



## LAURA LÓPEZ CASTRO & DON PHILIPPE

### OPTATIVO

« My grandmother had ten kids. But how? It's a mystery to me. You see, both my grandmother and my grandfather were constantly in prison - and in separate cells, obviously. My grandmother's crime was selling beans without a license. My grandfather kept getting arrested for telling people what he really thought about Franco, loudly and in public. So, my grandparents rarely ever saw one another. And when they did, they got straight down to it. Ten kids by magic. » Laura López Castro is so generous with the secrets behind her songs. We listeners hear what lies behind the lyrics, the story that comes with the rhythm. Laura has her grandmother's talent for fertility, and her grandfather's open-hearted, open-mouthed passion in front of an audience.

'Ten kids by magic' could be the tagline for OPTATIVO - the new **third album** from this German-born Spanish singer, which she has crafted with the French-German guitarist Don Philippe. « OPTATIVO has become what we have always been about, » the pair claim, « so full of unique character, but somehow still part of a whole. » These **ten new songs** parade wealth without pretension. In comparison with the first two albums, an ageing has taken place. But of the best kind – an ageing that brings hard-won wisdom and a new lightness of touch, light as the afternoon breeze that sways over the peach fields of Lleida... Lleida, in the Catalan countryside, outside Barcelona, where López Castro met her **grandmother** again this year, a woman who knows how to carry the heavier things of life with surprising smiles.

Yes, some golden threads come together in Lleida. The **Sin Papeles** are there too, the undocumented African labourers who bring in the peach harvest. López Castro listened to them last summer. They told her tales of migration, identity, a foreign homeland and a home amidst a foreign land. « These are people who have come to Europe but may never really arrive. Their yearning and separation remind me of my own background, although I've never experienced these themes so absolutely. »

Distinctiveness is the quality that has seeped into this album. López Castro has found **the diaspora inside**, voices that have floated out of view but can still be heard. « I feel half-Spanish, half-German. Sometimes it feels as if there are two of me, sometimes like I don't exist at all. » She sings about this fate in 'mi cansado corazón despierto', where her sleepwalking yet wide-eyed heart longs both for a little death and nothing less than life.

Dazed yet willful lyrics embrace sensations completely, only to let them go again into the night – after all, the search can never be over. In Spanish OPTATIVO is the grammatical form used to express an aspiration, a wish. Ah, but what to wish for? « I wonder if **Lautréamont** has cast a shadow over this album, » enthuses Laura, referring to The Songs of Maldodor, the French poet's masterpiece.

Musically too, says Don Philippe - alias Philippe Kayser, this album has seen them throw open the door: « Our albums are influenced by South American music, naturally: Victor Jara, Atahualpa Yupanqui and the music that burst forth in Rio de Janeiro in the 1950s, in reaction to American Jazz. But what you can hear now is that we have set the music of the Latin American uplands into an urban space. We're talking about a composition completely after our own fashion. » Kayser, who has recorded the **hum of the city streets** around him and used them as a soundscape for 'lo que tú ves', describes the music of Brazilian legend Jobim as « music for the neighbourhood. » So distant and yet so near, it's all about enrichment at the margins.

Laura López Castro and Don Philippe have been gathering all things to their breast. But distinctiveness is also an art and, as the songs show, part of that art is knowing what to leave out. Arabesques and Capriole have been cast aside. Kayser's guitar speaks a beguilingly simple language, López Castro's voice appeals enormously and there are moments when it becomes utterly her own, like a diamond fallen from its setting, sparkling free before us.

This album is a **collage**, yet always coherent. From where else has inspiration come? « Andrés Segovia and African Dogon music, » says Kayser, « Nick Cave and Kim Gordon (Sonic Youth), » adds López Castro. The duo are loyal to classical

and Jazz forms, but by liberating them from much of their complexity, and adding a bit of abstraction, they have moved closer to independent music. **This album carries listeners away on a new style.** Two Sudanese musicians living in New York and San Francisco, AlSarah and Nahid, make guest appearances on three songs. López Castro met the two singers at the SUDAN VOTES - MUSIC HOPES event and sparks flew immediately.

Philippe Kayser enriches the album not only with his guitar, but also with drums, ukulele, synthesizer, tambourine and triangle. **Paul Kleber** joins on the bass guitar and the double bass, **Jo Ambros** on mandolin & pedal steel guitar. **Sebastian Studnitzky** has contributed an artful arrangement for strings. Another starring role on the album is taken by the Düsseldorf pianist and sound researcher **HAUSCHKA**, who plays on two songs and provides all-around inspiration. HAUSCHKA's primed piano adds positively cinematic dimensions to 'noche eterna' and an otherworldliness to 'mi cansado corazón despierto'. HAUSCHKA's piano chatters, moans and twinkles - leftfield, tender and full of imagination, but somehow still leaving voice and guitar so much space, as if this new sound were a house with unsuspected extra rooms. Listeners will be astonished at how music can be so sophisticated and so pure at the same time. **Laura López Castro and Don Philippe have truly arrived.** The horizon of their style seems without end and yet these musical pioneers have struck compositions that seem as timeless as an untouched country.

*Kevin Ritberger*  
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