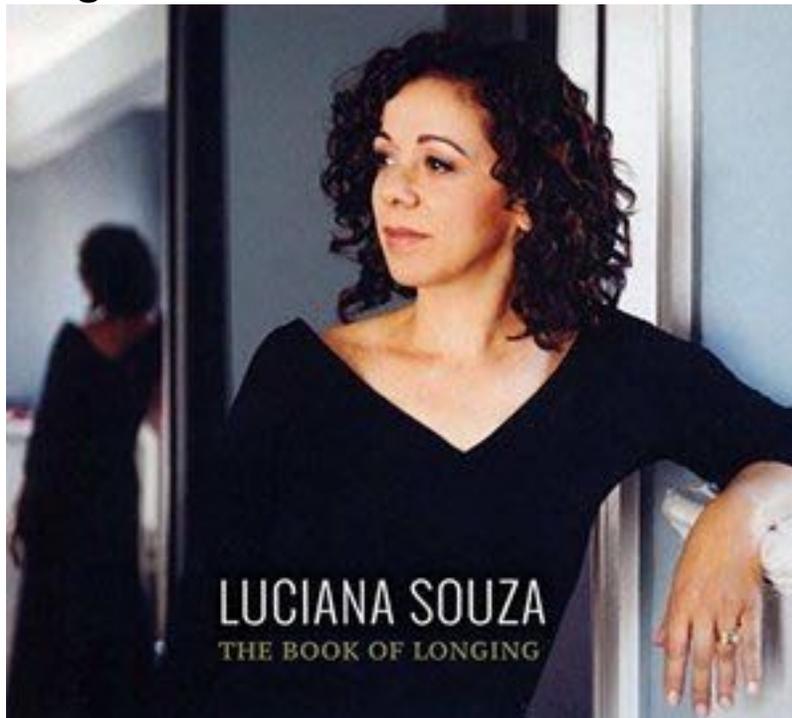


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Luciana Souza Delivers a Breathtaking Album of Nuance, Homage, and Poetry with 'The Book of Longing'

ANDY JURIK 14 Sep 2018

At times abstract and elusive while others vivacious and brimming with energy, Luciana Souza's *The Book of Longing* is a brilliant and sensual release from one of today's foremost jazz-crossover singers.



Though often referred to as a jazz musician, Brazilian singer Luciana Souza does wonders bending genre restrictions and expectations. She's collaborated extensively with various classical ensembles, from storied institutions like the New York Philharmonic and the Boston Symphony, to forward-thinking chamber groups like A Far Cry and the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet. Working with modern composers like Caroline Shaw, Sarah Kirkland Snider, and the wickedly versatile vocalist Theo Bleckmann, she's expanded her sonic signature to progressive and experimental sounds, building a stellar career beyond singing well-worn jazz standards.

The Book of Longing, her latest for Sunnyside Records, finds Souza writing music around the poetry of Leonard Cohen, Emily Dickinson, Christina Rossetti, and Edna St. Vincent Millay. This album isn't the first time Souza has written tunes based on texts from legendary poets—she's set works from Cohen and Pablo Neruda on prior records—but the sheer wealth of texts on The Book of Longing make it an undeniably ambitious and rewarding project.

Opening track "These Things" feels light as a cloud, dusted with brushed guitars and complimented by Souza's rich, yearning voice. It's damn impossible not to shudder at the beauty of her mature vocal tone as she intones, "These are the duties of the heart / These are the words we've come to call our gods." The minimal instrumentation and complex lyrics of "Daybreak" make it sound like the noir-infused bossa nova Antonio Carlos Jobim never got to write. Likewise, with a lazy groove and a tight trio "The Book" is a classic example of using less to say more.

In the promotional material Souza comments that setting music to poetry is like "falling in love", an act that inextricably binds her to the sentiments of a poet from ages past. Despite the generational gaps, Souza finds novel ways to humanize her settings. She crafts her melodies and harmonic landscape to breath new life into each word. Leonard Cohen's poem "Paris" bears a deep, melancholy weight (as texts from Cohen typically do), and Souza's melody makes each syllable shine without sounding insincere. "A Life" and "Remember" are sung with a beautiful, confessional tone that transcends any impressions Souza is limited to the world of Latin jazz.

The Book of Longing is a wonderful, intimate record, much of its mood owed to the sparse instrumentation. Chico Pinheiro's textured guitars and Scott Colley's tasteful bass lines bring depth and nuance to each track, music expertly complimented by occasional overdubbed percussion. It's not just the notes Pinheiro plays but how he plays them, from decisive and articulate melodies to gentile fingerstyle accompaniments. Colley, a highly in-demand bassist in the NY jazz scene, puts a wealth of soul and understanding in each note, supporting the music with even amounts of sound and silence. Recording such a small ensemble packed with phenomenal musicians allows each track to grow organically, from the hazy groove of "We Grow Accustomed to the Dark" to the exuberant joy of "Night Song".

While some listeners may grow tired of the album's reliance on trio dynamics and bare textures, The Book of Longing rewards those willing to mine a record for its lyrical and musical depth. Putting melodies to the words of noted poets is always a tricky proposition, but Souza builds monuments and breathtaking moments that still honor their sources.

