

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Shaela Miller has been a familiar face in the Southern Alberta country music scene for many years during which she has explored a variety of styles of music including alternative rock and alternative country to traditional country music.



She won first prize in the 2022 Project Wild competition and took home \$100,953, some of which she put towards her new album and new sound — synth heavy '80s dark Wave on her brand new album “*After The Masquerade*,” which has been released on Neon Moon Records.

In addition to releasing new music and playing shows, she mentors young musicians through organizations like Lethbridge Girls Rock Camp and through her other endeavours.

She is in the middle of a tour for the new album which kicked off with two of three sold out shows at the Owl Acoustic lounge and the Slice plus a special all ages special matinee. She took some time to answer some questions over e-mail.

“I’ve followed your career basically since you’ve started and you have explored a variety of sounds from Neko Case alt country, traditional country for the past few albums and now a more ’80s pop for the new music. What made you decide to explore this new sound for the new album? You’ve said on the Neon Moon Records website that you have been waiting to do this for a long time? Why now?”

I bought a synthesizer a few years ago with the desire to start a side project in the new wave/dark wave sonic realm. After writing a few songs and recording demos creating the new sound, I determined with my band and peers that it didn't make sense to have a side project. And I knew once we got started, I had no desire to record another full on country album. New wave music has always been the dearest to my heart and making a record like this has always been a goal of mine.

You're with Neon Moon Records. How did that relationship develop? How's it going?

Neon Moon Records was co-founded by my manager Jessica Marsh, whom I've been working with for the last 5 years. Together, she and I explored multiple label options for the release of *After The Masquerade*, but the amount of creative control I wanted to have wasn't in the cards for the other labels we were looking at. The Neon Moon model of label agreement aligns with my wants and needs as an artist, and since I already have a strong and trusted relationship with Jessica as my manager, it was an easy decision for me to get further involved with her in this way.

Tell me about the songwriting and recording process for “After The Masquerade.” What inspired the lyrics? How long did it take to write the songs and record the album? Who did you record it with?

I lost a very dear friend of mine in 2021. A lot of the songs on this record were written during my sorrow and grief surrounding that. Learning to build my life around it and pick myself up and soldier on. Some of the songs were written over a couple years even before this loss. For example, "Station" was written when I was 19. I had been wanting to re-record and release it for some time, and when we started to rework it for this record with the synths, it came together beautifully.

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We recorded in Calgary at the National Music Centre - Studio Bell recording studio with Graham Lessard as the producer. It was my first time recording with a producer and I was a little nervous going into it, how much creative control he would want to have, but we talked for hours about our shared love of new wave music and I knew he understood my vision. I couldn't have been happier about how that pairing turned out.

Do you have any favourite tracks on the new album. You've played a lot of them live. Which ones are the most fun to play live?

Mourning Tonight is really fun to play live. It gets the dance floor grooving every time. But I honestly love playing them all. Even the slower songs like "I Can't Love" and "Sunglasses". Some of the songs make me choke up a bit and I have to work hard to not let that happen so I can sing. And as for favourite tracks - "Of Roses", "In My Dreams" are very dear to my heart, but I truly love every single one of them.

Tell me about the videos and singles from After The Masquerade, especially the Mourning Tonight video?

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The music video for the title track, “After The Masquerade” was filmed in Vancouver with director Sean Edwards. The video concept came from my brain and he helped me write it out and put it into motion. I wanted to create a beautiful visual companion to the song by way of movements through dance. Dancer Nali Richards was hired and she choreographed her parts and danced painted head to toe in silver.

The “Mourning Tonight” music video used visuals that were filmed during the Waking Death Arts and Cultural festival, filmed by Skye Hephner. Artist Shanell Papp made the crochet skeleton, Mia Van Leeuwen directed the performance. The Waking Death Collective (Shanell Papp, Mia Van Leeuwen and Annie Martin) invited artists to collaborate and address themes of death, dying, and grief to evoke feelings of shared mortality, the nature of impermanence, and things that haunt us. I was so moved when I learned about the exhibit and asked if I too could be a part of the collaboration by documenting the parade to use in a music video. Mourning Tonight is a song I wrote during deep sorrow in learning how to navigate through the muddy waters of grief, learning how to cope and how to live again after the death of a loved one. The softness of the larger-than-life crocheted skeleton, the colourful ghosts, and the playful and ritualistic march of the bone carriers feel like the perfect juxtaposition of how I want my song to be received and my lyrics to be heard. Dealing with grief is something we all have to do at some point of our lives. It will ebb and flow like a rushing wave ready to wipe out your whole world if you let it. Learning how to build my life around it, processing it through dance, vibration and song, has become an essential part of my living.

How did winning the Project Wild \$100,000 first prize impact your career choices and your life?

Winning 100k greatly impacted my music career. I would have made this record regardless of the money I won. But I wouldn't have been able to afford to create it this way (hire a producer, record at NMC) had I not had this sort of budget to work with. Also having the money to promote it, make the music videos etc. I am very grateful for the opportunity, funding, and everything I learned from being a part of Project Wild.

The three local (including the extra all ages show) record release shows sold out almost immediately. How does that make you feel?

Selling out my hometown shows so quickly almost brought tears to my eyes. I was blown away. I am so touched and honoured to feel so supported and be a part of this great community.

You have a western Canadian tour planned. How are advance tickets for that going? What other tour plans do you have?

We have already played a handful of shows and each one has been incredible. We are gearing up now to leave for BC tour next week. I can't wait to get out there. Especially looking forward to playing our Vancouver Island dates (Duncan, Nanaimo, and Victoria). I was born and raised part of my life in Victoria and have a lot of friends and family out there.

We have some festivals booked for the summer and we're looking forward to those! I don't think they are announced yet. We also have some fun touring being planned for eastern Canadian

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dates in the fall.

What's next for you? Are you working on the next album? Will it also have the '80s new wave type sound?

No, not working on the next record yet. We have been talking about the possibility of releasing a remix album! But that might just be a pipe dream. We'll see what happens.

What have you planned for the tour? Will it be a full band tour or solo? Will you be playing all of the new album and Shaela favourites?

We are playing full band for all the shows. And we have been playing the album front to back, and then we dive into some old favourites from previous albums. We've also added some fun new covers to our set. Some 80's new wave and synth pop covers. It's been a blast!