

Rupa's comments on *este mundo*:

1 (la frontera)

the album opens with an audio collage of sounds from the edge of things, the transitional zone. in ecology, it's the place where two ecosystems meet, where evolution occurs in the shortest time scale. i believe that in human history, the expressions that embody what is greatest about us come about in places where cultures and different groups are in close contact with one another. The machine heard in the song is from San Francisco's *musée mécanique*, which has a collection of antique hand-cranked, coin-operated moving picture machines. the wind howls as it does outside my door, blowing in off the pacific ocean, unsettling things. the cello picks it up, haunting. then the accordion, sounding like a wheel that it is less round than it should be, offering an imperfect cycle to a melody from *eXtraOrdinary rendition*, "c'est pas d'l'amour"—“that's not love.” the sounds of a man's bell and footsteps as he calls out "*palettas*" (popsicles) from the border. i was standing right up against the wall that separates the US from mexico when I recorded those sounds. he walks past us, a sound we recognize, but don't know from where. we are in the transitional zone. we are changing.

2 c'est moi

in both medicine and music, i have found that the two greatest teachers, the ones that bring the most profound lessons, are love and death. each has completely altered the shape of my life and i don't have control over when they will come and what force they will have. the accidents and randomness in life often bring the greatest riches, and embracing the futility of trying to maintain control brings a certain whacky and beautiful freedom. this song highlights how infinitely small our lives are and how magnificently large our hearts are in the face of uncertainty.

3 por la frontera

the first trip down to the US-Mexico border with the band was in 2007 and i wrote this song on the way there. we drove along the old highway 101, el camino real. this street links the old spanish missions up and down california. along the way, we saw *jornaleros* (day laborers) in the fields, talked with the latino busboys and cooks in the clubs we played who were fascinated that a group of *gringos* were going to tijuana with the purpose of simply seeing the border. we were starting to ask simple questions like: who does this border benefit and how can a line be worth more than a life? since the US has increasingly militarized the border along the west coast, immigrants have been making a deadly journey through the desert, many dying of thirst or starvation. the end of the song features an exchange between drums and bass--a tug of war between life and death--and a prayer from the mission district's community healer Jorge Molina, asking for safe passage for those seeking a better life in the US. so many people come to our city to do menial labor, making as much money in one hour as they do in one day in Mexico. this forced migration driven by economic pressures has shaped the face of our surroundings.

4 la linea

this song gives voice to the various borders we cannot cross---social, economic, political, romantic, national. it is about a woman who is wandering the streets, not able to reach another, the frustration of feeling hemmed in by lines that have been drawn to keep us separated. a few months after i wrote it i met an amazing african-american woman in the hospital. she was dying of crack-induced lung illness. she was difficult with most of the staff at the hospital, acting out her existential angst with the doctors and nurses. the first day i met her, i sat down and listened to her for about an hour, recounting the story of her life, how she got to where she was. it was powerful to hear how she framed her life, how she was coming to understand her death. the depth of connection we felt after this first meeting ended up shaping her stay, and allowed for some profound interactions between us prior to her death. until then, i had never considered a woman who was called "a crack whore" by others as a friend but through knowing her and allowing myself to cross my own lines, i

believe she died with a greater sense of peace. and i live with a greater sense of attention to people's struggles no matter what walk of life they come from. i remember her beauty and courage every time i sing this song.

5 la rose

the words of persian poet hafez inspired this tune:

how
did the rose
ever open its heart

and give to this world
all its
beauty?

it felt the encouragement of light
against its being,

otherwise,
we all remain

too

frightened

this song is a declaration of who i have become through accepting my path in medicine and music, who i have realized myself to be. it is a recognition that i don't have a choice, that life pushes me from the inside to go out and do what i do. it's a relinquishing of control of who i think i should be and just being who i am. the song has the drunken quality that the sufi mystics equate with god and music--intoxication. it is a bursting out, an opening, at first timid and then full force. it starts intimately, as if you're hearing a secret. and then the band bursts in as if we had all been kidnapped by a ragtag group of crazy misfits who seize life by the collar, shake it up and say YES!

6 culpa de la luna

i keep falling in love. i keep searching for something that i cannot explain. i feel pulled by a hunger that cannot be answered. the disorientation that comes with living life in the present moment is intoxicating and destabilizing at times. it's the gift of being a musician, an artist. it's the blessing and curse of passion. it's best not to complain. and not explain. just blame the moon and roll with it.

7 l'elephant

i wrote the main ideas for this tune the week i got married. it is strange because, it contains the recognition that the commonly understood form of marriage was not for me. it took me about a year and half to finish the song, and then another year and a half to finish being married. it's a song about the destructive and restorative nature of truth. the importance of laying waste to our stories in order to see what is true. it was inspired by this poem by indian philosopher krishnamurti.

I walked on a path through the jungle
Which an elephant had made,
And about me lay a tangle of wilderness.

The voice of desolation fills the distant plain.
And the city is noisy with the bells of a tall temple.
Beyond the jungle are the great mountains,
Calm and clear.

In the fear of Life
The temptation of sorrow is created.

Cut down the jungle – not one mere tree,
For Truth is attained
By putting aside all that you have sown.

And now I walk with the elephant.

every aspect of this tune was written with the feel of an elephant, swaying, swaggering, knocking stuff down, tenderly moving, it implies something that is about to break, something at the edge of itself.

8 soledad

this is a fishy rendition of a *cumbia* from colombia circa 1938. it helped me get over a broken heart, a broken home. living in SF near the ocean, the best way to deal with life's vicissitudes is to go to the beach and tell it to the water. i make myself get in, from head to toe a few times a year. it's good for you to hit the freezing water. wakes up all the cells. i call it "flushing your head." the presence of the ocean keeps everything in perspective. rapper boots riley joins us laying down rhymes about a relationship gone awry. we recorded this tune live and then put the band in for what we called the most expensive party we've ever had. oz fritz our sound wizard was at the board as the band partied around a stereo microphone at the close of one of our recording sessions. the tequila was lovely.

9 (el camino del diablo)

an interlude, showing the underside of a melody, how it can be stretched, shaped and retold. like a story. now we are walking along the path that migrants are taking through the sonoran desert, a place that has claimed so many lives. the sparse and intimate sounds--a crying trombone, fingers on strings, shifting weight, breath--our fragile human selves all blowing in the wind.

10 este mundo

our work, our sense of purpose swallows our valuable lifetimes. our passions. our needs. this is a song about work, calling us away from those we love and across great distances. it is about the yearning we feel to find each other in spite of these distances.

11 soy payaso

this song is my life's journey--from east to west to somewhere in the middle, up to the sky then down to the bottom of the sea. the arrangement was inspired by the form of "the rime of the ancient mariner" a poem where a man must tell his story to passersby, an incredible tale. this tune is a story about a woman who is looking for her place to sing and realizes it is under the sky, not in anyone's home. she gets lured into a house of magic and some guy inside paints her face because he needs a clown who can sing. and she says she is a clown but then when she sees a mirror, she can't recognize her own self. so she leaves. it starts with *raga bhairav*, with bass drone, *tabla* and *bansuri* flute, then cello takes it over with a klezmer-inspired line using the same notes from the rag but shifting the bass focus. then all of a sudden we're in a d-minor gypsy jazz piece,

with a woman telling her frenzied story. it's full of twists and turns. stops and starts. A tiny clock with cuckoo bird that look like a bat, a little black mouse running around the floor, a house of magic with a bathtub that doubles as a stage and a ladder that leads up to a secret loft full of dark secrets tucked away in locked chests. it's a jack in the box. it's a genie in a lamp. it's the world cut up into pieces and reassembled through sound and a very strange story. the form of the song was intended to be like an ellipse or the infinity sign--starting and ending with the tabla and bass drone with flute. the foghorns from our first album make an understated appearance, bringing us back to SF.

12 neruda

another poet! i know i am not alone in saying my first lover was pablo neruda. his fire and appetite for life are so palpable in his art, i often wanted to call him on the phone for advice when i felt lost. realizing i could not reach him, i wrote this song to dance with him. the first verse is his. the second is my answer. a *milonga* that branches into other forms, this is a song of celebrating the power of living life close to the juicy core.

13 trouble

a sultry tune about desire and our tricky negotiations trying to live life honestly. i wrote it the same week as "culpa de la luna" and feel they are talking about the same thing in two different ways. it's a song of seduction.

14 la estrella caïda

when you sleep alone, you have the benefit of being in "star formation", spreading out all over the bed. this is a lullaby i wrote to myself after the loss of a major love. overnight my home evaporated. now everything blows in the wind.

15 espero la luna

this song is about a change in world order. it takes place along the devil's highway, in the desert of the borderlands. someone is waiting to cross. she is waiting for the moon to light the way to make it easier. the tales of people who have walked this path are harrowing, the heat, the thirst, the fear of losing one's life, the deaths. and the question, is it worth it? this song is about a softer light, a call for a more compassionate world order.