



How Lauren Jauregui Learned to Listen to Her Own Voice

It took her years to get back to herself, but now the singer-songwriter who exploded onto the world stage as part of *Fifth Harmony* has her first solo EP, *Prelude*. And she's also on a mission to help others heal.

Alicia Menendez:

Depending on how old you are, you either feel like you grew up with Lauren Jauregui, or you feel like you watched her grow-up, as part of the girl group Fifth Harmony. As other members of the group have moved on into their own solo careers, Lauren has taken her time finding her sound, and her voice, and her new debut EP, *Prelude*, is a monument to the work she has done to find herself.

Lauren, congratulations on the EP. It's absolutely beautiful, and so rich, and wonderful, and I want to talk a little bit about your backstory, so we can talk about how we got to this moment where you really get to be you.

You say that growing up in your house was loud, which is incredibly relatable, Cuban-to-Cuban. Who was the first person though, that made you believe you had talent?

Lauren Jauregui:

My mom, and dad, my parents, my whole family. My family's always been so supportive of me, and my dad is a musician, as well. He plays drums and piano by ear, and he also sings, and he whistles like really amazingly. Yeah, I think they were the first people to tell me that I could sing.

Menendez: You realize it's almost 10 years ago, you auditioned for X Factor.

Jauregui: I know, girl, 10 years.

Menendez: I was watching that audition tape-

Jauregui: Not 10 years, nine years. I can't be like a decade in this thing yet.

Menendez: But it has almost been a decade, and not only has it been a decade, you're like a baby in that audition.

Jauregui: I was a baby. I was a literal child. It was crazy.

Menendez: Have you watched that audition recently?

Jauregui: I have not recently watched it, but I do watch it from time to time just to remind myself where I started.

Menendez: Yeah, and what do you think when you see that girl, because it's a girl?

Jauregui: Wow. You had no idea what was going to happen, but you're so strong.

Menendez: Because out of X Factor grows Fifth Harmony, and you've said at the beginning, you didn't feel like you belonged, you had an entire conversation with your parents. They give you an out, say, "You don't have to do this if you don't want to do this, but this is your vehicle, so if you want to stay."

Jauregui: Right.

Menendez: The thing you've said that really struck me about that time was that you experienced an ego death while being part of Fifth Harmony. I think a lot of us have had a moment of experiencing ego death. What did that look like for you?

Jauregui: It was a moment in my life, where I had to put everything aside. I don't know how to say this in a way that's not sounding arrogant, so I'm going to try my best.

I didn't feel like I was supposed to be in a group. I didn't want to be in a group. I was very, personally, adamant about that in my own prayers, while I was there, because I knew they were looking for a girl group.

When I got put in the group, I considered that an ego death, because I had to put what I thought I was supposed to do aside and what I thought was supposed to happen aside. I had to make room for God's plan. God is different for everyone, but for me, there's a higher power at work constantly in my life, and I feel like my purpose is tied heavily to music.

At the time, if I would've gone any other route, I would not have done it. I would not have completed my mission here, because if I would've done it by myself without having done it through X Factor, if I would've just tried to like get into the music industry somehow, from having zero connections, and zero foot-ins, and zero anything.

I was so sensitive. I don't know if I could have handled all of the no's, and rejection, and sexual harassment that young women go through in the process of getting somewhere in this in industry. I don't know if I could have handled that.

I don't know if my spirit could have handled that, and then, if I had still done X Factor and still been alone, if I would've gone through what I went through with Harmony alone, without four other girls that were also experiencing the same thing that I was, which was

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this overnight phenomenon, fame, where a bunch of people care about what you think, and say, and act, and show up places.

You have to change your phone numbers, things like that, you know what I'm saying, that no one can really prepare you for. If I would've gone through that alone, I would've quit. I would've not done music, because I have no affinity for this fame stuff, to be honest.

It's not really something that I could have planned for, and everyone says, "Oh, you knew what you were getting." No, you don't know what you're getting yourself into until you're in it, and anyone who's in it can tell you the same thing. Having gone through that, and having to work, because other people depended on me showing up, because that was really what motivated me was the fact that other people really, really, depending on me showing up.

Doing that and understanding the work ethic that it takes to get to the place that Fifth Harmony got to, was a huge part of my learning process, as a musician, as an artist, as a businesswoman, and as a woman, as a woman navigating the world.

Yeah, if it didn't happen exactly like it did, I would not be where I am now.

Menendez: When you talk about that work ethic, there's that work ethic, but there's also something you've alluded to before, which is burnout during those years.

I think, sometimes, it's easy to think it's all private jets and award shows. You were doing mall tours.

Jauregui: Yeah, girl.

Menendez: You were in the grind. Can you take me back to one of the times when you were being pushed past what was the reasonable limit?

Jauregui: It happened so many times, to be honest, especially when we were underage, I think, like 24-hour shoots. Shit, that was just intense.

I think the burnout, unfortunately, especially at the time that we were in, before mental health conversations, and anyone even making space for artists to have those kinds of conversations, you just couldn't really say nothing, because there's people waiting in the wings, hungry for it, is what the answer is.

There's people who are willing to work twice as hard, three times as hard, five times as hard, 10 times, as hard as you, and that's true. This industry is a lot about, very much less about your talent than it is about your work ethic, and where you are, and how you navigate.

Menendez: As you said, no one, nothing can prepare you for becoming a public person. I can't imagine how true that is when you become a public person at 15, a globally known public person. There was a lot of scrutiny, both, I imagine, from the immediate team, also just from strangers on the internet, which is the nature of being a public person these days.

It's, to me, some of the most interesting elements of your new EP, which is really grappling with that scrutiny, and what you listen to, and what you push back on.

What was it that was reaching you most often? What does it do to a teenager, when the opinions that you're processing are not just like the girl who sits next to you in chem class, but the opinions of the entire world?

Jauregui: I was sensitive when I was the girl in chem class. But to be honest, this is just part of it, right. In every piece, is a part of building me to who I am right now, who I need to be right now, in order to do what I've got to do, what I feel is my purpose, what I feel is my mission here on this planet, right.

I had to get thicker skin, and when I say ego death, it's like I had to learn to love myself authentically. When people are giving you so many opinions about who you are, or who you're supposed to be, when it's someone you know, it hurts a little more, but when it's strangers, and you're just starting out with that kind of reality, where strangers are telling you about yourself, or thinking they can tell you about yourself, that shit is weird.

It's a weird space, because you find yourself making decisions, and doing things, and acting ways that you wouldn't normally or naturally be doing or acting, just to protect yourself from what that could potentially mean, or what that could potentially turn into, or how it could get skewed to making you.

That's not to say like engaging in toxic behavior, or anything like that, but there's a limit to how you can live your life, how you can experience life, how you can make mistakes, or not make mistakes.

I don't know. When you're 16 through 21, I feel like we make so many mistakes in the privacy of our anonymity, and figuring out life, and I didn't get to do that.

Menendez: There's no backsies on that.

Jauregui: There is no backsies, that was difficult to process and deal with, but it was also a part of it. Again, I'm so much more secure in who I am now, without anyone's opinion influencing it, because of not just that, but like all of the trials and tribulations I've gone through since.

Menendez: What's clear to me talking to you, and what's clear to me reading all of the recent press you've done is, I'm finding you on the other side of this journey, but there clearly was a journey to bring you to this moment.

Part of what I find interesting is, I think most of us would think you do your healing, you do therapy, you do whatever it is you need to do to find yourself, and from there, you start finding your voice, start finding your sound.

For you, it actually happened in the inverse, where you begin finding yourself sonically, and through that process, begin to really hash through these questions of who you are, what you want, who you want to be in this next incarnation of your life.

What did that look like? What did that require of you?

Jauregui: Presence. It just required me to be present with what I was really feeling, even if I didn't really know what that was. Sometimes, I was just writing to write, and sometimes I was writing to feel, and sometimes I was writing without intention.

There was a stark difference in all of those tracks and like which tracks made it to the full piece, I think, just more resonated with that version of me that was figuring herself out, which is like you said, I still am that person, and that's why I still resonate with this music enough to still put it out now, even though I wrote it then, is because I say in Colors, like all of the versions of myself are so part of me, even if I don't entertain the less-healed parts anymore.

Menendez: Describe to me who you feel you were being asked to be, or who it was you were showing up as, and how that person is the same or different, than the person you're showing up as now.

Jauregui: I don't know because she was still me. It was just like a 5% version of me. No effort, and no presence, so off. Then, I still am working up the percentage. I think sometimes I'm still scared to give my full 100%, because when you give 100%, you can't take it back. You can't make an excuse for it.

I think, sometimes, I get caught up in that, but I do give my 100% in the meticulous nature with which I finish things, I want to give things, but I hold myself back sometimes, just out of pure habitual self-sabotage, that I could speak to a lot of people about.

Menendez: Yeah, because then you can always manage expectations, your own and others.

Jauregui: Yeah.

Menendez: It was a rationale for why things didn't work out. Do you have a favorite song on the album?

Jauregui: I love them all, truly.

Menendez: They're all your babies, but if you had to choose?

Jauregui: If I had to choose one, I'd probably pick Scattered, just because the chorus is just so real, and present, and I love the beat. I love the way that the drums come in, and I love the way it makes me feel.

Menendez: Scattered is my favorite song on the EP, so I do feel like we need to bring in another person, who had a different favorite song to give them all equal representation, because they're very different sounds existing.

Jauregui: That's how you felt?

Menendez: Yes. I am like a moody, solo female artist listener, so all of the first tracks resonated with me, and then I was like, I love these tracks that sound more like R and B tracks, but they feel different.

Jauregui: Yeah. They kind of all live in the same sonic world though, because they still have elements of each other in them. I think, especially lyrically.

Menendez: Talk to me about the decision to go independent, and why that felt necessary, and aligned with where you are now?

Jauregui: I just needed to be able to execute my own creative vision without impediment, or doubt, or like the focus of everything always being the monetary value of something, versus the integral value of something. That was really where I was at, because I feel like money comes when you connect with people in your authenticity, whatever that means for you.

I think that there's a wide range of what being authentic means to each of us, but, for me, being authentic is I'm a little emo, like I'm an emotional baby. I have feelings, and I like to explore them, and that's what my art is, to me. I don't just want to be somebody who sings other peoples' songs, and gets on a stage, and does heavy choreo for everyone.

That's not my personal thing, and that's not to say that can't be peoples' thing, like that's a super valid thing. It's just not mine, so I just wanted to do my thing, which is to be heavily involved in my creative process, and to, yes, do choreo, but choreo that connects with the lyrics, and connects with my intention with the song.

Menendez: Yes.

Jauregui: I really wanted to do that, unapologetically.

Menendez: On the flip side of that, you've said that going independent has made you realize what an expensive little business you're a part of.

What has going independent, where have you been able to pull back the curtain and see the ways in which this is an expensive business?

Jauregui: Oh, my God, everything takes money. Everything takes quite large amounts of money. I think that's why a lot of people don't stay independent. I think that's why a lot of people end up in deals, where they think that what they're getting for their value, or for their worth is enough quote unquote, because they don't know better about what they're actually going to be bringing in for people on the backend, they don't understand. Myself included, when I was younger, I didn't understand how the business model of things worked.

Menendez: You're building yourself, you're building your sound. Did you also have to rebuild the team around you?

Jauregui: Yes, and that's even still under construction, I think, sometimes. I think that, as I grow as a businesswoman, I refine what I need. As I grow as an artist, I refine what I need. I've gotten more in touch with my needs, and being aware of them.

I've healed a lot of my hyper-independence inside of myself, that was very afraid of asking for help and very untrusting of everything around me, because safety was an option, and so when you feel that way and that's the way that you're resonating, even if it's on a subconscious level, that's what comes to you, is situations like that.

Repeat the pattern until you wake up to the pattern. This is just on my healing journey, so yeah, I definitely had to surround myself with people who just understood though, where I was trying to go, and how I was trying to get there, and who believed in me because I believed in myself.

I think everyone that I have around me now, definitely has that ethos and definitely believes in my vision, and is willing to be present for that.

Menendez: Talk to me about your decision to write an open letter to Trump supporters, to use your voice for that.

Jauregui: That was a long time ago, but, yeah. I think I've grown a lot since then, to be honest, in my understanding, and not to say that I empathize with people who support Trump, but I empathize with why people feel driven to support someone like Trump.

That's a complex nuance, right, because I'm not saying that he was deserving in any way of any kind of support. I'm more so observing now, how we work as a society, and there's a lot of distrust in government, and there's a lot of fear around what we should or didn't do, because we don't know ourselves, and we don't know what we need.

We're so used to abuse, it's hard for us to imagine a world that's not corrupt. I, at the time, was angry, because I couldn't understand how anyone would want to vote for someone, who was so blatantly oppressive, and blatantly misogynistic, and blatantly racist, and blatantly all of these things.

Now, that's a situation we're in, and so, at the time, I was 18, 19 freshly out the closet, freshly in my power, freshly empowered by my voice, freshly empowered by the concept of using a platform to bring awareness to things. As I've grown, I've also understood that tangible change doesn't come from just talking, it comes from doing.

It comes from investing in community. It comes from being a part of community, and it comes from grassroots effort, most of the time, and it doesn't come from politics, and it doesn't come from reform, and it definitely isn't going to come from the U.S. Government, to be fair, because there is no agenda, except the agenda to make money.

That is it, and if this pandemic didn't prove that to everybody, I don't know where the fuck everybody is, but it proved that to me. I felt compelled to call in peoples' humanity. That's why I wrote that letter, because I was so angry that I couldn't understand why people didn't automatically have that sense of humanity that I have, naturally. I'm very empathic, and I'm very hyper aware of the world that we live in, and the pain and suffering that's in it.

I can't fathom when people choose to side with that, but I've now stepped back and understood nuance, and that most people are just scared, and most people only can meet you where their own education meets them, where their own biases meet them, where their own connection with themselves, even, the love that they have for themselves, even is.

Telling people who to be, doesn't make them want to change. Does that make sense? But educating people about what they're doing, is like the sneak attack. I'm more inclined to educate people and drive people towards people, who educate about topics.

Menendez: Part of what's interesting to me is, you were newly out, there was a reckoning happening in this country. You had a voice and a platform.

Jauregui: I never was told who to be. It was just more of not being able to fully be myself, in that I didn't even know who that was in the context of being in a group. There's no such thing as a personal identity in that kind of context.

I ended up coming out, because I was outdid because of what happened, but like I didn't ever really intend to, but I'm glad I did, because now it's like, "What? That doesn't even matter."

I can't even believe that I thought about whether or not I should, I don't think anybody should have to claim their sexuality. I think you should just do what you want. I think that who you love and who you have relations with is literally your business.

Menendez: I do want to ask you, was your grandmother who encouraged you to audition for X Factor? What do you think she'd think about this new EP?

Jauregui: I had a whole moment with them when I finished it. When I recorded Prelude, and I came back from those two days, I had a whole moment with my ancestors. I like gave them some flowers, and I like changed their water out, and I just was praying, and I could feel them with me.

I want to cry. I could feel them with me. They're proud. They're proud as fuck, and they were with me every step of the way.

Menendez: If we listen to the album, where will that show up for us?

Jauregui: I think that it just shows up in the energy that it gives you, at least the energy it gives me. I just know that I did it. I did what I wanted to do, and it's actually how it's going to come out. That, in itself, was God, and my spirit guides, and my ancestors, guiding the way for me from vantage points that I can't even see.

Menendez: Here's my final question for you. You are 25. It feels like you've lived a 1,000 lives.

Jauregui: Girl, so many lives.

Menendez: What do you want to do next?

Jauregui: Oh, I want to keep making music, I think, until like my 30s, I think I'm going to make music, and art, and just visuals. I want to make movies. I have a lot of ideas. I just want to manifest them over the course of the next five, six, seven, and then, I want to escape to a house on an island with a big-ass yard, and a bunch of trees, and chickens, and I just want to live and make art if I want to, or if I don't want to not, and just vibe. Then, I want to create healing centers. That's my trajectory,

Menendez: Your five-year plan?

Jauregui: That's 10-year plan, because I think my healing centers, I'll probably start opening. Hopefully, I can do it even sooner than I envision, that's my goal, is to be able to start that in tandem with moving into my 30s.

I want to focus more on that, because I just have a vision for spaces where people can heal, especially kids, kids in foster care systems, and just displaced, or homeless. I just want to create spaces where they can thrive, and learn about themselves, and have a chance.

Menendez: I love it. Lauren, thank you so much.

Jauregui: Thank you.

Menendez: Hey, thank you so much for listening. Latina to Latina is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantugua and me, Alicia Menendez. Sarah McClure is our senior producer. Our lead producer is Cedric Wilson. Kojin Tashiro is our associate sound designer. Stephen Colón mixed this episode. Jimmy Gutierrez is our managing editor. Manuela Bedoya is our social media editor and ad ops lead. We love hearing from you email us at hola at Latinatolatina.com. Slide into our DMs on Instagram or tweet us at Latina to Latina. Remember to subscribe or follow us on radio public, Apple podcast, Google podcast, good pods, wherever you're listening right now. And remember, every time you share the podcast or you leave a review, you help us to grow as a community.

CITATION:

Menendez, Alicia, host. "How Lauren Jauregui Learned to Listen to Her Own Voice" *Latina to Latina*, LWC Studios. December 16, 2021. LatinaToLatina.com.

Produced by:

