



Season 13: Episode 05 | Laila Biali | A Conversation with a Canadian Jazz Icon

Hello and welcome to Scripture Untangled, a podcast by the Canadian Bible Society. My name is Joanna la Fleur. I'm a friend of the Canadian Bible Society and I'm going to be your guide for today's episode.

Today, journalist Lorna Dueck is in conversation with Laila Biali. Laila Biali is a Canadian gift to jazz fans all around the world. She was one of six artists nominated for the 2026 Grammy Awards for Best Traditional Pop Vocal Category.

Yes, that's right, she was up against people like Lady Gaga, Elton John and more. Laila Biali is a multi-award-winning singer-songwriter, pianist and is the national radio host of CBC's Saturday Night Jazz. She truly is a Canadian jazz jewel.

Laila also had great insight into the church and jazz and you're going to hear more about that and her earlier career and how she was tapped by Timothy Keller's team to lead the integration of jazz into the worship life of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City. We're going to hear all about that in today's interview. Biali's past consecutive releases, *Wintersongs 2024*, *Your Requests 2023*, *Out of Dust 2020* and *Laila Biali 2018*, all received Juno Award nominations, and she won the 2019 Juno Award for Vocal Jazz Album of the Year.

Laila has headlined festivals and concerts from venues spanning five continents from New York's Carnegie Hall to Beijing's National Center for the Performing Arts and supported international icon, Sting as well. Laila was the youngest ever double winner at Canada's National Jazz Awards named SOCAN Composer of the Year and

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Keyboardist of the Year. When she isn't on stage, she's busy mothering her teenage son and juggling life with a musically performing husband, Ben.

So, here's Lorna Dueck with Laila Biali at home in Toronto.

Lorna Dueck: Well, we have never talked jazz on Scripture Untangled before and who better to do it than Laila Biali. Thank you. Thank you for joining us. And yeah, from moving over from CBC where you talk jazz and of course your great platforms in your concerts. Yeah, explain to us some of the distinctives of jazz.

Laila Biali: Well, it's a great question, Lorna, and it's a tough question when I get asked with some frequency and I'm still trying to sort out just what the right answer is. And I can give you my answer. You know, I think jazz is a form of Black American music. In fact, there are some jazz musicians, contemporary musicians today, who take exception to the term jazz. And they would rather it were called Black American music because, that is the roots of this great genre.

But the beauty of jazz in my view, as a Canadian, is that it really throws its arms open wide to include people from all walks of life, from all cultures around the world. And I think the key tenets when I consider, you know, as a classically trained musician, what makes jazz distinctive, the key tenets are, you know, spirit of improvisation, freedom within boundaries. There's some beautiful parallels there for the spiritual life.

And, you know, there is this body of work that we call the *Great American Songbook*, which is actually from Broadway, and Tin Pan Alley songs. And those got adopted into this world of jazz and have become for so many people the framework that we use to share our interpretation of that music.

You play the melody from a particular song and then you improvise on it and then you come back to the melody. But it's so much more than that now and people are

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writing their original songs within the jazz genre. I'm one such person and they're mixing jazz with other genres. I'm one such person. So, I don't know if there's anything clear that you can sink your teeth into within that description.

Lorna Dueck: Okay, now let's just tie the church, see if we can tie the church in for a moment, because gospel music has influenced jazz, right? And is there a musical relationship between gospel and jazz?

Laila Biali: Yeah, there is.

And I think again, it comes back to that descriptor black American music, because I think gospel music was very much also and is also black American music.

Once again, it's expanded to include all people, but its foundations are in that particular culture, that group of people. I think, I know jazz in particular really began in New Orleans.

And when I think of black gospel music, I think of the South, the deep South and the songs of people who were not free, right? And then of course they had their churches and that was a place of worship as well as in the fields.

And I think that jazz in its way, I mean, you hear about so many of our founding fathers, like Thelonious Monk, for example, He worked with a preacher. One of the ways that he became a jazz musician was he toured with a preacher and had to kind of improvise as the preacher in the streets was sharing the gospel.

Thelonious was responding to his cadence, and it was almost like the preacher themselves was a jazz musician. And if you fast forward to someone like Gregory Porter, who's one of the foremost jazz musicians of this age, his roots, you know, run deep within the church in Harlem.

And I think that again, there's even in gospel music, there's a lot of spontaneity and so much of it is about spirit. And I think for jazz, well, for me as a jazz musician, that's also what it comes down to is the spirit of the music.

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Lorna Dueck: Does it fit in today's church?

Laila Biali: Jazz?

Lorna Dueck: Yeah, it seems like we haven't made it big enough. At least the churches I go to are hardly, I don't hear jazz very often in my church. Or do I?

Laila Biali: Well, so no.

Okay, so it's funny you should ask that question because I was the music director at Redeemer Presbyterian in New York City. They have multiple sites and I was the music director for the Hunter College Eastside Evening Service.

Yeah, well, Tim Keller was there and I was brought on when a pastor by the name of Leo Schuster, he was brought in from Texas, he's now back in Texas. He was the lead pastor of that particular site and then Tim would rotate through the various sites in the morning and evening depending on the week. And one of the reasons I was brought in was to bridge what previous to my time there really was a jazz approach to worship.

And that came from a gentleman named Tom Jennings, who is no longer at Redeemer, but he was for decades. And he developed a sound and approach to the worship songs, hymns, taking hymns and putting them in a jazz setting or context.

And interestingly, Lorna, when I would attend those services, I would hear songs that were familiar to me as part of the prelude and postlude that were like contemporary jazz songs that I couldn't believe I was hearing them in a church setting. And that was partly what hooked me because I kind of drifted away from the church. And then when I moved to New York City, I was drawn back in.

So that was compelling. Allow me, and this is just my opinion, when we were in the midst of the service and using these sorts of jazzier approaches for worship, it was difficult. I found it difficult.

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And I'm a jazz musician, but the complexities of the music for me were a distraction. And so, when Leo Schuster was brought on and I was simultaneously brought in to replace their music director, who was John Coward, a very famous jazz musician, my job was to continue to preserve a bit of a spirit of jazz, particularly for the Prelude, Postlude, and maybe The Offering.

But then for the worship songs, Leo wanted to see us move towards something a little bit more mainstream again. And so, I have always been fascinated by that, what for me was a bit of a tension.

Yeah, but then I go to Little Trinity, you know, now and then here in Toronto and I see how Mike and his team weave jazz into the worship music and I think it works super well, you know, so yeah, I think it can vary.

Lorna Dueck: Okay. So, it takes a real skill. What a front row seat you had to be at Timothy Keller's church in New York to, yeah, they did protect jazz. Okay, so that kind of interesting background aside, I do want to find out when did jazz begin for you personally?

Laila Biali: Yeah.

Lorna Dueck: When did you start this career?

Laila Biali: You know, it was in my teen years. Classical music is my first love, and I had dreams of becoming a concert pianist from a very young age. And I would go to bed listening to cassette tapes just to age myself, you know, the most incredible professional concert pianists playing Chopin and Rachmaninoff and Bach.

So that was a track I was on. And then when I was 15 in Vancouver, where I grew up, we took a trip as we often would down to the States to do some shopping. And on one fateful trip, we were rear-ended on the highway. And I started having issues as a result from the whiplash with my back, my shoulder, my arm.

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And that happened simultaneous to changing high schools and ending up at a school where there was a very robust jazz program. And I was struggling with the use of my right arm and these ambitious classical songs and watching the stream kind of dissipate. And then I was introduced to jazz, and I actually didn't really like it, Lorna, when I was first, and I think the first song I heard was *In the Mood*, which is definitely one flavor of jazz.

But it doesn't go as deep as a lot of the jazz I was ultimately exposed to.

And so, I had this fraught relationship with the genre initially as I kind of grieved my first love, classical music. And I was mostly playing with my left hand, which was also strange. But over time, there were a few artists who really bridged the gap for me between classical and jazz, which initially seemed like these completely disparate worlds.

And they were culturally to some degree. For example, Keith Jarrett, who is a favorite artist of mine. I think he went to Berkeley. I can't remember where he went to school, but there was a classical program and there was a jazz program and they would not allow the jazz pianists to play the classical pianos, which is so bizarre, right?

You couldn't imagine that today, but this would have been, you know, back in the sixties and seventies. anyway, so I was having a difficult time reconciling the two worlds.

But then artists like Keith Jarrett, who he comes from classical, but he's an incredible jazz pianist. I started to latch onto their approach. And in fact, I don't think he, he's not a Christian person, but God used several of his solo projects just to bring so much healing to me when I was in college and at school for jazz, but still feeling very much like a fish out of water.

Lorna Dueck: So, when you were at the Royal Conservatory, you were their youngest graduate in your field. You switched to jazz with the Royal Conservatory, did you?

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Laila Biali: No, so I studied the Royal Conservatory of Music Method, and I got to what they call their ARCT level, which is like grade 11, grade 12 when I was 12. And so I was, yes, I was quite young. But and it wasn't really until I was 15 that I was exposed to jazz and then I feel like I really got into it when I was 16, 17 and then ultimately at Humber College.

Lorna Dueck: I just want to take a pause here and say, you know, we're recording this at a time when you have just been the marquee guest for the Royal Conservatory of Music's fundraising gala. It's like for our listeners outside of Toronto, that's a very big deal in Toronto at that stage.

You have really jumped, but I just want to go to the 2026 Grammys. And I'm reading the Grammy nominees and I go, I know this person. Here alongside Lady Gaga, Barbra Streisand, Elton John, Jennifer Hudson, I see you are nominated for a Grammy. Congratulations. What was that like?

Laila Biali: It was unbelievable. My friend called it a God wink, which I thought was such a great word because it truly felt miraculous, Lorna. Yeah, and the woman who a lot of folks, they struggled to pronounce her name, myself included, except we play her on my radio show all the time, *Laufey*, she was another nominee and she ultimately won. And you'll see her everywhere these days.

But yeah, I just, when I submitted, because you can submit yourself, if you're a member of the Recording Academy and I am, you can submit a number of projects. They cap it. But, you know, and I submitted *Wintersongs* and *Wintersongs* was such a difficult project to get through in terms of my personal life and health over the course of creating and recording and releasing that project.

I suffered a traumatic brain injury; I lost my voice. You know, our family, Ben's mom had a catastrophic fall. My own parents both had serious health events. Our son was struggling. Life felt really chaotic. And I'm sure every listener can relate because we're

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all going through something. But it just felt like it was so hard to get to the finish line of that project.

And I've never had an album take as long as that one did. And so when we fast forward to the Grammys and that announcement, I just didn't think I stood a chance because what people don't realize is not only, like we're hearing the names of my fellow nominees, but among those not nominated in that category were Ringo Starr, Christina Aguilera, Seth MacFarlane, Belinda Carlisle, Lea Salonga.

Like all these A-listers. Yeah, it was really wild. And the other thing I'll mention, Lorna, is that typically there are only five nominees per category. And I was among six. And because this really was my first rodeo, after the announcement, it was so shocking to me that I then began to worry that because I saw it as a bit of an aberration that somehow it was a technical error. Like I still...

Lorna Dueck: You still couldn't believe it. You went to the Grammys though, right? You did go.

Laila Biali: We went, yeah.

Lorna Dueck: This year, to the Grammys because you might get called in those one in six.

Laila Biali: We, you know, and at that point, we were so shocked by the whole thing that we thought, okay, let's take this to the finish line. But you know, it was really, may God's will be done. And we felt so genuinely thrilled for *Laufey* when she won. And I listened to all the albums, and I personally did feel that hers was the strongest. So, the Recording Academy made the right decision.

Lorna Dueck: Well, there you are, speaking like a true host of the Jazz Saturday night show, speaking like a true host.

You know, there's so much I want to get into, but you've mentioned the we. Let's talk about you and your husband and your family for a minute, because you have

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intimated that there's been some, it's not been a smooth road. Tell us about Ben and you.

Laila Biali: Yeah.

My goodness. So, trying to think of how vulnerable to be and how detailed to be, because I'm sure there may be some raised eyebrows as I'm sharing this part of our story, but I'm sure I'm not the only one. So, I was living in New York City, and I grew up in the church. I went to a Baptist church in North Vancouver, Delbruck Baptist Church.

And then went to school, to Humber College. And at that point, the nature of my faith, it wasn't that the authenticity of, it was always there, but I began to ask really tough questions. And I found that my faith came under fire.

When you're in college, you can be challenged by other, deep thinkers and they might say that Christianity is anti-intellectual. And so, and of course it's not, but I was struggling in the midst of some of these conversations and I was just surrounded by so few Christians when I was at Humber. And I began to drift.

And then it was a friend of mine, Sarah Walker, who was at Humber and she was an older student who brought me back and it was to The Meeting House, and I know they have their own complicated story. But at the time it was Upper Oaks Community Church and I don't even recall how I got there. Sarah probably picked me up and brought me out there, but they were doing their Hot Potatoes series, and I'd never heard anything like it in a church setting. You know I grew up in a conservative Baptist church.

I think the topic was sex and I thought, we're talking about sex in church? And I just cried the whole sermon. And I really felt like that was the beginning of being really drawn back into this relationship.

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So anyway, fast forward to my move to New York. I moved in 2008, so I would have been 27. And at that point I was touring with different artists and found myself once again struggling with my own faith and who I was as a Christian.

And I met Ben during that time. He was in Paula Cole's band. I don't know if your listeners know who Paula Cole is, but she wrote the theme for Dawson's Creek for Dawson's Creek fans and the, "I don't wanna wait..." That was one of her big hits.

And that was where I met Ben. And I was also serving at a couple of different churches. I wasn't yet a music director at Redeemer, but I was subbing for John Coward on piano and also working at Trinity Baptist Church on the Upper East Side. And so I was still in community, but Ben and I, there was this spark.

He's not a, he wouldn't call himself a Christian to this day, although he, we are on this journey together. And even the fact that we ended up together for the long run is something that may still raise eyebrows. But I believe that it is of the Lord, was of the Lord and that God is using it, used it then and is using it still.

So, Ben and I were, you know, touring together and we started dating. We actually went to Redeemer for counseling, like extensively, you know, and of course, big move. And he was in his forties. I was in my twenties and I, know, the humility he had to come and be part of those conversations and open-minded and open-hearted was really remarkable to me. And he's such a beautiful person. And, you know, we were going through the Scripture about not being unequally yoked and, you know, and we struggled through.

And there was one Christian counselor who said, well, I don't know if I'm supposed to say this, but I can see you guys are really well matched. And she said, you know, she'd even been counseling Christian couples who had that very important thing in common. But they weren't necessarily a good match, you know?

And anyway, we got pregnant before we were married. That was another part of our struggle. And then we had a very difficult decision to make. Do we join together in

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marriage in spite of our very different worldviews? And we were getting advice from everyone you could think of. Some folks were saying you should give the child up for adoption.

You know, wait till you find your Christian husband. But ultimately, I felt led to join my life to Ben's and it's been a very powerful journey. And I love my husband to the stars, and I feel that we have grown and continue to grow together. He's the one now encouraging us to find a new church home. You know?

And I'll tell you one more thing, Lorna, my wedding ring, because you can imagine it was a journey of ups and downs, right? And lots of doubts and being afraid that somehow, I was going against the will of God and that God couldn't bless the marriage. My engagement ring, we went to a little store on Queen Street.

I think it's Anne Sportun, I forget how to pronounce the name. And we found this ring and I chose it because I liked how it shimmered in the light, it was affordable. And then later, this was so cool, still trying to reconcile how everything in my life at that point felt out of order. Was it in the realm of sin? I learned that this ring was called the Pebble.

And I was a big fan of Nicole Nordeman's at the time. And she has a song; I think it's called *River God*. And I was listening through her album, and the song came on and it was, *Rolling River God. Little stones are smooth only as the water passes through. So, I am a stone rough and grainy still trying to reconcile this water's chill*. And I thought, my goodness, that's our story, you know?

And I had our little wee babe within me, and it was so complicated and yet I knew that God was somehow going to redeem it.

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Lorna Dueck: Wow.

Laila Biali: Yeah, it's a lot!

Lorna Dueck: It's a whole jazz composition in all of this. Wow. Thank you for being so vulnerable. We hadn't really planned to exactly go there, but thank you because in our church audience, we need the discordant testimony as well.

We absolutely need the improvisation of, "oops, this didn't go as I expected" and now I'm going to follow this melody here." So, thank you, thank you for giving us all grace that God pulls us through.

Laila Biali: He does, and I do want to say that I was music directing at Little Trinity and I was growing in girth because I was pregnant. And at that point Ben and I were engaged, but anyone who could do basic math knew that the timing didn't make

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sense. And they just embraced me. They just embraced me. You know, I was not cast out. I was not judged.

We were met where we were at, Ben was embraced, he was brought into the fold. And I know for him that that has been a really integral part of his journey of seeking because he's definitely seeking. And what a beautiful representation of the heart of Christ, truly, right?

Lorna Dueck: Absolutely. Wow. I'm just kind of silenced by the holiness of that testimony. Yeah. So, let's talk about the Bible now. When you listen to it on audio, how do you, how do you incorporate it into your busy life as a mom, as a traveling artist?

Laila Biali: Yeah, well, I've tried many different approaches over the years. I've tried the Bible in the Year. I've tried different plans that are annual. The recap Bible and or the Bible Recap rather. Where I've landed these days, it's lighter touches. So, I do use the Bible app and it's their daily verse and there's a little devotional that goes with it and a video kind of like a mini, I wouldn't even, it's not even a sermon, it's just more like an anecdote that ties in with the Scripture.

And then after the mini devotional, you're led through a time of prayer and reflection. And that at the moment is my go-to. And it doesn't feel as robust or in-depth as perhaps I would ultimately like, but for now, it really works. It really works because I can do it wherever I go.

If I miss a day or two, I don't feel badly for falling behind because some of the Bible plans, especially the Bible in a Year, I would fall a few days behind and then I would just start feeling a little defeated and I would give up. I would abandon the plan, I don't know, six months in. And so, this is what's working for me right now.

Lorna Dueck: Laila, a tip off for our audience, now I've asked you to think about some Bible verses that are meaningful to you. Let's just hear where your imagination goes, when you turn to Scripture.

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What verses mean something special to you

Laila Biali: There are so many Lorna, and I just captured a few and I did look them up because I wanted to make sure I took a closer look at the context in which they were written.

And I'll present them in chronological order as they appear in the Bible. But the first comes from Psalm 34, it's verse 5 - "Those who look to Him are radiant, their faces are never covered with shame."

Now I was led to this verse when I was in my 20s. I'm now 45 so fast forward another 20 years, and God led me to this verse when I asked Him, what is your definition of beauty? Because as a young woman in the public eye as a performing artist, I really struggled then, and struggle still with what beauty is, and how does God define beauty?

And it was interesting because I started in Psalm 27, and I felt Him prompting me, just keep reading, just keep reading, just keep reading. And then I came to Psalm 34, and I thought my goodness that is a perfect definition because it's not our own physical appearance that dictates the beauty, it's God's radiance as we look towards Him.

And so, nobody is exempt, not one you know, even someone who themselves may feel disfigured, when they look towards God and His radiance reflects back, they are as beautiful as beautiful can be. And I thought, oh my goodness that's the definition, and then off I went and wrote a song called Radiance.

The next one comes from Romans 8, and I read through all of that chapter for a little bit of context, it's an amazingly rich chapter. But the verse that has really resonated for me over the decades, is verse 28 - "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose."

And it's the idea, and where I feel challenged is by the words all things, all things. Really? Uh-oh.

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It's incredibly freeing on the one hand but it's also in some ways challenging. Because I think there are many things that happen to us in life, that somehow, they can isolate us from God. And that is such a beautiful reminder that God is with us through it all, and He really truly will work all things together for good. Even the sinful choices that we make.

Imagine that right? He can redeem anything. Boy if I needed that verse. And then um another favorite comes from Philippians 4 verse 13, "I can do all things" or "all this" is what it says in the NIV. But I know I've heard all things, "I can do all this through Him who gives me strength." Again, "all things."

So, for me as a performer, I'll just quickly share that I'm not actually built for the stage. I cannot tell you how nervous I get. Every time I get on stage yeah, oh it's nearly debilitating.

Lorna Dueck: What!

Laila Biali: And I have a small team of prayer warriors, and they can attest to this, who I text before every single performance, because it's all I can do to not fall apart sometimes, before I get on stage.

Lorna Dueck: Wow, we wouldn't know that. Way to go on the power of prayer.

Laila Biali: Oh man, and sometimes it's my undo, it can feel like I'm brought to the brink of my nerves, my anxiety. "I can do all this through Him who gives me strength."

And then the last one I'd like to share and it's along the same lines, because fear is such a part of that anxiety that I have to face. And that is 1st John 4 verse 18, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear. Because fear has to do with punishment, the one who fears is not made perfect in love." But my focus is always just those first few words. "There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear."

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I can just feel my nervous system when I read those words and allow them to sink in and do their good work. My whole nervous system just calms right down, you know it hits me on a cellular level, and that is the power of Scripture and of God's truth.

Lorna Dueck: Wow you know, you have to stay a traveling musical family as well. So, tell me about traveling, like trying to keep up with all of that and this huge role of following Jesus as a mom, as an artist. How does traveling affect you or how do you normalize that in your life?

Laila Biali: Oh gosh.

Well, I mean, I do love it. I'm not built for it. I'm someone who struggles and has always struggled with sleep and have a number of health quirks. So, traveling is definitely difficult, but because I feel so called to do it, it's always enriching and wonderful and filled with adventure. And it's been tougher to make it work as a family.

You know, our son is the other thing at the center of our lives, right? And so, I naively thought that it would get easier as he got older. And it did in some ways, you know, when he was a wee babe, he was three months old and I took him on the road with me by myself. And that was crazy because he was colicky, Lorna, and it just, and I didn't have Ben with me. I was on my own. It was one of the hardest things I've ever done. And I think it was hard on wee Josh, my son.

And then it got a little easier, you know, when he was eight, nine, ten, in his early teens. He's 15 now and Ben and I can see that he needs us now more than ever. And I've had to make some difficult changes, you know, because he's got to be consistent with school. So, we used to always bring him with us.

That was often what we would do because we don't have family nearby. And so now we have to be very choosy about when we hit the road for how long. And I actually took about six months off last year.

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Lorna Dueck: Good for you.

Laila Biali: Yeah, and it was hard. It was hard for us financially. But Josh, you know, really needed our support.

Lorna Dueck: And you know, these teenage years are so intense, but they are only five years. And yeah, everything has to stop. I quit work when my kids were teens and I had, you know, re-entry, dabble back in and out, but basically their wheels fall off when they become teenagers, and you just need to drive the bus. Like you need to, it's a hard time.

Laila Biali: That's well put. It can feel, one can feel, depending on what the nature of the challenges are, one can feel a little lonely. You were talking, speaking to, when you were interviewed by Joanna of just the power of community and entering into new communities depending on what one is facing in their life. And that challenged me. That challenged me because... I know there are communities, and actually because we're not embedded in a church community right now and haven't really been since the pandemic.

And in a way, since we left New York. And when the wheels came off, as you just described it, one of my friends, more recent questions, friend from New York who I met at Redeemer, she's like, "are you surrounded by a church?" And my best friends are all women of faith. And so that's my community. But then I realized, you know what? Ooh, the church community piece is missing.

Lorna Dueck: Oh, Little Trinity will take you back.

Laila Biali: Yeah, well we were just there recently and there are so many folks there that we just adore. We mentioned Mike Jansen earlier and yeah, so and Josh actually has begun to attend their youth group on Friday nights and so we'll see where God leads, yeah.

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Lorna Dueck: You have a big world because Ben is a, your husband's a musician as well.

Laila Biali: Yes. That's right, Ben.

Lorna Dueck: And you talk to the nation every Saturday night on the Jazz Show on CBC. It's a great program you do. Scheduling must really be a challenge. You must have to lean into the Lord for like, what do I pick?

Laila Biali: Yes, well put. And my sister, Susan, who is a doctor and a speaker and she tours a lot, she was really the one who taught me to do that because she does that. And so, she was teaching by example and I've learned to really, and I still forget sometimes, Lorna, and it will get me into trouble, but I try now, especially with freelance work, to really bring everything before God and say, okay.

You know, I have my filter or my criteria by which I try to make a decision that makes sense in the earthly realm, but then ultimately God has veto power. So even if the gig makes sense on paper or the offer makes sense on paper, if God says no, then I need to go with that. And if it doesn't make sense on paper, but God says yes, then I say yes. And it's working out.

And when I feel like I have that assurance that something is ordained by God, even if things don't go as planned, and often they don't, then I can really cling to Him and say, I believe You called me to this. There are tons of gaps and there's a lot of mess. I know that You're going to see this through. And He always does.

Lorna Dueck: He always does. I didn't ask you to prepare this question, but I feel we should talk about it. You are Canada's highest profile Christian jazz artist. You know, maybe North America's, but you are certainly ours in Canada. And we have a lot of people listening who work on worship teams, and we have a lot of guitar-led church life. We have a lot of, you know, worship music has taken a very bigger part of how people gather. Give us some counsel. Give us some advice for not being afraid to

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include jazz in worship. And just give us some advice on the importance of worship music. I didn't warn you about this. Yeah.

Laila Biali: I saw as I tried to describe earlier where jazz could be distracting, the ways in which it could be distracting for congregational worship or as part of congregational worship. And it for me could be at times when I was at Redeemer.

And so, I was always trying to kind of square that, but then, you know, the way that Mike Jansen and like Silas Witkamp and other people who are involved there integrate tenets of jazz. So, you know, there's like, again, it's in the spirit of jazz. And so, to me, there's perhaps, you know, it's not as regimented, I guess, is what I would say.

And in that sense, if people are moved, a little bit into the unexpected or into unexpected or even slightly uncomfortable territory. You know, where perhaps the hymn is, you know, led in a different way. I don't know, that can maybe crack things open. And perhaps jazz has its role there or some of the tenets of jazz have their role there.

I mean, it can also be very playful, right? That's the other thing. I think sometimes church could get a little too serious and jazz can bring us into more of a spirit of play. And so that's a wonderful thing. It can surprise us and delight us and push us. I do want to say though, in terms of any advice I would give, and this is a tough one.

So, when I was at Redeemer, one of the really important values was excellence. So, we actually only ever worked with professional musicians on the worship team. And in fact, most of the musicians brought in weren't Christians, which is kind of controversial, right?

Lorna Dueck: Redeemer was a groundbreaking evangelistic church. Yeah, is, yeah.

Laila Biali: Right. And I think that that's really interesting and it's one approach. But for me personally, when I'm at a church where maybe the quality of the music is not

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absolutely top notch, but you can see that they're integrating a bunch of different members of the community. And it's a little bit more of a messy mix that to me feels more representative somehow of the church.

And again, you don't want the level to be, you know, such that folks are distracted because things are just going wrong left and right. Like we don't want chaos. But I think it's beautiful if we allow some folks that aren't necessarily trained professionals but have a love of worship and a gift for worship into the fold. And I see that at Little Trinity, you know?

Lorna Dueck: Right now, a whole bunch of the audience is just going, whew, I'm glad I didn't stay in the worship band. Yeah.

Laila Biali: But that's harder, right? Like as a professional musician, that's harder because you just, want everybody, the training isn't necessarily equal and yet, you know, we have to find a way to make it work and for everybody to feel like they're part of that body. So, yeah.

Lorna Dueck: All right, that's a great note on which to end, that the body is messy. The body of life here in our daily lives is messy. And you have been very authentic with our audience and very intimate. Say hi to your family for us as an audience and say we're going to learn from the Biali story. So, thank you. It's just been beautiful.

Where's your next big stage that you're getting kind of pacy about?

Laila Biali: Well, I'm involved with a couple of charitable events coming up. And then I'm actually playing a much more intimate show in Toronto for the Jazz Festival. be at the Jazz Bistro. And then that's on the 21st and 22nd of June. And then I'm really looking forward to a show in Elora, which is a tiny little, say, do you know Elora? Is it a village?

Lorna Dueck: I know it. Yes, it's not far from my home. Yes.

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Laila Biali: Right, right, I don't know if it's a town. I think it might be a town, what the designation is.

Lorna Dueck: It's a little tourist brunch place. That's what Elora is. Elora listeners, you also have real homes there, but for the visitors, it's tourist brunch.

Laila Biali: And it's unbelievably charming and they host a world-class music festival called the Elora Festival, and we'll be there at Gambrill Barn. And we're going to have the Elora Singers with us. One of whom was part of the Good Friday service at Little Trinity. And anyway, so they're going to join us on stage for a few numbers.

That'll be July 18th. And so very much looking forward to that and doing some touring coming up in the fall and early next year and yeah, having that conversation as a family as to how we're going to make it work for everybody.

Lorna Dueck: Well, we will keep our eye on the wonderful career that you've got. And thank you for coming to Scripture Untangled, Laila Biali. Thank you.

Laila Biali: Thanks for having me, Lorna.