

# JazzDeLaPena

## Vocalist, Composer Laura Otero releases From Noche to Night (Destiny Records)

By **Tomas Peña** - Oct 10, 2015



*"Laura Otero composes and sings beautiful songs informed by the best musical traditions in Latin A and the jazz world. Her music and her performances, with some of the best musicians in Austin, full of passion, drama, and rhythm. When you see her perform you witness the power of music to a person and a room."*

## Gregory Fernando Pappas

Bogotá-born vocalist and composer Laura Otero announces her second album of original music, *From Noche to Night* (Destiny Records). Surrounded by some of Austin's finest musicians, the album is a culmination of her explorations of traditional Colombian music as informed by her graduate studies at the University of North Texas in Denton.

Otero began her performance career in musical theater with the company Misi Producciones over ten years ago. Her credits include *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Annie*, and *La mas grande historia jamás can* performed at Jazz at Lincoln Center in 2012. She credits these formative performances with building the professionalism she carries to this day.

During her college days in Bogotá, Otero began arranging for a female vocal sextet and has since won multiple awards in Colombia and the US for her vocal arranging. "Nuestra canción," re-recorded for her album, garnered a DownBeat Student Award for Outstanding Composition in 2013. Her penchant for vocal harmony – a result of her musical theater experience and her deep love of pop music – can be heard on the title track, where she is joined by fellow vocalists Michelle Alonso and Jessica Gree

Otero's interest in adapting traditional Colombian music dates back to high school, where she conducted an independent study about how to make the folkloric songs accessible to younger generations. During her undergraduate studies at Pontificia Javeriana University, she began writing jazz arrangements of Colombian folk music for vocal sextet. Upon arriving at UNT – funded by a Fulbright scholarship – she introduced her international classmates to Colombian music and continued to infuse it with her enriched jazz language.

The rhythm section – Otero's "core band" – features Andrew Friedrich on guitar, bassist Richard Mikkelsen, and drummer Daniel Dufour. Friedrich and Mikel are best friends; along with Otero, they lived in the same apartment building and began exploring South American music of all kinds, from boleros to bossa nova. Dufour is no stranger to Latin music, having performed and recorded with trumpeter/vocalist Pete Dinklage. All three were thrilled to dig into a new rhythmic repertoire. "It was great to have a band for the first time," Otero enthuses. "We could work on a sound, and work on the details of the music." *From Noche to Night* features guests drawn from Austin's vibrant jazz scene, including first-call percussionist Michael Loraine, violinist James Anderson and accordionist Mike Maddux from the Austin Piazzolla Quintet. Other band members include cellist Ilia de la Rosa, and saxophonists Zack Varner and Marcus Wilcher.



Another special guest on From Noche to Night is vocalist Claudia Gómez, who Otero refers to as a major influence. “Claudia came to college in Bogotá to do a week-long workshop with the singer,” Otero recalls. “She was so inspiring because she is so experienced and with music. I immediately got all her albums, and I love how Claudia Gómez performs on “Pienso en Ti,” a song Otero composed based on a verse written by her grandmother. Otero approached Gómez about recording the song through an old teacher, and she agreed to do so on Thanksgiving day. “It was an exchange – I sing a verse on your upcoming record,” Otero says. “We’ve bonded through music

through life.”

Most of the songs on From Noche to Night were written during Otero’s time in Texas, many of which she workshopped in her studios with vocalist and songwriter Rosana Eckert. Otero explains the guidance she received for the title track: “Rosana is such a smart teacher – she knows how to guide you through life. I was having a hard time living in between cultures – no longer being in Colombia and not being American but feeling like an outsider to my own culture. Rosana told me just to write a song about

Otero’s passion for South American music extends beyond Colombia. She is a vocalist in Los Patos, a band specializing in Peruvian chicha. Her experiences in that band were the driving inspiration behind “de fuego,” subsequently given an infusion of Colombian flavor by her former teacher, Juan Sebastián. Fellow Colombia-to-Texas transplant, Kiko Villamizar, sings coro here. Award-winning Brazilian composer and vocalist Michelle Alonso contributes two arrangements to the album. The dramatic lyrics of “A Paso Lento” begged to be set as a tango. “I gave myself license to just write music,” Otero says. “When I’m in the creative process, I don’t want to box the music in, you have to just let it be.”

From Noche to Night epitomizes Otero’s time in the US. “This album is part of a transitional phase,” she explains. “The culture shock has been so strong both ways. My head is constantly switching from Spanish to English.” In her short time in Austin, Otero has immersed herself in its burgeoning jazz scene. From Noche to Night showcases the diversity of Austin’s musical community and a bright new voice from Bogotá.

### Track List:

1. MERCEDITAS 4:58
2. A PASO LENTO 4:33
3. PIENSO EN TI (Featuring Claudia Gómez) 4:20

4. HARD TO SAY GOODBYE 5:49
5. NUESTRA CANCIÓN 6:18
6. AGUA DE FUEGA 4:29
7. MI CANCIÓN NO DEJA DE AMARTE 6:07
8. FROM NOCHE TO NIGHT 6:43
9. ¿DÓNDE ESTÁS MI AMOR? 5:42

**Musicians:**

Laura Otero – Vocals

Andrew Friedrich – Guitar

Richard Mikel – Bass

Daniel Dufour – Drums

Claudia Gómez – Vocals (3)

Michael Longoria – Percussion (1, 6-8)

Zack Varner – Clarinet (5, 7), Alto Saxophone (6)

Marcus Wilcher – Soprano and Tenor Saxophones (1, 4, 6)

Ilia De la Rosa – Cello (7)

James Anderson – Violin (2)

Mike Maddux – Accordion (2)

Michelle Alonso – Backup Vocals (8)

Jessica Green – Backup Vocals (8)

Kiko Villamizar – Backup Vocals (6)

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**Tomas Peña**

A graduate of Empire State College with a dual major in journalism and Latin American studies, has spent years applying his knowledge and writing skills to the promotion of great musicians. / in the crossroads between jazz and Latin music, Peña has written extensively on the subject.