

After making my first album *La Llorona*, I spent a year in a contemporary circus. I am not from a circus family but three of my sisters are circus performers. You have to be crazy to work in a circus; it is a really hard life. But it is also an amazing life and a way of putting yourself out into the world in a very real way.

The dangerous things which circus performers do are a metaphor for how unprotected their lives are. They live in caravans parked in the middle of the city and the walls are extremely thin. There is always so much that can go wrong. It is not easy being a part of a lifestyle where there is nothing between you and catastrophe.

Being part of the circus heavily influenced my second album *The Living Road*. I was much more involved with the arrangement and production than on my debut. I didn't want instruments to be on the album just because they were beautiful – they had to make sense for the song. An instrument is part of the story and I built the emotional climate of a song from each instrument. I fought against musical convention and didn't want instruments used purely for convention.

A ukulele playing in a big dramatic song makes me think of a little child in a huge dark space, giving a fragile feeling to a song.

People come up to me and tell me their feelings about different songs. I am very happy if their feelings reflect exactly what I was trying to do. If only one person hears what I intended, I have succeeded. Maybe not everyone hears the intention but this is ok as they will hear something else.

An idea for a song can come to me in Spanish, French or English. I always write in the language of the idea, just as I would speak French to a French person without thinking about it. I could never translate a song, that would be very confusing.

My favourite book until I was 18 was *Jane Eyre*, which I read more than 20 times. Charlotte Brontë's book has a precise and graceful use of language. The language she uses is self-respecting; you can see how straight the character of Jane Eyre is sitting from reading a particular line.

Circus people are like actors. They are very emotionally intense and explosive and that makes living with them intense; whereas musicians are more reserved, quiet and less complicated.

The road means a million things which are all good. It means light, air, movement, development and evolution. For me the road is being out there, not being protected, not hiding from life or locking yourself up in a prison, no matter how comfortable. The road is a way of living.

I have a feeling of ecstasy living in a trailer. This is perfect happiness. You can go outside at night and the stars are shining. There is a little light on in the trailer and you can hear music drifting out. Something about that life is so right for me.

One of my favourite songwriters is Bob Dylan because he is so honest and daring, and the rhythm of his language is so beautiful. I also enjoy listening to Randy Newman, Tom Waits and Thom Yorke of Radiohead is a wonderful songwriter.

Music was very important when I was growing up. My parents were both musicians. My mother played a harp and my father played the harmonica and liked banging on a drum. When I was a little kid I would sing all the time and drive everyone mad.

In my song called *La Frontera (The Border)* there is the image of a small, frail person underneath a huge sky. The person is trying to get to the border with a kind of heaviness. Up in the sky the clouds are constantly changing shape – sometimes they fight, dance or do nothing. The clouds race across the sky with no borders. I like the contrast between those two images.



Lhasa

Mexican/American singer, 31, from Montreal. She is the winner of a BBC Radio 3 Award for World Music 2005 and appears at the Poll Winners' Concert at The Sage Gateshead on March 5, and in concert there on May 5.