

A black and white, close-up portrait of a woman, Juana Luna, looking slightly to the left. Her hair is pulled back, and the lighting is soft, highlighting her facial features. The background is dark and out of focus.

Canciones en
Blanco y Negro

Juana Luna

If you ask Juana Luna, she'll tell you she's a wanderer by nature. Originally from Buenos Aires, her travels have taken her around the globe, where she performs her soulful original compositions alongside wistful, delicate takes on traditional Argentinian folk songs.

With *Canciones en Blanco y Negro*, Luna's latest release, she is leaning into her own vagabond ways and paying homage to her ancestral wanderers. This full-length album is dedicated to drifting dreamers everywhere — including her own grandmothers and great-great-grandmothers. “I feel very connected to all the women who came before me” says Luna, “In a way, this album is a ritual of acceptance to all the women whose stories don't get told, whose suffering got swept under the rug. This is like an embrace, a way of looking through the generations to say thank you to those who came before me.”

By weaving together a carefully curated selection of familiar Argentinian folk tunes with her own folk-inspired original compositions, Luna is drawing a powerful connection between the visions of those who came before her and her own dreams. “As a traveler I'm always arriving somewhere new, observing people's decisions in new contexts,” says Luna, who is no stranger to the vulnerability of getting lost. On *Flor de la Noche*, an original tune with roots in the instrumental language of the bolero song, Luna brings a sweet poeticism to this experience. “Flor de la noche / que susurras al oído las canciones / que encuentras en las constelaciones / y están hechas de emociones / y de sus contradicciones” she sings, evoking a fantasy world of hidden secrets and spiritual connections to the natural world.

Despite using materials with origins spanning close to a century, Luna crafts a cohesive story on *Canciones en Blanco y Negro*. Each arrangement is beautifully intentional and unique and the production choices are distinctive. Whether the sound world has an acoustic or electro-indie palette, Luna went to great lengths to ensure her musical choices were matched to the essence and story of each song.

The album's title is no mistake either, a nod to the era of classical Argentinian music she revisits with such care. This era also inspired her production choices for the record — Luna chose a collection of vintage microphones and recording equipment in order to craft an album that calls to mind an era of black and white photography. In post-production, she added an extra layer of reminiscence by softening the tone with hues of vinyl.

On a stripped-down version of the oft-interpreted, classic Basque song *La Paloma* (The Dove), Luna draws upon her memories. This elegant take on the well-loved original feels profound in its intimacy; it's as though she has invited you into the recesses of her memory. In fact, this is the exact arrangement her grandparents sang together when she was a child, a duet that made a lasting impression on the young Luna.

Not all the songs are so sparse, though. Her original compositions are rich in their evocative storytelling. The genius of Luna's composition and arrangement lies in her ability to discern the exact sounds with which it is best to bring a story to life.

On Barco de Papel (Paper Boat), this means an echo-ey treatment of vocals and an almost ghostly, swirling synth pad on the verses, powerfully replaced by a guitar-led groove and choral-esque, bold vocal treatment in the choruses. And then there's Olmedo, a playfully arranged story-song that brings the full force of romantic strings and Spanish-style guitars to tell the (true!) tale of a man who came to New York City in his 70s to pursue his dreams of performing magic, only to be blinded by a sudden stroke and find himself pursuing a new kind of dream — sightless wonder.

"To me, this is a story about all the ways we can feel we're doing something late, or in the wrong way. Who's to say what the right way is?" says Luna, "We do things because we want to do them, because we love to do them. That's what matters."

There are three songs on this new record that stand out from the rest, all drawn from the canon of Argentina's most-loved folk music. Pato Sirirí, by Jaime Dávalos, Las Golondrinas by Eduardo Falú and Serenata del 900 by Cuchi Leguizamón are all classics in every sense. "These three really express the DNA of Argentinian folk music," says Luna, "They are the roots from which my own music grows." They're also all songs about searching. The lyrics of Pato Sirirí are particularly evocative "Si algún día vuelves / y como el sauce me ves llorando / es que una estrella vivo esperando / que con el canto se encienda en mí" (if one day you come back / and see me crying like a willow / like a star I live waiting / for the song it ignites in me). What words could better express the continuous heartbreak and desire that comes with choosing the life of a dreamer?

The last song in the album, Emilia, is one that Luna wrote for her great great grandmother, who arrived to Argentina on a ship, all the way from Italy, by herself when she was 15. She was expelled from her family because she was expecting an extra marital child, which was a scandal at the time. Emilia settled in Argentina and managed to bring up her daughter, and even more children. She created a wonderful family.

Luna says this song is a healing ritual, five generations later she embraces Emilia with her song and poetry.

Together, the 10 songs on Canciones en Blanco y Negro tell a story of those who are driven by love. Love of one another, as on Together, the only English-language song on the record. Love of the distances, as on Barco de Papel, love of dreams, as in Pato Sirirí. It's a record for those who may feel lost — and who may not think that's such a bad thing.

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