

JARAMAR

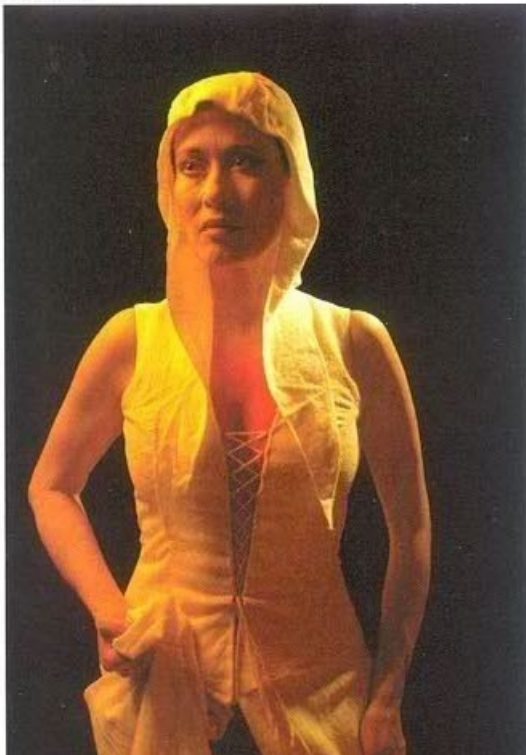
Travesía 1992-2002 Fugazí Records
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Duerme Por la Noche Oscura: Canciones de Cuna Fondo de Cultura Económica 2004

Wow! Just sometimes out of the blue you get a disc by a group you have never heard of before who are absolutely fabulous and obviously have a big following in their own country. The Mexican singer Jaramar gives her name to a band of fine musicians playing bass, guitars, cello, strings, percussion, flutes, dulcimers, keyboards and saxophone, who are totally new to me and a totally mesmerising experience. Indeed my guess is they could become big in Europe if they come over here à la Mariza. Everything here is arresting. Indeed there's one particular song – *Sic Mea Fata* – that has haunted me since I first heard it and which I keep playing over and over again. It's almost masochistic in effect, like someone having to deny love and destiny. It sounds very today yet turns out to be *Carmena Burana No. 116* from the 12th century.

Travesía maps 10 years of Jaramar's musical life from 1992-2002, selecting its tracks from six discs each called a project, which include one dedicated to songs tied to their original languages and another of erotic female poetry. The overall feel is of early troubadour music, but that's largely because it kicks off with a modern interpretation of the music of the Sephardic Jews of Spain and has a fabulous version of the classic early woman's song *Bésame y Abrázame*, with its merry dancy-rhythmic line "Kiss me and hug me, husband of mine". Anyone who likes Radio Tarifa will find a way in here as Jaramar's *Una Pastora yo Ami* is a song that Tarifa made famous as

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La Pastora back in their early 1990s' *Rumba Argelina* days. Jaramar's purer approach is no less tantalising, which says a lot, as it's almost impossible to beat the sexy version by Tarifa's flamenco-rumba singer Benjamín.

The accompanying CD ROM /DVD has cut of a great concert in Guadalajara, Mexico plus interview. Jaramar is a very beautiful woman and part of the appeal is that she physically sings her music to life with moves that match her voice. The settings of erotic poetry by Mexican female poets which date back to the 15th century *Sor Juana de la Cruz* with music by Alfredo Sánchez are stunning. *La Sirena*, which sees the mermaid as the secret, deeper, even darker side of women is particularly special. Alfredo Sánchez's music and arrangements use medieval and early music idioms as a springboard for something much more contemporary; *Jade y Oro* has an Arabic feel to it. Songs are evocative, seductive and at times eerie. Jaramar's voice, which has the ability to express a host of emotions, is beautifully close mic'ed, so you feel she is singing right in front of you, even whispering in your ear.

Everytime I listen to the disc I am reminded of yet another female singer. First, given the way Jaramar can use her voice, it was fellow Mexican Lila Downs (although Jaramar's version of *La Llorona* is quite different to Downs's and different also to Lhasa de Sela's version). Then it was Catalan singer Maria del Mar Bonet; then Portugal's Teresa Salgueira of *Madredeus* (especially or *Ponte en Pie* when she has Salgueira's nasal throatiness). However, while one can 'hear' traces of other contemporary female voices, Jaramar has a distinctive style of her own: her voice has limpid clarity, intensity and depth. And her musicians are very good indeed, which is why this disc is so special.

Jaramar has also made *Duerme Por la Noche Oscura* (Sleep Through The Dark Night), a recording of children's lullabies and assorted songs, old and new, which is very beautiful too. Some are traditional Sephardic, Spanish and Catalan from past centuries, others have texts by poets, notably *Arbolé arbolé* by heroic Spanish Civil War poet Federico García Lorca. There's also the *Romance de los Pelegrinos*, with its winsome melody and attractive bedtime story, which Lorca collected and published as *13 Spanish Songs* in the 1930s. Delicate and magical, the booklet has the best children's fantasy pictures with flying fish and mermaids and strange animals. While you can't sing to calm hypermanic babes, or really soothe fretful children to sleep, it may work for stressed adults! It would certainly work a soundtrack to a puppet theatre. It has Jaramar appeal! www.fugazirecords.com; www.jaramar.com.mx

Christine Charter May 2005 1