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We've all heard confessional lyrics, but how does one go about writing soul-baring music? Listening to Shannon Wright's striking Maps of Tactic (her second album on Chicago's Quarterstick Records) feels like looking at somebody's innards. Even if you don't pay any attention to the lyrics, you feel very intimate with the singer-songwriter.

Wright's songs wed the emotiveness of Bjork, PJ Harvey's musical inventiveness and nakedness, Courtney Love's volatility, and Portishead's mastery of atmosphere. But it's far from derivative; this is bracing music played with perhaps too much conviction.

Wright, who will be sharing a bill with The Winter Blanket and Matt Davis at Peabody's on September 14 (7:30 p.m.), has produced a painful, exhilarating mess. The album is an emotional arc, starting with the tame, controlled "Within the Quilt of Demand" and gradually degenerating. The arrangements are spare and understated yet intense, sometimes evoking a haunted carnival, often with just drums and a guitar, piano, or Wurlitzer.

From this slightly demented sound springs Wright's forward, warbly voice, a marvel of unguarded and uninhibited emotion. Everything sounds like it might come unhinged at any moment, and while sometimes a calm intrudes, just as often the songs explode and fly apart.

The brief album, clocking in at 32 minutes, was produced by legendary noise master Steve Albini but doesn't seem to bear his fingerprints. Wright played nearly all the instruments, and I doubt even Albini could rein in such a force of nature. But while the songs sound like they burst out, they're also beautifully constructed – fully formed while being musically and vocally surprising. Only a fierce talent could produce such raw beauty with this level of refinement.

You'd be hard-pressed to find a stranger combination than Wright and The Winter Blanket, a band whose music is as calculated and subdued as hers is unbridled. The local art-rock outfit, led by Darling drummer Doug Miller on vocals and guitar, recently released its debut Hopeless Lullaby on the Moline label Plow City Record Company.

The album, produced by Low's Alan Spearhawk, is moody, textured, and pleasant, a confident and promising start with an understandable share of first-release weaknesses.

The songs build on quiet, half-speed beginnings with layers of instruments and vocals. The record is aptly named, because Miller's voice has the rough hush of dreamy, late-night invocations. Kim Murray's backing vocals add a nice sharp complement, and their joint singing provides the record's best moments.

The lethargy that permeates *Hopeless Lullaby* has inherent pitfalls, though. The songs typically get louder as they go on, but they don't gain much in intensity, and there's a certain sameness to the proceedings. The record requires patience and attention, a bit like Sunny Day Real Estate on some serious downers.

The band's songwriting, too, is a bit rough, drifting and shifting aimlessly in midsong. The group's delicate interplay, strong musicianship, and impeccable timing go a long way toward compensating for that shortcoming, though. And I expect time will only help the band grow.

If that prediction comes with no guarantee, I offer another with more certainty: It will be very interesting to hear what happens when the The Winter Blanket's sleepiness gets stirred up by Wright on Thursday night.