

SARA TAVARES biography

The Slang and Authenticity of a Diaspora: Sara Tavares Finds the Voice of a New Generation of Africans in Lisbon. “There is a big, big generation of Cape Verdeans and other Africans here in Lisbon, in Paris, in Boston, all over... with a kind of messed-up identity,” says Lisbon’s twenty-seven year old Sara Tavares, who releases *Balancê* on World Connection on February 13th, 2006. “Our generation feels very lost because there is no culture specifically for us; that talks about our reality.”

“When I walk around with my friends, it’s a very, very interesting community,” Tavares explains. “We speak Portuguese slang, Angolan slang, some words in Cape Verdean Crioulo, and of course some English. In Crioulo there are already English and French words. This is because slaves from all over the world had to communicate and didn’t speak the same languages. We are a metisse culture.”

Multilingual wordplay shows up throughout Tavares’ album, and she hops across cultural references as much as she embraces any. The album title *Balancê*—pronounced bal-on-SAY—has many different meanings. The noun *balanço* is used in Portuguese when music “swings.” Lusophone Africans use the verb form *balancê* in a more general way. “When you are eating something really good you say ‘this food is *balancê*!’” explains Tavares.

“For me song ‘*Balancê*’ is also about balancing yourself,” Tavares continues, “between sadness and joy; day and night; salt and sugar. It’s about balancing emotions. You are always walking a thin line and you have to keep your balance. You have to dance with that line in order to keep standing. If you stay too rigid, you will fall.” “I was in Zimbabwe a few years ago and I saw some really drunk people dancing,” Tavares chuckles. “We were watching them, and they were always almost falling and then they would catch themselves. Just like those people dancing, I also want to dance with that kind of freedom and balance.”

Tavares’ sweet voice and gentle arrangements communicate this meaning even if you cannot understand all of the lyrics. Her voice has a healing power which comes from someone who has struggled with her place in the world and then accepted herself fully. This is the voice of a woman whose parents left her. In the ever so Cape Verdean search for a better life, her father left for America; her mother moved south. Tavares was raised by an older Portuguese woman. Through music she sought out her family and cultural roots, along with the help of veteran African musicians in Lisbon and back in Cape Verde where she travels every year.

“The whole album is like little lullabies to myself,” says Tavares. “All the messages are about self-esteem, loving yourself. About liking what is different in you. About integrating all the parts of you.” ‘*Bom Feeling*,’ whose title combines a Portuguese word with an English word that “everyone uses,” translates as ‘Good Feeling.’ While some people look down on the Portuguese slang associated with African people in Portugal, Tavares embraces it. Tavares says she is from a “broken home” and identifies with street culture.

‘*Poka Terra*’ is influenced by Afro-Beat and *semba* (a style from Angola). The song’s title is an onomatopoeia for the sound a train makes. Tavares is calling on people to catch the train of consciousness and to become responsible for yourself. She sings “An alligator that sleeps will be turned into an alligator bag sold in some store.” On ‘*Planeta Sukri*’ (Sugar Planet) Tavares places a reggae style sound system on top of a traditional Cape Verdean rhythm *coladeira* (a style made popular by Cesaria Evora). “The poem of this song can be seen as a love poem,” says Tavares.

"I am saying 'Take me to a sugar planet, take me to place where there is no sadness, no cries. And this place is inside of you and me and everyone.' I mean it more in a spiritual way than a romantic way. The ballads are very much like little prayers."

Tavares talks to the moon on 'Muna Xeia' (Full Moon). The song title emerged when Tavares made a mistake and accidentally combined the English word 'moon' with the Portuguese word for the same 'lua.' "It's a very feminine song with me talking to the women," Tavares explains. "First the woman inside of me and then the women in Africa and the women in the world. I sing, 'Moon go in peace, moon go in faith, walk in peace, walk in faith.'" Two years ago, Tavares spent time in Cape Verde working with a contemporary dance company. He "You know how contemporary artists do crazy experimental stuff?" she asks. "Well, they gave me the strength to experiment. If those who live in and own the culture, then we in diaspora can also experiment. As long as someone keeps the tradition. It's a two-sided knife."

"I want to be a part of a movement like the African Americans were, like the African Brazilians were," Tavares says. "Instead of doing the music of their ancestors, they have created this musical identity of their own".

And it is now respected. It is considered whole and authentic and genuine. It will be a long time before the people from my generation do not have to choose between being African or European. I think you shouldn't have to choose. You should just be there. Celebrate that. Be that!"