

# Bolivian beats

## Rosario Arce shares Latin music with Canada

By Lisa Evans

**R**osario Arce loves traditional Latin music. “There’s a lot of culture and history with the lyrics and the instruments,” she says. Even before the Bolivian-born singer takes to the stage with pan flutes, drums and the charango (a small Andean stringed instrument) accompanying her, she taps into her roots and designs her own costumes for each show, always taking care to incorporate some detail of her culture.

As a child, Arce loved to sing, but never realized how special her talent was. “I thought it was something natural. Everyone could sing. I never thought it was a special gift,” she says. Her vocal gift provided her with the opportunity to come to Canada in 1989 to represent Bolivia in the World Folklore Festival in Drummondville, Quebec. Although Arce had been performing with professional Bolivian musicians since she was 14 years old, showcasing her talent on an international stage was a whole new experience. Arce fell in love not only with performing, but with sharing the music from her home country with others. After the festival, Arce, who speaks French, lived in Montreal for a time before relocating to Toronto.

Living in the multicultural city exposed Arce to a variety of musical styles from other Latin countries. While she has become well-known in the Spanish community, winning the best female singer award at the 2011 Tony Reyes Spanish Festival and receiving support from the Toronto Spanish radio station 1610 CHHA, which plays Arce’s songs on a daily basis, she now aims to use her talents to forge a connection to the country that has become her home.

Arce takes pride that her music can not only entertain,

but also educate Canadians about Latin American music. Although she mostly sings in Spanish, Arce says music is a world language that doesn’t require a dictionary. “You don’t need to understand the language to understand the music,” she says. “If you hear a rhythm and you say ‘I like that rhythm. Where does that come from?’ or you hear an instrument and you say ‘Where does that instrument come from?’ Canadians are surrounded by immigrants and it’s nice for them to learn about different cultures, and what better way than going to a show?”

Arce released her third album in late 2013. Titled *The Last Kiss*, the album is a tribute to her father who passed away of cancer three years ago. “[The title] refers to the last kiss my dad gave to my mother before he passed away. He was in a coma, but he woke up to say goodbye and give her a kiss,” says Arce.

The album was two years in the making. While her previous two albums were made with a Latin American audience in mind, in this album, Arce purposefully selected songs that would open her music up to the Canadian market. “I wanted to create an album that could be enjoyed even [if the listener] didn’t understand Spanish,” she says. By selecting interesting rhythms and melodies to bridge the language gap and adding an English version to one of the traditional Bolivian songs, Arce hopes to connect with the Canadian audience. “I want Canadian people to get to know about me. That’s why I included a biography in English and I put the title in English,”

says Arce.

The album is truly a multicultural effort. Arce hired musicians in Bolivia to record the traditional instruments then had the tracks sent to Canada where they were mixed with her vocals and electronic instruments.

While Arce’s music is tied to her Bolivian roots (she was thrilled to receive a title from the Bolivian Embassy as ambassador of Bolivian and Latin American culture in Canada), she thanks Canada for shaping her musical career. “If I had

stayed in Bolivia I would be probably well known in my country, but I wouldn’t have had the opportunity to get to know other cultures like I did here,” she says. By connecting with the Spanish community in Canada, Arce had the opportunity to explore music of other countries in Latin America,

without ever travelling to them.

“I learned from their music and I’m able to sing their music and that’s a big accomplishment,” she says. 🌟



Rosario Arce sings mostly in Spanish, but believes her music reaches beyond language.