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# Balm for the spirit

Brooklyn musician's new album takes inspiration from her family

BY TAMMY SCILEPPI

**W**hile touring and performing with exciting artists like Sting, Laila Biali, a jazzy, hands-on mommy spent eight years creating her latest album, titled "House of Many Rooms."

Brooklyn-based, award-winning pianist, vocalist, and songwriter Biali, 34, skillfully weaves the best of pop, rock, classical, soul, and jazz into all of her musical arrangements. She says "House of Many Rooms" is about the living spaces we construct inside our own hearts and minds, where we store dreams and memories of the people who have touched us. (Check out <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hwRd9MOvMcc> for a video introducing her new album.)

Ask any parent, and they'll tell you that life is forever transformed when you have a child. And no matter who you are, what kind of job

you have or had; whether you've climbed the ladder of success, or just marched to the beat of your own drum — the realization that mommyhood trumps everything else becomes crystal clear when that little person enters your world.

That's what happened when Biali, a Canadian native, felt inspired to write "Little Bird" for her new 11-track album. The lyrics came to her on a subway ride home, back in November 2010. Her heartfelt song is about her then 5-month-old baby boy, Joshua, and in it, Biali looks back at a time in her life when she felt the birth of her son (now 5) "was the missing puzzle piece; tying all the madness in my life together in the most beautiful and unexpected of ways."

**Tammy Scileppi:** How about sharing that special time with our readers?

**Laila Biali:** I had brought Josh to a friend's party, where a bunch of my musician friends were gathering to celebrate some significant professional milestones. I remember sitting at this party, feeling like I was in a whole new and different world as a mother. I'll be honest — there was a bit of grief to process. Joshua was a surprise, and my husband and I got pregnant very shortly after I started working with Sting.

I knew the pregnancy and birth would change my life as a musician, substantially, and this party was a reminder of how much it had actually changed. On the way home, I took the time to reflect on the significance of these changes and, of course, determined that I wouldn't have had it any other way. Josh was the greatest gift life had brought. "Little Bird" was and is my first tribute to him.

**TS:** Two moving songs on the album, "Sparrow" and "Shine" deal with the deaths of children. What compelled you to write them?

**LB:** "Sparrow" was written for a friend who lost her twin baby girls eight months into her pregnancy. I couldn't imagine her loss (especially as a mother) and was horrified and deeply grieved at this news.

As an essentially optimistic person, who believes in the redemption of even life's toughest experiences, "Sparrow" asks the question, "How could a merciful and loving Creator

allow this to happen?" The ultimate message of the song, amidst the brokenness and questioning, is one of hope. I'm delighted to report that my friend has since given birth to a healthy baby girl!

"Shine" was written for the victims of the Sandy Hook Elementary School tragedy. Again, as a mother, the feelings of loss and confusion over such brutality overwhelmed me.

I wanted to write a lullaby, for all the parents who had lost their little ones, and for the souls of those sweet children — those we'd lost and the rest who would have to bear the memory of such a day.

I chose "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" as the foundation for the melody, because I wanted the song to feel like a lullaby. Some of the words starkly describe the damage, physically and emotionally: "There's shattered glass beneath our feet. The shards, they cut like broken dreams. And now our children cannot sleep at night."

But this song is ultimately a prayer for healing and restoration: "Twinkle, twinkle, little star. Bind our wounds and heal our scars. Shining stars."

**TS:** What is Joshua up to these days?

**LB:** He is now attending pre-K full time, about a 10-minute walk from our apartment. My husband, Ben, and I live in the Prospect Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn, not too far from the botanic garden and Brooklyn Museum. We love our little village!

Not surprisingly, Josh has a great affinity for music and dance. (His paternal grandmother attended Juilliard in the '50s, as a modern dancer.) He also loves building structures of all kinds, using various materials — Magformers, Legos, blocks, you name it. He lights up our life!

*Laila Biali performs at SubCulture [45 Bleecker St. at Lafayette Street in NoHo, (212) 533-5470, [www.theradianceproject.com](http://www.theradianceproject.com)]. June 1.*

*House of Many Rooms presale on iTunes and Google Play ("Little Bird," "You," and "Love" are available for immediate download with pre-purchase): <http://bit.ly/HOMRiTunes>, <http://bit.ly/HOMRGooglePlay>*

*Stream: <http://bit.ly/LailaBialiHouseofManyRoomsSoundcloud>*

*Download: <http://bit.ly/LailaBialiHouseofManyRooms>*



Photo by Leila Cyr

Laila Biali, Josh (5), and husband Ben Wittman.