

MUSIC REVIEWS

Luciana Souza Explores Saudade In Her New Album 'The Book Of Longing'

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Heard on [All Things Considered](#)

MICHELLE MERCER

Luciana Souza is a Grammy-nominated jazz singer and composer best known for thoughtful takes on her native Brazilian songs. In *The Book of Longing*, she explores saudade, or yearning.

ARI SHAPIRO, HOST:

Singer and composer Luciana Souza is known for her thoughtful takes on jazz and songs from her native Brazil. She also records musical adaptations of poetry. Souza brings this all together on her new album, "The Book Of Longing." Music critic Michelle Mercer says it's one of her best yet.

MICHELLE MERCER, BYLINE: Longing is in Luciana Souza's blood. As the child of bossa nova songwriters, she grew up steeped in saudade, or yearning for what we've lost or never had. Saudade is about absence, but it's a theme with a strong presence in Brazilian music. And it can even be a kind of pleasure.

MERCER: Souza's background, along with her love of poetry, makes longing rich territory for her new song cycle, "The Book Of Longing." The title is taken from Leonard Cohen's 2006 book of poetry. She adapts four Cohen poems here, including "Nightingale." Her version is called "Night Song."

LUCIANA SOUZA: (Singing) I built my house beside the wood so I could hear you singing. And it was sweet, and it was good, and love was all beginning.

MERCER: As well as writing music to existing poetry, Souza writes her own complete songs. Her original lyrics fit seamlessly here alongside Cohen's

words. She favors evocative lists that accrue meaning. Here's Souza's "These Things."

SOUZA: (Singing) These are the duties of the heart. These are the words we've come to call our gods. These are the books we read.

MERCER: The supporting instrumentation here has elegant simplicity. It's Souza's own light percussion with Scott Colley's bass and Chico Pinheiro's guitar, musicians who understand how to cushion a lyric's starkness or structure a song's flow. But the key to this album is Souza's impressionistic composing for emotional effect. In her setting of Christina Rossetti's 1849 sonnet "Remember," hymnal guitar chords set a gently resolute mood.

SOUZA: (Singing) Remember me when I am gone away.

MERCER: Conventionally, sonnets have a turn in their final lines. And Souza charts "Remember's" change of heart with a musical shift.

SOUZA: (Singing) Better by far you should forget and smile than that you should remember and be sad.

MERCER: The album's closing message is that longing doesn't have to overwhelm us. And with Souza's delicate touch, it doesn't. This is the most graceful album yet from a songwriter who knows how to make rare and common sentiments into music of deep feeling. "The Book Of Longing" might ease us through any end-of-summer wistfulness and even help us find the beauty in not having it all.

SOUZA: (Vocalizing).

SHAPIRO: Luciana Souza's new album is "The Book Of Longing." Our reviewer is Michelle Mercer.

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