



DALA

BIOGRAPHY

On their fifth studio record, *Best Day*, **Dala's** central message is as simple as it is compelling; if you're unwilling to celebrate the impermanence of life as well as its constants in equal measure, you're cheating yourself.

It's a sentiment the Toronto-based duo of Amanda Walther and Sheila Carabine express concisely on the album's title track, *Best Day*, and a reflection of the way they look at both their individual lives and their musical partnership. "Life is short," Walther says. "You don't know how long you have with the people you love, so you need to live every moment to the fullest, which isn't a bad thing to be reminded of frequently."

That's an assertion Dala underline beautifully by bracketing *Best Day* with 'Life on Earth' and 'Still Life'; two songs that encourage listeners to view their lives as masterpieces in the making, regardless of the materials they're given to work with.

Put bluntly, you have to experience winter to enjoy the spring, a point driven home by the freezing weather Dala find waiting for them upon returning to Canada after a run of California shows in February 2012. It is the coldest day of the year thus far, but neither seems to mind. "We push each other to enjoy every moment, regardless, and we take great delight in where we are right now," Carabine says.

Dala have every reason to do so. Since the release of their debut, *This Moment is a Flash* (2005), the response from fans and critics alike to their insightful brand of acoustic pop has been uniformly enthusiastic. Their 2009 release, *Everyone is Someone*, received critical acclaim in the EU as well as in North America, with The Irish Post lauding it as the Album of the Year, and National Public Radio's 'Folk Alley' calling 'Horses' one of the Top Ten folk songs of 2009. In Canada, *Everyone is Someone* garnered Dala their fifth Canadian Folk Music Award (CFMA) nomination and a Toronto Independent Music Award for Best Folk Group. Additionally, their 2010 live CD/DVD, *Girls From The North Country*, won the pair a 2010 CFMA for Vocal Group of the Year, a JUNO nomination for Roots and Traditional Album of the Year: Group and was broadcast repeatedly by PBS outlets throughout North America.

Dala are grateful, but they tend to measure the success of their records according to more personal benchmarks, such as how well a given record reflects their friendship and how it might enable them to connect more effectively with their audience. *Best Day* is no exception. "We really feel this album represents all of the aspects of our personalities, individually and together," Carabine says.

Characterized by Carabine and Walther's signature harmonies, and underpinned by relatively sparse accompaniment from piano, acoustic guitar, ukulele and only minimal drums, the result is surprisingly lush, particularly on tracks featuring string arrangements by Chris Bilton, Asher Lenz and cellist, Kevin Fox, such as 'Not Alone' and 'Great Escape'.



Lyrically, many of the songs on *Best Day* tread a fine line between uncertainty and hope, often finding Carabine and Walther asking questions both believe can never be answered completely. “They’re the things we’re always grappling with, regardless of life’s highs and lows,” Carabine says, “but that’s the thread that ties all our music together.”

Nowhere is that more evident than on Walther’s, ‘Father’ and Carabine’s, ‘Good as Gold’, both of which deal with the most complex, yet assuredly impermanent relationship of all in mind – the relationship between parents and their children. But even playful tracks, like ‘First Love’ and ‘Lennon McCartney’, carry the kind of emotional weight that’s so basic to our shared human experience that whether a listener is passing from the ‘wooly comforts of childhood into adulthood’, as Carabine says, or recalling memories long since buried, the songs will stop them in their tracks.

That’s exactly the quality Dala hope to capture with every song they write and record – a high standard, perhaps, but one they credit producer, Mike Roth, for holding them to in the studio. Roth shares many of their most treasured influences, The Beatles, Joni Mitchell and Bob Dylan among them. Additionally, having produced all of their records to date, he’s uniquely suited to help the duo capture their evolving vision as more recent influences, American folk singer, Eliza Gilkyson, Radiohead and Fleet Foxes, for example, come to bear on their music.

Dala’s ties to the setting they chose to record the bulk of *Best Day* are equally deep – a cottage in Honey Harbour, Ontario that’s long been a favourite getaway and songwriting haunt for the duo. “It’s the perfect place to recapture the feelings we had when we first wrote these songs,” Walther says. It’s also the direct inspiration for ‘Peggy’, a song inspired by the memory of the mother of the property’s owner, a woman Carabine knew only through the books in the cottage library Peggy once penciled her name into, and the occasional note written in the margin of old cookbooks.

Best Day marks the first time in years Walther and Carabine have written some songs separately for a record, Walther says. Regardless of how a song originated, by the time it’s recorded every track is a reflection of both singer/songwriters – an expression of their long friendship and the musical partnership they’ve nurtured since first meeting during a high school music class in 2002.

“We call it consensus writing,” Carabine says. “No song is finished until we’re both equally excited about it. We both have to sing them live and we really do swap leads, so it’s more important that we’re both happy than one of us feeling they had control from beginning to end.” And that’s as important to their songwriting as it is to their live shows, she adds.

What drew Dala together initially was their shared love of the absurd – a quirky, irreverent and occasionally self-critical brand of humour that comes out as clearly in their music as it does in their often hysterical onstage banter. “We go to some emotional places in our music,” Walther says, “Humour serves as a relief from that, and a way to give the audience permission to laugh.” The more spontaneous the dialogue between songs, Carabine adds: “The better the performance and the more memorable the evening.”



Fair to say Dala have spent many memorable evenings together over the past decade. They've shared the stage with the likes of Jann Arden, Tom Cochrane, Richie Havens and Arlo Guthrie and performed at some of North America's highest profile music festivals. Among them the New Orleans Jazz Fest, Mariposa and the 50th Anniversary of the Newport Folk Festival in 2009 – where Dala were the only Canadian act invited to play.

Throughout their career the duo have toured tirelessly, building their following the old-fashioned way, by singing for anyone who'd listen and often turning first time listeners into instant, die-hard fans. Chances are it was hard going at times, but Dala have always opened themselves up to whatever challenges and opportunities life puts in their path without reservation, and with their latest release, they show no signs of altering that approach in the least.

Some records you have to spin multiple times to feel close to and to be inspired by the sentiments they express. With *Best Day*, it takes one listen – if that. Scheduled for release in June 2012 on Campus Records/Universal in Canada, and Compass Records in the U.S., *Best Day* is **Dala's** boldest offering to date.

Website: www.dalagirls.com