

BASIA BULAT

"I don't think I realized the radio had more than one station 'til I was 11 or 12," Basia Bulat says. At the family home in Toronto, the dial was always fixed to the local oldies station: Motown, Stax, The Beatles, Beach Boys and Sam Cooke. While her mother hunted for someone to do the dishes, Basia and her younger brother Bobby would hide with a radio or tape player, happily rattled by all that song.

Since the age of three, Basia has been sitting on piano stools and trying to hammer things out. It started with her piano-teacher mum, but along the way Basia's picked up guitar, autoharp, banjo, ukulele, sax and flute. In high school her instrument was the upright bass – a lone girl among "eight-foot-tall guys in the back of the orchestra, goofing off with the tubas". There's a sense of play that still suffuses her music, jostling under the songs of regret and love, want and joy. When her brother began in his teens to play drums with punk bands, Basia would be there with her demerara voice, joining happily in the jam. When she left for university in London, Ontario, musicians began to drop by her downtown apartment. Many nights were spent with these classically trained friends, laughing and singing, and together they made a glad, bright noise.

In the summer of 2006, Basia went to live in Montreal. Through friends she met Howard Bilerman, an engineer and co-owner of the famed Hotel 2 Tango studio. Basia cashed some student loans to record with Bilerman in one of the final sessions at the original H2T site, but by the third day she had lost her voice. It was ultimately these rough early takes, hoarse with excitement that formed the bulk of *Oh, My Darling*. Initially the recordings were meant only as an "audible memory" of the time Basia spent with friends in London and Montreal: "We liked playing together so much, and I just wanted to remember that." But Bilerman was smitten with the songs, with Basia and her band, and he began to write to friends at labels, friends with music-blogs, anyone who might pay attention. For despite the original intention, these tracks are breathless, thirsty, dislodged from dreary nostalgia. There are strings, yes, and acoustic guitar, but also a frantic drum-kit gallop; the influence of the spirits of wild Jeff Magnum, big-voiced Odetta, Emily Dickinson and all those boisterous soul-music singles. It's this spark that sets Basia Bulat apart from the raft of typical singer-songwriters, and also what attracted the interest of Geoff Travis and Britain's legendary Rough Trade label who released *Oh, My Darling* in Europe and Japan in the spring of 2007.

Since then Basia and her band have toured across Canada and Europe, sharing stages with the likes of Final Fantasy, Great Lake Swimmers, Loney Dear, Patrick Watson, Julie Doiron, Sondre Lerche, and The Veils, leaving a trail of new fans and happy critics along the way. *Oh, My Darling* is a pet project no longer, but Basia's ambitions are unchanged from those early days of that tiny apartment: "I love songs that I can sing along to," Basia says, and then she corrects herself, balling her hand into a fist. "No, songs that you want to sing along to."

Oh, My Darling will be released in the US on February 5 with a tour to follow.