ALEJANDRA SUÁREZ

When you move to another country at age sixteen, you learn a thing or two about music. And about yourself.

At least that was the case for Alejandra Suárez, one of the rising stars on the international music scene. When she was just sixteen years old, Alejandra's family moved from Caracas, Venezuela to Montréal, Canada in search of a better future. The transition meant leaving friends and family, learning two new languages—French and English, and getting used to winter. It meant embracing a new culture, and yet finding a way to preserve her identity.

In Venezuela, Alejandra was deeply involved both in her music and in her culture. She performed for friends and family from an early age, and as a high school freshman, she won a school-wide singing competition. But in Canada, music became a kind of refuge, a way to bridge her two lives. Music was the place where her Venezuelan roots and her new life could merge into something uniquely beautiful.

While plunging headlong into school projects, language study, work and community activities, Alejandra also managed to find time to explore the Canadian music scene. It was there that she began to deepen her understanding of jazz, blues, R&B and hip-hop and blend them with her Latin roots. "Amazingly, I got to know and appreciate a lot more about my own music. I have been very lucky to work with some great musicians in the Latin music scene in Montréal," Alejandra says. She quotes the Spanish phrase, *la sangre llama*, which loosely translated means, "the blood beckons." It speaks of the profound desire that those who have left their home country have to be reunited with friends and family and to reconnect with their own culture. "We carry our roots in our blood," Alejandra says. "We have to."

And, of course, it wasn't long before her talent was discovered. During her first year in Montréal, at just sixteen years old, Alejandra was hired to write, produce and record her first song at the commercial level. She had been writing consistently since age thirteen, so it was only natural that those musings would find their way into her music. This particular song would be used in the soundtrack for the film, *A Silent Love,* a cultural love story set in Montréal and Mexico. Alejandra wrote "Buscaba el amor" in cumbia style, drawing upon memories from Venezuela and on her years of writing practice. "It was about an impossible love," Alejandra recalls. "And that reminded me of a friend in Venezuela."

At twenty, Alejandra got her first professional contract with Chico Band, a popular group based in Montréal. As part of this and other bands, Alejandra performed at popular venues, such as "Le Cabaret du Casino de Montreal", as well as at festivals and events across Quebec.

But the real breakthrough came when she was featured as an emerging artist in the Discovery Section of the 2007 Montréal Jazz Festival. "It was an enriching experience that allowed me to learn a lot of things—not just about music, but also about myself as an artist." Alejandra says. She remembers getting off the stage, already looking forward to her next chance to perform. "The energy and support that I felt on that day compelled me to continue fighting—to engage

myself with and commit to this dream of mine." It was this experience that drove Alejandra to continue to become involved in every part of her music.

In 2009 Alejandra signed her first recording contract with Music Spirit, an independent record label. She has been writing her own songs and collaborating with producer Norm McDavid to create her debut album, *Indestructible.* Her songs blend Latin, R&B and Caribbean rhythms and encompass themes of love, life, and the social realities that surround us all. Her single "*Sin juego y sin voz*" ("Without game and without a voice") is due to be released this summer. In this song, Alejandra gives a voice to a voiceless generation—children robbed of their childhood due to extreme poverty.

It's hard work, but Alejandra does not give up. "I continue to pursue this dream because whenever I feel like giving up, this dream continues to pursue me," she says.

Maybe that's because Alejandra understands that great music does more than entertain us. It unites us, even if just for a moment. "As humans we never get tired of art and creativity," she says. "And if we would all take a chance to follow our true passion, we could all make a real difference." Great music transcends language and culture by expressing the things that we cannot say but that we all feel. It blends the disparate parts of our patchwork identities into something fluid and beautiful. Good music is everywhere. *Great* music is hard to come by.

And Alejandra Suárez makes *great* music.

Look for her single "*Sin juego y sin voz*" this summer, and visit www.alejandrasuarez.com to learn more.