



# Can Shakira Conquer the World?

Her album is late. Her shrink is on the phone.  
And her biological clock is ticking. But nothing  
will stop Shakira's quest for global domination  
By Vanessa Grigoriadis ↻ Photographs by Max Vadukul





**M**OST OF THE TIME, WHEN SHAKIRA IS recording music in Nassau near her home in the Bahamas, she wears her PJs all day and hardly ever puts on shoes. But today is supposed to be her last day of work on *She Wolf*, the album she has been creating for a year, so she's decided to celebrate, dressing up in a silver necklace, a long black silk dress with spaghetti straps and club-kid platform shoes that lift her five-foot-two-inch frame up like stilts. "My boyfriend is six feet tall, and sometimes I feel like I'm his keychain, a small little thing," she says, then sighs. "I am so ready for this to be over!" she exclaims. "I just told my manager, 'I'm ready for hair and makeup. Just take me out of here.'" As Shakira makes her way into the studio, though, her mood begins to darken. When she can't find the keys to her car in her Gucci handbag, she searches for them with the intensity of someone who has

lost her passport before an international flight. Once she finds them, she climbs into her pristine Mercedes SUV, turns up Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* and zips down a twisting coastal road, making what seems to be a very illegal U-turn, at least by U.S. standards. On one side, the road is overhung with the dense foliage of mango trees, and on the other, there's a vast expanse of glittering Caribbean, which she throws a longing look. "I haven't been in the ocean for so long," she whines.

There's already a whirl of activity at the studio, with Shakira's exhausted management team punching away at their Black-Berries and engineers making changes in the control room ("I have them create all of my 'K's and 'R's on the computer, because I cannot say them with my accent myself," she explains). Compass Point Studios was founded in the late 1970s by Island Records' Chris Blackwell: AC/DC recorded three albums here, including *Back in Black*, and the halls are lined with gold records and portraits of Eighties artists chilling in the Caribbean, some in baby-blue shorts and mirrored sunglasses. "I am such a huge fan of Bob Marley, the Cure and AC/DC, and when I heard about this legendary studio where all of them recorded, I knew I had to be here," says Shakira. "This place is the main reason that I settled in the Bahamas."

As a musician, Shakira is a perfectionist – "I'm an Aquarius, but I've turned into a Virgo over time," she says. She wrote 60 songs for *She Wolf*, whittling them down to 10 in the studio over the past four months. Today, she's supposed to send nine mixes to mastering and finish "Spy," a two-step song with Wyclef Jean, so that it can be mastered tomorrow as well. "That song is like a couples project," she says. "We built

Contributing editor VANESSA GRIGORIADIS wrote the Adam Lambert cover story in *RS 1081*.

the house together, but men aren't very focused on the details. Now, I'm the wife, staying behind to put the flowers in the vase." Her process as a producer is to listen as much with her body as her ears. In fact, "Hips Don't Lie," her first collaboration with Wyclef and the bestselling single of her career, is a phrase she has used in the studio for a long time: "I would say, 'Hey, do you see my hips moving?'" she says, laughing. "No? This is not working. My hips don't lie."

An assistant hands over a pot of coffee, and Shakira pours herself a cup. "I stopped coffee for six months, because when I drink it, I get cravings," she says. "But now I need to have it three times a day." She's trying to watch her weight, even though she shouldn't. She's gorgeous, with an expressive, heart-shaped face, a thick fringe of eyelashes and a supertoned body without the plastic endowments up top that usually complete the picture. "In Colombia, I'm the only woman who doesn't have those," she says. "Colombian surgeons are the best, along with Brazilians, in South America. It's cheaper there, and the doctors there make them pretty natural, very good."

She steps into the control room. "Are you ready?" she asks Gustavo Celis, a Grammy-winning mix engineer, hoping to listen to his new mix of "Men in This Town," a track about desperate single women prowling for decent guys at places like Los Angeles' Sky Bar. (Note to Shakira: There are not, nor have there ever been, any decent guys at Sky Bar.)

"I need a little longer," Celis says tremulously.

She purses her lips. "Can I hear what you have so far?"

Celis shakes his head. "Well, it's the same as yesterday," he admits.

"Really," says Shakira, stringing out the word. Annoyed, she taps a notepad in front of her. "I don't know if we can get this all



done today," she says. "It may not be the last day of the record after all."

But the album is late – will she get some grief from the label for missing her deadline again? She cocks her head, considering the question. "You mean I might have to beg someone for extra time?" she says. "Beg? Ah, no. No."

**N**EEDLESS TO SAY, THIS was not the last night of Shakira's record. She's messed with *She Wolf* endlessly, because she cares so much about it succeeding. "I know that this is my moment in America," says Shakira, who is already a global superstar with 50 million records sold and earnings of over \$100 million – even if she isn't quite in Beyoncé territory here. "This is my chance to consolidate a career and my dreams as an artist in the U.S., so that I can continue making music for a long time and traveling the world." This might sound cold and calculated, but for Shakira, this is an emotional moment: After this tour, she wants to start a family. "And that's less an intellectual decision than a physical calling," she says, a glimmer of excitement passing over her face. "My body feels like it is asking to reproduce, to have a huge belly and carry babies. And when the baby comes, I don't want to be in the middle of 100,000 projects."

*She Wolf* is only Shakira's third album in English, and she didn't even speak the language until the late Nineties – she taught herself, listening to the rhythms of Leonard Cohen and Bob Dylan songs. "It's interesting to me that in my teens, I was a rock chick, listening to Nirvana, Aerosmith and Tom Petty, and there was no Latin influence in my music at that time whatsoever," she says. "When I started singing in English, I went in search of my Latin and Middle Eastern roots, experimenting with fusion and other cultures. Now, I really



#### Tiny Dancer

Shakira began performing at age four, when she started belly-dancing. She'd put on shows for her classmates in Colombia (opposite). With Wyclef Jean performing their 2006 hit "Hips Don't Lie." The song is the bestselling of her career. "I focus 100 percent of my physical energy on the music," she says.

**"Women deal with so many pressures: aesthetics, being mothers, daughters and wives. And on top of it, we must get rid of cellulite."**

want to be free to do anything that I want to do sonically. I think dance music today has a lot to offer in that sense." Says Sam Endicott, lead singer of the Bravery and co-writer of "She Wolf," "Shakira is open-minded. I love that she howls in 'She Wolf.' It's so bizarre and cool."

In September, after the "She Wolf" single didn't catch fire on U.S. radio – it rose to Number 11 but never broke the Top 10 – it seems that Shakira and her label went into high gear to get a single that would. A day before the Video Music Awards, on September 12th, Amanda Ghost, the head of Epic and co-author of Shakira's song "Gypsy" – a possible third single from the album – says she got a call from Timbaland to visit him at Trump Palace. He wanted her to hear "Give It Up to Me," a track he had in mind for Shakira, even though the *She Wolf* album was ready to ship. "I hate changing plans," says Ghost, "but the music business is the Wild West right now, so I'm ripping up the rule book and starting again." She played the song for Shakira in the car on the way to the VMAs, and they made a decision to push the release of the album from October 12th to November 23rd. "We said, 'Fuck it all,'" says Ghost.

The drama didn't stop there. For "Give It Up," Shakira filed her parts remotely, writing the lyrics on a car ride during her promotional tour in Germany and taking one of her days off in London to record. At first, it looked like Timbaland would take all the rap parts on the track, but then they hired Flo Rida to cut them instead – and then, says Ghost, "Everyone's breath was taken away when Lil Wayne said he wanted to jump on the record." Even though Lil Wayne and Shakira now share billing on the song, they've met only once, briefly, when they landed at an airport in the Bahamas at the same time. "This is the modern approach to things, with so little time and so much going on," says Shakira, laughing prettily. "I guess I'll see him when we shoot the video."

Shakira is one of the best flirts in the world, and that laugh is part of it, a long stream of rapid-fire giggles that are so cute they could come from a baby unicorn. She has two faces: on one hand, just totally adorable, as much of a coquette as her belly-dancing would imply; on the other, a pushy, difficult diva who doesn't mind throwing the world into chaos as long as she gets her way. This is how it can be with powerful women, and it's not the most enlightened way to be, but Shakira considers herself a die-hard feminist. She surrounds herself with "strong, determined, fighting women" and can rant at length about the injustices faced by her gender. She is excited about the "She Wolf" video, which features porno-contortionist moves inside a giant pink vagina, but she was taken aback



when her mother wasn't thrilled about it. "I was surprised at first and thought about how her fans and Colombians were going to view it," says her mother, Nidia, calling from Colombia. After all, *She Wolf* is largely about the difficulty of women satisfying themselves in a world where men are in charge. "We live in a society that represses women's subconscious dreams," Shakira says, her eyes narrowing. "You know, women have to make enormous efforts through life, much larger than men. We deal with so many pressures: the pressure of aesthetics, and how society wants us to deliver our performances as mothers, daughters and wives. And then, on top of it, we must sweat it out at the gym trying to get rid of cellulite."

That's on the agenda today too: While she's waiting for her engineer to finish the mix, Shakira grabs a black leather bag of gym clothes and heads to the back of a studio, where a petite trainer has set up a gym for her to train two hours a day. Dozens of elastic bands hang from the ceiling, and a step machine is set up in front of a mirror, ready to do its part in her daily diet of a zillion squats. "I do them until my leg is going to fall off," she says. "I never went to the gym before in my life, but at 32 I notice that my body responds negatively to bad food, so I must make double the effort."

**D**DOUBLE THE EFFORT IS Shakira's way of moving through the world: She conducts business both in the English-speaking world and in the Spanish-speaking one, and she is producing *She Wolf* in two languages at once. Her next album is likely going to be exclusively in Spanish, and she's preparing for a global tour after that. In fact, her boyfriend, Antonio de la Rúa, the son of a former president of Argentina, and an investment banker, recently traveled to Colombia to help research the new Spanish album. "We flew around to different villages, even in the deepest areas of the jungle where they still speak African dialect," says producer John Hill, who accompanied de la Rúa on the expedition. "We recorded 85-year-old songwriters, kids' accordion groups, people singing on the street - just grabbing things to inspire Shakira for the record."

The product of a late marriage by a Colombian woman and a jewelry-store owner of Lebanese descent with seven children from a previous marriage, Shakira seems to have always been driven: She started belly-dancing at four, when she watched a performance in a Middle East-

1

Shakira's World

(1) Shakira runs three foundations that build children's schools in Colombia. (2) With boyfriend Antonio de la Rúa. The pair have been together for nine years, but Shakira refuses to get married. (3) With her parents in 2009. (4) At the Video Music Awards in 2002, a year after her U.S. breakthrough with *Laundry Service*.



2 3



ern restaurant. "I liked it so much that I asked my father to get me some Arabic music, and my mother bought me a turquoise custom-made dress to practice in," she says. She began writing songs around eight, then enrolled in modeling school and performed on Colombia's state-fair circuit before she landed a contract with Sony's Latin division at 13 (she ambushed a rep in his hotel lobby to get an audience). Her first two albums didn't do well, though, and she was forced to take a part in a soap opera that won her Best Bottom on TV in a newspaper. She finally hit the charts in 1994 with a rock album, *Pies Descalzados* ("bare feet"). "I kept going to the same school after that," she says. "Except I started signing autographs in class."

These days, Shakira doesn't spend a lot of time in Colombia, even though her parents still live there, but she is deeply invested in helping to figure out the nation's social problems, a product of government corruption and 30 years of guerrilla war. She runs what amounts to another career as an advocate for early-childhood education, speaking at forums around the world and building elementary schools in Colombia through her three foundations. "Shakira is a young woman, but she could be 50 years

old," says Maria Emma Mejia, the head of one of them. "She has exceptional discipline." The schools are run in conjunction with the government, but they provide uniforms, music and dance classes, and even in some cases hire the mothers of children to cook nutritious lunches. "In Latin America, there's a stupid cycle where if you are born poor, you will die poor," Shakira says. "We're trying to change that."

Refusing to maintain the status quo has become very important to Shakira, and that's part of why she's refused to marry her boyfriend, even though they are monogamous and have been together for nine years. "It's funny how the papers want to see you married, and then they want to see you divorced," she says, with a flash of anger. "Well, I won't do any of it." She has also perhaps repudiated her Catholicism, though she will not overtly say so. "I've become very practical, very rational," says Shakira. "If I don't see it, I don't believe it." Tonight, when assistants start telling stories about seeing ghosts at Compass Point Studios, she says, "I was so afraid of ghosts when I was younger. Not anymore! I don't believe in any of that crap." She laughs, and then calls out mock-plaintively: "Ah, sorry! Wherever you are, forgive me!"

4



To follow her own path, Shakira sees a Freudian psychotherapist, a 70-year-old analyst she meets with often when she is in New York and speaks to on the phone from elsewhere. "I love seeing a map of my subconscious mind and having a space that is only mine, where that mind can speak, and I can listen to it," she says. "It is the captain of our ship, and our destiny." She thinks that she's become a bit stuck at the oral-fixation stage of life. "I've always lived through my mouth, like a person in jail lives through a window," she has said. "It's my biggest source of pleasure: What I say, what I sing, the kisses I give, the chocolate I eat."

Even with talk like this, Shakira is still a good girl, an overachiever. It's hard not to feel sorry for her as she sweats away, reaching for superstardom under the intense time pressure of needing to start a family. After her workout, she starts to slog through a long day in the studio. With her two heavysset assistants, she agonizes over an upcoming promotional schedule in Miami for an hour: The three of them intermittently chat and work BlackBerry-like defense attorneys preparing briefs, constantly shaking their heads at the ineptitude of the person at the other end of their messages. Soon, they move to a conference room to consider potential album covers on a laptop. Shakira scrolls through a hundred images, most with imperceptible differences, as the assistants murmur at her shoulder: One is

"too confusing and unintelligible for the mind to capture it"; others are "masculine, much too much." She sighs. "The font should be freer," she says, waving a hand around. "*She Wolf* is all about doing what you want!"

**I**T'S ALMOST 10 P.M. WHEN SHAKIRA finally gets on a conference call via Skype with Wyclef Jean's engineer in New York to discuss the 15 versions of "Spy" he sent to her earlier in the day. She takes a seat in an Aeron chair, dead center at the console, writing down changes to the trumpet, drums and vocals on a lined white pad. "Wyclef's kind of buried in there right now," she says. "He's my friend. I've got to protect him." She laughs. "You know, these songs were recorded when I was in Paris - wine, cheese, vibing it. You can't re-create that shit." She takes out a nail file and rubs away, shaking her head. "Yesterday, when we had a conference call, I looked so terrible," she says. She throws her bare foot up on the lip of the soundboard and wriggles it around. "That's all I put on the webcam for him to see: just my bare foot."

The phone call goes on for a few hours, before Shakira finally turns to her mixes. "Ah, my cravings from that cup of coffee," she says. "I want chocolate." She settles instead for satisfying her oral fixation with a constant stream of cereal ("130 calories a cup! Too many!") and a miniature popsicle she made from frozen *corozo*, a fruit

that she says is only found in Barranquilla. "I tried to plant *corozo* here, but it didn't work," she says, holding her stomach from hunger. "I am a sugar addict, and late night is bad. This is when I do bad things. No! I mean eat bad things." Then she adds, "A Freudian slip."

The mix goes on, and she stands up in the middle of the room. Her shoes are off - her dress is so long that without them, it turns out, she can't help but step on the hem. "I'm back to my regular height," she says. Then she closes her eyes. "I have to focus 100 percent of my intellectual and physical energy on the music," she says later. The track starts, and for the first time, her face completely shuts down - suddenly, she's transformed into a totem, and even her lips seem to lose their puff, lengthening into a solid line. Then she begins to move, and this time her dance is not seductive, not for a man, not for the cameras. She jerks her arms around, her belly pulsating oddly from the center of her body. It's as though she's possessed.

When her eyes open, they're glassy, almost like she's stoned. She dunks her popsicle stick in her drained porcelain coffee cup and lets out a tremendous giggle. "What the hell," she says. "Let's send this to mastering. It might be because my ears are closing up, but I leave it now with all of you and your consciences! Print it, and I'll hear it on the album." She closes her eyes again, and for the first time she looks as if she's at peace. "I'm feeling it," she says. **5**

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: LEFT: GABRIELA DIAZ; GARY HERSHORN/REUTERS/CORBIS; XAVIER MENOS; PINO PRESS/SPASH NEWS