

## Lhasa biography

Her story begins in Big Indian, a tiny village perched among the Catskill mountains, although she didn't stay there long. Lhasa's (full name Lhasa de Sela) idealistic and unconventional parents rejected routine and stability, preferring to follow life wherever it might lead them. For seven years, the family would crisscross the United States and Mexico in a converted school bus, Lhasa's first chapter in a long experience of the road.

Her father was a writer and teacher who would work in construction or picking fruit, when he had to; her mother was a photographer. Travelling with them and her three sisters, it was her early contacts with books, fairy tales, radio drama and passing landscapes that shaped her imagination. Even at the time, she knew how lucky she was to be spending her childhood as she was, although the freedom entailed uncertainty, as well. The soundtrack to those years was a medley of the American and Mexican classics loved by her father, and the Latin, Arab, Eastern European and Asian music her mother would listen to.

San Francisco, mid '80s. At 13, Lhasa took to the stage of a Greek café to sing Billie Holliday ballads and Mexican tunes a cappella. There, she gradually discovered the power of her voice to convey thoughts and emotions she was only beginning to experience herself.

Six years later, the road led north, to Montreal. It was there that she met guitarist and producer Yves Desrosiers. For close to five years, they performed together in downtown bars, a collaboration that evolved into original material that eventually took form in *La Llorona*, an album that centered on the persona of a tearful siren of Aztec mythology who would bewitch men with her heart-rending melodies. Infused with a certain *nouvelle nostalgie*, the album exuded the fragrances of Mexico and the colors of the Romany, full of sensuality and striking instrumentation. Released in February 1997, the Spanish-language album was immediately recognized for its sparkling originality. Hundreds of thousands worldwide were transported by the even, throaty voice that delivered such mysterious poetry above the rich arrangements, heady like incense.

The first impact was in Quebec, where Lhasa began to fill halls and ultimately win the "Félix" for "Artiste québécois - musique de monde" in 1997. Then followed the rest of Canada, where she went platinum, selling 110,000 albums and winning a Juno for Best Global Artist, in 1998. Then came the U.S. and Europe, especially France, where *La Llorona* went "triple disc d'or," with 300,000 flying off the shelves. Lhasa and her band toured relentlessly for several years, throughout Europe and North America, where her concerts were as acclaimed as the album had been. The demand for live appearances steadily increased.

On the eve of the 21st Century, Lhasa decided to take a break from touring and consider what might be next. Realizing that she needed to distance herself from her life as a singer, she decided to travel to France to fulfill her childhood dream of performing with her three sisters, all circus performers. They met up in Bourgogne and created a show together, which premiered in the summer of 1999. The contrast between the life of a touring musician who sees the world fly by with never the time to savor the places and people along the way and the circus life, travelling in the company of family and friends, sharing trailers and assembling and dismantling the big top and bleachers, provided a welcome opportunity for the singer to replenish her inner resources.

When the circus tour had ended, Lhasa arrived at a new chapter in her life: Marseille, the ancient port city, where half the titles for her new album would be born.

In 2002, now back in Montreal where her career had begun, she re-united with François Lalonde, drummer, percussionist and sound engineer on *La Llorona*, and Jean Massicotte, pianist who had also contributed to the mixing of her first release. They were to co-produce her second album, *The Living Road*, already much anticipated on both sides of the Atlantic.

Where *La Llorona* revolves around a mythical siren, *The Living Road* centers on the metaphor of life as a road. A gathering of original titles sung in Spanish, English and French, the album bridges physical distances as it links the musical traditions of the present and the past. Lhasa's voice and lyrics cross borders freely. The melodies themselves are timeless and the rhythms textured. And in every song can be found Lhasa's clear conviction that life is a living road, that nothing repeats itself, and that nothing is ordinary.

"That's what inspires each of the songs on the album," says Lhasa. "The mysterious force that doesn't let us box ourselves in, that compels us to keep changing. The road is alive, we can't freeze or stop it. And we know can't."