

Some might have seen Lhasa's first album, "La Llorona", as a curiosity, an exotic accident. The singer and songwriter appeared from nowhere in 1997 with an album that defied definition, capturing a Latin world of her own imagination born of an itinerant childhood spent between Mexico and the US. The music was both familiar and truly unique, a mix of ranchera music, Eastern European gypsy music, country, and popular songwriting, with intensely personal lyrics in Spanish, and a passionate vocal delivery. The album was written and produced in Montréal, and in many ways could not have been made anywhere else. These are songs inspired by a warm country but written in a cold one, with a Brontë-like romanticism, a wry and literate sense of humor, and moments of startling emotional rawness.

When they heard it, people from North America and Europe sighed and said "Ah, Mexico...", and Mexicans said, "What strange music! Where is she from?"

The album made its way through Canada, France, then through half of the world, winning prizes (including a Juno and a Felix) and selling more than 700,000 copies (a surprising accomplishment for a non-commercial, non-traditional Spanish-language album). "La Llorona" was so thoroughly embraced by its fans that it has become a modern classic of sorts, always under the radar, always being discovered by new admirers, always as surprising and familiar as it was when it first appeared 12 years ago.

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When "The Living Road", Lhasa's second album was released in 2003 (almost seven years after her first), it immediately became clear that she had evaded the lure of self-imitation and had followed her muse instead. Her refusal to be boxed in -to succumb to the label of exoticism- was obvious in the choice of writing and singing in three languages, as well as in the tales that wound their way through this truly astonishing album. She was not only at home in Spanish, English and French, but was raw, personal and uncompromising in each. Moving from one idiom to another, from a sweet and feminine ranchera to a clacking gospel tune, from a spiraling, percussion-driven blues song to a gentle lullaby; her charisma and conviction holding it all together as if by magic.

“The Living Road” brought Lhasa to an even wider public and to greater acclaim. Audiences everywhere adopted her as their own. Her impassioned and hypnotic performances took her to hundreds of cities, from Mexico City to Istanbul. Songs from both of her albums were used in film and television, including *The Sopranos*, Madonna’s documentary *I Am Because We Are*, the science fiction film *Cold Souls* and John Sayles’ *Casa de los Babys*. Collaborations with other artists included work with Tindersticks, Patrick Watson, Arthur H. and many others. In 2005 the BBC’s World Music Awards named Lhasa “Best Artist of the Americas”.

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Now, six years after the release of “The Living Road”, she is back with an album simply called “Lhasa”. A first listen reveals how apt the title is. Written and produced by Lhasa herself, recorded mostly live and entirely to tape, this third album feels like the work of a singer, songwriter, arranger, and producer coming into her own. And it couldn’t have been recorded any other way – the attentiveness of the musicians to each other and to the singer is apparent in the subtle changes of intensity and tempo that are impossible in the world of click-tracks and composite takes. Here is music making and music recording, the old fashioned way: for real!

This album is a living, breathing specimen of that rare species of music, which unfolds itself without selling itself, which reaches out and pulls the listener in, effortlessly. Lhasa has accomplished something extraordinary here, and made it look easy.

The songs are all in English, the instrumentation is simple yet unusual – harp, guitar, pedal steel, bass, drums, piano. The melodies are familiar and irresistible, yet totally original. The lyrics are written in a strikingly transparent and image-laden English. The style draws from Country, Gospel, Blues and Folk, and manages to feel ancient without a hint of nostalgia, and modern without a drop of technological wizardry. The musicianship is daringly restrained and textured, the singing unforced, open, luminous.

Far from all of the sound and fury of the modern music business, Lhasa has been quietly going about becoming one of the most fascinating songwriters of her generation.