



# HEALING MUSIC

## GATHERING STRENGTH

**S**inger/songwriter Lara Manzanares had been living in San Francisco for a few years. She'd earned an MFA from California College of the Arts and was starting to establish herself on the music scene, but her body was sending messages that something was wrong. She had a foreboding of disaster if she didn't get back to her native New Mexico. "I had to just sit down and think, 'What's important in life? What kind of lifestyle do you want to live?'" she says. "And I did some thinking and some introspection, and I was like, 'It's time to go back.'"

Growing up in Tierra Amarilla in a family with a sheep-to-shawl business in Los Ojos called Tierra Wools, Manzanares is a daughter of the mountains and an accomplished weaver. Getting back to New Mexico helped ground her for an extended recovery from a debilitating illness. Settling into a little house that her mom owns in Corrales, Manzanares had no idea that she would be recording an award-winning album before long. "I don't know if you believe in universal or cosmic stuff, but that's kind of what I feel happened," she says.

Music had insistently threaded through her life since she was a young girl. It filled her parents' house, and she'd absorbed everything from rock and roll to traditional New Mexican corridos and rancheras. She'd sung at the farmers' market in Santa Fe as a teenager, where another performer gifted her with a sheaf of lyrics of traditional Spanish and Mexican tunes. Studying design in college, she says that "music kept popping up." For example, for a package design project at the Art Institute of Chicago, where she was pursuing a post baccalaureate course of study, she created a CD package for an album called *Ingredients*, on which she sang the ingredients from a variety of packaged foods.

Manzanares had started writing her own tunes as a teenager and had become more intentional about the process while in San Francisco. By the time she got to Corrales, she had a store of polished



Lara Manzanares has returned to her native New Mexico and brought a fresh, inspired style with her.

songs. As her strength began to return, she ventured out to open mic nights and started making contacts.

The "universal or cosmic stuff" started when a friend, Tammy Tiong, asked Manzanares to fill in for her on a gig. "I went and I played the gig, and I ended up playing a bunch of my original songs," she says. "Apparently, it had an impact because they called me back to play the following month."

As she prepared to leave the house for the second gig, "This feeling came—like a premonition—but it was really strong: 'Somebody there is going to help you,'" she says. At the end of the gig, someone approached her and said, "Hey, there's somebody here who wants to help you. Have you ever thought of recording an album?"

Manzanares met her would-be angel, and they went forward with the project. "I am so grateful to that person," she says,

keeping their identity private. An artist friend, Paul Trachtman, introduced her to producer Jono Manson, and over the next nine months or so, Manzanares recorded the album, *Land Baby*, a collection of 12 diverse originals in English and Spanish. At the 2018 New Mexico Music Awards, *Land Baby* won the Best Album award. The CD package, designed by Manzanares and featuring one of her weavings, got the nod for Best Packaging.

Manzanares is now in the process of putting together a backing band, and she is looking forward to playing out on a more regular basis as she regains her strength. Whether you need a singer, photographer, weaver, or graphic designer, you can reach her at [lara.manz@gmail.com](mailto:lara.manz@gmail.com) and keep up with her at [www.laramanzanares.com](http://www.laramanzanares.com).