

Hummingbird's Grandchildren Commemorates a Denver Great-Grandmother

JASMINE LIU | APRIL 16, 2021 | 7:55AM





Asia Fajardo-Diamond's EP *Hummingbird's Grandchildren* will be released in May. / *Hummingbird's Grandchildren* / Cover art by Arlette Lucero

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Saxophonist **Asia Fajardo-Diamond** grew up in Denver with her great-grandmother, who came from a mining family in western Colorado and moved to Five Points in the first half of the twentieth century. In May, Fajardo-Diamond is honoring her great-grandmother, Esther Lopez Dussart Fajardo, with the release of *Hummingbird's Grandchildren*, an EP dedicated to her memory and packed with danceable tunes for children.

Each song on the EP celebrates an Indigenous value that Fajardo-Diamond's great-grandmother passed down to her. The first track, "**Crystal Sky**," has already been released as a single. Fajardo-Diamond, who was taught in childhood to love and care for animals and the broader natural world, tried to infuse the ethics of tenderness and respect into the song's soft vibe.

"Nahui Nahui," another song on the EP, references the Four Sacred Movements. Fajardo-Diamond is a traditional Aztec dancer, and before beginning any dance, she honors the Nahui Ollin – a concept in Aztec cosmology that four ages in history have preceded the present one. Fajardo-Diamond particularly wanted this jazz-rock tune to get kids dancing. "My great-grandmother was always baking, gardening and doing creative things. The message is to move! To be creative! Movement is medicine," Fajardo-Diamond says, adding, "We don't all have to move in the same way. Whatever your jam is, you do that."

"Freedom Blues," which is a more traditional jazz-blues song, celebrates parents and elders who teach their children about the importance of honoring diverse cultures. Fajardo-Diamond's great-grandmother came from a family of miners who worked alongside migrants from all around the world. "As a child, I could sense that she treated all different people like we were in the human experience together," Fajardo-Diamond says. "Freedom Blues" pays homage to those who have sanctified the intergenerational importance of diversity.

Finally, “Hummingbird’s Grandchildren,” the EP’s titular song, is riddled with complex chord progressions and odd meter. It alludes to Huitzilopochtli – which means “hummingbird” in Nahuatl. The hummingbird is the warrior deity in the Aztec religion. “The song refers to the struggle that my great-grandmother went through in trying to create a good future for herself, my grandpa and, later, her grandchildren,” Fajardo-Diamond says.

She hopes that in commemorating the life of her great-grandmother, she might help present-day Denver residents to consider the rich history of those who have come before them and who have made the city what it is today.

“Denver has seen so much – some good, some bad – and we need to acknowledge that the city didn’t get here by magic,” she says.

She laments that there are those in Denver today who are ignorant of and irreverent about the city’s past. Through commemorating the life of her great-grandmother, she hopes to draw attention to gentrification in Five Points. “I cannot afford my great-grandma’s house. It just went on the market again – I can’t afford that, and I’ll never be able to afford that,” she says.

This Saturday, April 17, at 11 a.m., Fajardo-Diamond will perform “Crystal Sky” virtually for a pre-release celebration. She will also be in conversation with *Westword* Mastermind Yuzo Nieto, the co-founder and chief executive arts director of **Radical Arts Academy of Denver** and bandleader of the Pink Hawks, discussing how musical spaces can celebrate diverse people and cultures. The event will conclude with an open mic, in which audience members are encouraged to present music of their own.

“It’s about sharing my album," Fajardo says. "It’s also about honoring my great-grandmother and these values she’s instilled in me. And it’s about asking, how do we create inclusive societies in music?”

*Asia Fajardo-Diamond will **perform “Crystal Sky” on Saturday, April 17, at 11 a.m.** The musical performance will be followed by a conversation with Yuzo Nieto and an open mic. The EP Hummingbird’s Grandchildren will be released in May.*

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