

piano-playing gifts while accentuating the jazz-like nuance behind her beautiful, bluesy voice.

Yet, she's more about fun and, a born entertainer, she's keen on injecting social responsibility into her highly animated statements.

The title track defines her approach to life, featuring slippery slide from Tim Williams, a tight horn arrangement and red-hot piano, yet her positive message is sometimes obscured by lyrics trying to work too hard.

The hilarious duet, *Last Time I'm Lovin' You*, borrows a page from Rufus & Carla Thomas, with a great performance from Jack Semple on guitar and co-lead vocal as the pair revisit The Honeymooners (musically, the intro to the piece is one of the album's highlights).

*Don't Ever Leave Me* features

another ripping vocal from Power and smooth-as-silk support from B3 (Mike Little) and piano. The raucous *I'm Comin' Around* and harder-edged rocker, *Side On Sue*, (both featuring Joey Landreth on slide) ably demonstrate how easily Power dovetails into full-on, roadhouse blues.

However, head for the more intimate moments of *Let Me Love You Tonight* to more fully appreciate Power's core strengths. She can clearly do it all.

– By Eric Thom

### Aviva Chernick

*La Serena* (Independent)



Aviva Chernick's music is deeply spiritual, committed to living an examined Jewish faith. Her previous



Aviva Chernick, centre.

work has involved re-interpreting ancient Jewish prayers in new musical settings, creating English lyrics alongside the original Hebrew.

Aviva finds an enlarged understanding of biblical texts, shedding light on how they might be appreciated in a modern context. She finds happiness

and hope in some rather spare texts.

On her new album, *La Serena*, she continues her musical exploration of biblical poetry (*Psalms*; *Song of Songs*) but shifts the emphasis to her Judeo-Spanish heritage. Aviva has been studying with Nona Flory Jagoda, a keeper of the





Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles

Balkan Ladino tradition. When Aviva first heard Jogoda in 2008 at the Glen Gould Studio in Toronto, she made her way backstage and asked to become her student. Since that time, Aviva regularly flies to Jagoda’s home in Virginia to study the traditional Sephardic songs and poetry, sung in Ladino.

Aviva’s voice is sweet and clear. It resonates with purity. She approaches all her material with reverence. Conveying the beauty of melody is one of her musical gifts. I do wish, though, that sometimes there might be some grit; dare I wish for some unleashed passion?

Where I do hear passion is in the instrumental work on the album. Joel Schwartz on guitars and mandolin, and Justin Gray on bass and bass veena (an instrument created for him by luthier Les Godfrey), weave elegant, sometimes lush, settings. Never overpowering the voice, the instruments nevertheless transcend accompaniment to become their own evocation of the songs.

The ensemble catches fire on *Arvoles Yoran*, *The Trees Cry*, a song adopted by Greek Jews who chanted it on their way to the gas chambers. Aviva’s voice rings with intensity; the sound of the bass veena takes the song

into Indian classical territory with harmonics lifting the song into a global context.

I have to mention that the album itself is beautiful to look at and to hold. The paper is lovely, the text is lovely, Aviva’s dress is lovely! (She credits the designer of her dress with influencing the overall aesthetic of the album.) Lyric translations bring the songs home.

Overall, an interesting road, less travelled, worth exploring.  
—by Lark Clark

### Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles

*De Ayer Para Siempre* (Smithsonian Folkways)



Mariachi is finally getting some respect. Long beloved by Mexicans, the high level of skill and devotion required by the genre is finally being recognized outside its immediate culture.

Smithsonian Folkways has been recording mariachi musicians, in albums and on videos, for years. Two of their recent releases are significant: the beautifully recorded and well-documented album *De Ayer Para Siempre* (*From Yesterday to Forever*) by Mariachi Los Camperos, and an equally complete documentation of the

all-female mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles.

Mariachi Los Camperos was founded in 1961 by third-generation mariachi Nati Cano. Growing up in western Mexico, Cano emigrated to California and established a restaurant in Los Angeles. Yes, Mexican food was important, but more significantly, La Fonda Restaurant provided a permanent home for Los Camperos.

*De Ayer Para Siempre* marks the smooth transition to a new leader, Jesús (Chuy) Guzmán, himself the son of a mariachi musician. Chuy recounts that as a child, when he came home from school, he would get out his violin and play until evening. At the age of 10 he started his own mariachi group. Guzmán paid his musical dues, playing in Tijuana restaurants for long hours every night, for years. Moving to Los Angeles with the sole desire to join Los Camperos, he was invited into the group in 1986. When founder Nati Cano passed away in 2014, Guzmán was the natural choice to carry on the group’s tradition.

Mariachi has long been regarded as an exclusively male domain. Although there were a few all-female mariachis in the “golden era” of mariachi music

in the 1930s and ’40s, they were generally regarded as a novelty. The time was right for change when, in 1994, Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles was formed.

Drawing from the increasing number of educated young female musicians, founder José Hernandez recognized an opportunity to create excellence. With consistently high standards, Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles has become a beacon for other women who want to play in the style. Group leader, violinist Julie Murillo, answering a challenge as to how a woman can have a family and be a working musician, answered, “We’re women, we do it!”

Traditional mariachi groups are just that—traditional. Individuality is not encouraged. As Nati Cano explained, to be a “good mariachi”, you must be “part of the family”.

Although technique is not specifically discussed, the level of musicianship, especially among the violinists, is impeccable, the vocals operatic, the arrangements clock-like in precision. Disparaged as “ethnic folk music”, these mariachi groups have sought to dispel stereotypes about mariachi culture. These two recordings provide proof of excellence obtained.  
—By Lark Clark

### Dawn Tyler Watson

*Mad Love* (Independent)



Dawn Tyler Watson is a proven performer who can call her own shots—and she does.

Live, she’s legendary—her mercurial personality bubbling over the stage as her stunning vocal power and passionate delivery adds legions of fans with each outing. On record—and this is her fifth—she can