

THE ARTIST'S LIFE LIONA BOYD

'My advice to aspiring artists would be expose yourself to different types of art, find one which grabs at you, seduces you'

I've got a quote by Goethe that I keep at my desk: "A person should hear a little music, read a little poetry and see a fine picture every day in order that worldly cares may not obliterate the sense of the beautiful which God has implanted in the human soul." And I do think arts have such a profound effect on life. I will go see films, listen to music, read and write poetry whenever I can. I am so privileged to be able to play guitar. It's an extension of myself, I can't imagine not doing it.

The inspiration for my music comes from my life experiences, usually things with deep emotional feeling for me. I wrote a song for my husband when I first fell in love. Sometimes the landscape is important. After I had been living out of Canada for a few years, I visited Northern Ontario, and I wrote a tribute, *My Land of Hiawatha*, inspired by my time there and my love of the landscape.

Occasionally inspiration can come from strange places: I once wrote a children's book about my cat Muffin. When I was invited to play for the Royal Family a few years ago, I wrote a song, *Serenade for Summer*.

I've been living in L.A. for the last 12 years, and it's really reignited my passion for the culture. The city's Hispanic roots are everywhere — in the language, the architecture. Of course, it's something that's been with me my entire life: My father is Spanish, I spent some time in San Miguel in Mexico as a teenager. I call the music I'm doing now *nuevo Latino* (which I stole from a term for the cuisine down there).

The inspiration for my latest album, *Camino Latino/Latin Journey*, comes from my time in L.A. Earlier I had recorded a song with guitarists [Jorge] Strunz and [Adre-shir] Farah for their album, and



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they had said if I ever wanted them to play on one of my albums, they would. Then I invited some of my favourite players to contribute to the album, such as Al Di Meola, Pavlo and Jesse Cook. I think it made an interesting contrast of sound, because they use finger picks and I don't, so they can play at twice the speed.

One piece, *Oh Guitar*, is a tribute to the guitar inspired by my love for [Federico] Garcia Lorca and Pablo Neruda. I've set their poetry to music before. I met Neruda once, and even strummed Garcia Lorca's guitar. And since Garcia Lorca wrote a tribute to the guitar, I wrote one.

I try to play guitar four or five hours a day, but that's not always possible, especially when I'm on tour. It's not just for practice, but I like to retreat into music. It's good for my soul — nourishing.

While rehearsing, I will drink a lot of tea, English and herbal, and a lot of cappuccinos. I work constantly, both day and night. I pack as much into a day as possible. My husband says that I am an obsessive-compulsive workaholic. I tell him I'm not — I'm an artist. I don't get creative blocks but I do run out of time. So I don't get enough sleep, and I should probably do something about that.

For me, the night is more peaceful and that's when I'll get a chance to play the guitar. During the day I'll be in the office-studio in my house, either recording, working on the Web site www.classicalguitar.com, or I'll be managing my label. I bought back all my masters a few years ago, and I've been busy with distribution or production of the albums and videos.

(You can see Ozzy Osbourne's house from my office, by the way, meaning I'm not his next-door neighbour from hell, like the newspapers mistakenly reported. He and Sharon have even invited us over for tea.)

My advice to aspiring artists would be expose yourself to different types of art, find one which grabs at you, seduces you. I played many instruments growing up, but the guitar was always the one I fell for. Don't expect to write a masterpiece immediately, but don't listen to any negative criticism. Keep with it.

Liona Boyd plays the du Maurier Centre in Hamilton tonight, and Kitchener, Ont.'s Centre in the Square tomorrow, picking up her tour in October when it heads to the Maritimes.

She spoke to Rebecca Caldwell.