



## How Aimee Garcia Took Charge of Her Hollywood Career

The actor best known for playing a nerdy Latina on TV is becoming a power player behind the scenes, thanks in large part to starting a production company with her long-time collaborator. Aimee talks to Alicia about the road from being a novice writer to penning a comic series for Netflix, how she feeds her artist soul, and the privilege and responsibility of telling stories.

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Alicia Menendez:

Aimee Garcia is Hollywood's favorite Latina nerd. From *The George Lopez Show* to *Dexter* and *Lucifer*, Aimee has consistently played smart, sunny characters, even on shows that are pretty dark. Now, she's launching her own production company, *Scrappy Heart*, and creating space for others who, like her, don't fit neatly into any one box.

Aimee, thanks for doing this.

Aimee Garcia: Thank you for having me!

Menendez: I want to start with *Scrappy Heart Productions*, because while I am sure that we have some listeners in our midst who are aspiring actresses, I'm gonna guess that more are trying to figure out how to go from worker to owner, from performer to creator, so take me back to the moment where you decided you wanted to have your own production company.

Garcia: It kind of happened organically with *Glow*. So, they asked my writing partner and I, who's also Boricua, she's Puerto Rican, and wrote a *New York Times* bestseller called *Crazy is My Superpower*. We were talking how we love superheroes, and we love comics, and we never saw ourselves represented, and they asked us to write *Glow*, the comic based on the Netflix series, and that was the first time that we thought, "Let's highlight the Mexican character in there that we thought could have been more dived into during the series." What if we pitched that relationship between Yolanda's character and the Muslim character?

And we pitched it to Netflix, and they loved it, and they got their own covers on the comics, and that was the first time I thought, "Oh my goodness. This is so cool that I was able to with my writing partner highlight a Mexican character and have her be the center of the story, even though she's a peripheral character on the show."

Menendez: So, I have been following your writing partner and now your production company partner, AJ Mendez, for years, because she and I both grew up in Union City, New Jersey. And so, years ago when she was in the WWE, my mom was like... My mom's always on the lookout for Union City kids, so she was like, "Union City kid in the WWE!" And then I was like, "Oh, and she's Latina. This is amazing." So, you guys were writing partners before you were producing partners.

Garcia: Correct. We were writing partners. We wrote Glow, which we loved doing, and then we started writing Dungeons and Dragons, and she's like, "Hey, I found this article on this badass female Viking who had a hero's burial." And we were like, "Let's highlight her." And she had this huge scar on her face, and then we did this Disney writers program and they said, "You should start a production company, because you guys have so many ideas, and you guys run the gamut with comedy, and drama, and TV, and you guys should create your original material." And then we were like, "Yeah, we should do that."

And then the kicker was really the Comic-Cons. That was when our fans... I would go around for Lucifer and she would go around for WWE and they'd ask us what's next, like what are you doing next, we love your character. And we thought, "Well, let's give them an answer. Let's say we're creating our own characters and making these peripheral diverse characters the centers of their own stories." And then we just did it.

Menendez: I say this with all the love in my heart, which is I'm genuinely surprised that it took that long for you to realize that you wanted and needed a production company.

Garcia: I know. You know what it is? I've been really lucky as an actor. I recorded M.O.D.O.K. while I was shooting Lucifer, and I filmed El Chicano while I was shooting Lucifer, and I've always worked as an actor. I've had a bunch of failed pilots and I've had success with Dexter, and shows that were supposed to be big and only last a year, like Rush Hour, and Trauma, and I just throw myself all in, and I think I didn't have the bandwidth to think outside of that kind of singular horse race track. I wish I would have done this sooner. I write eight hours a day. I just dedicated myself for the past three years to writing every day I have off, and anytime I finish a take, I'll just run to my computer and write.

Menendez: So, what was the first thing you did once you and AJ decided that you wanted to start a production company?

Garcia: Content. Content is king. Whether it's you getting the rights to an article, or writing it yourself, or putting together a pitch for an existing IP like AJ did with Crazy Is My Superpower, IP is everything. And if you can have original IP, that's the most important thing. So, I really think putting pen to paper is the first step. Whether it's an article, a book, a script, I mean AJ and I both wrote our own scripts. And then with my show, I was looking for a showrunner to help me write this pilot for a family Latino comedy that I want to write. I just ended up writing it myself, like literally... That's why we called it Scrapy Heart, because we... When we got the job for Glow, we didn't even know how to write a comic book. We literally YouTubed how to write a comic book and DIY. We're total DIY.

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- Menendez: You were gonna say something about the fear. What were you gonna say about fear?
- Garcia: I think we're just scared of stuff we don't know, and we're scared to fail, which is totally understandable. I'm known as an actor, but I'm completely rookie and completely green as a writer, so it's very vulnerable to put your ideas on paper and have someone not only judge your interpretation of a character, but to judge your brain, your ideas. That's so personal and you're basically giving someone your brain baby, and if they crap all over it, it's just really heartbreaking.
- I say this all the time, but babies fall and get up all the time. Like they don't know any better. They literally fall dozens of times before they learn to walk, and they don't care. They just get back up. And so, I think we could learn from that. You know, *Walking Dead* got noes from every network except for AMC. It's not about even the quality of the work sometimes, which I think obviously is very important. Sometimes I think it's just about persistence.
- Menendez: So funny. I was watching another interview with you and you were talking about writing the comic book, and the person who was interviewing with you just sort of couldn't get over this idea that that wouldn't result in you playing a character. I think when you have been talent, in front of the camera talent on everything you've been a part of, how do you then reposition yourself and get other people to understand you as being a person who's going to be behind the camera?
- Garcia: What helped me a lot was getting published. I mean, to have a comic book that says Garcia, you can't say you're not a writer. AJ and I both wrote our own scripts and we're really close to making a deal with a studio now, and instead of us saying, "This is what our vision is. This is what we're thinking." You literally just have to show them. You literally just have to write your voice and then they will see your voice. We're a visual industry, you know what I mean? And we're a risk averse industry. Nobody wants to take a risk. There's so much money on the line. The stakes are so high. Especially now. And so, I think the best thing to do is just do it and not ask for permission.
- You have to just roll up your sleeves and do the work. I think you just have to be delusional enough to jump.
- Menendez: You go to Northwestern, triple major in economics, journalism, and French. You act throughout college. Theater, indie films, commercials. But then you move to New York to work in finance. What went into that decision?
- Garcia: So, I'd been acting for so long in order to pay for college, and then once I paid for college, I was like, "Well, I guess my work is done here." And I didn't want to admit to myself that I loved it so much. It was one of those-
- Menendez: Why?
- Garcia: Because I just... It didn't seem like work. Like I genuinely love it. I love being a ham. I love making people's days a little better.
- Menendez: It was impossible that someone would get paid to do something they love so much?

Garcia: I didn't feel like it was a real job. Maybe, I don't know, maybe it was my immigrant parents. You have to suffer. You know what I mean? There's sacrifice. You know, my dad grew up in an outhouse. He didn't have indoor plumbing. My mom grew up super poor. Maybe I felt guilty that it came so easy, like it just was so fun. I didn't really think of it as a job. I loved it. And so, I thought, "You know what? I gotta get serious. I already can be in finance. This is great. This makes sense. This is what I studied." And it was like breaking up with the love of your life, dating other people, and then coming back and being like, "I can't stop thinking about you."

I think in the back of my head I always knew I would go back, but I needed to know that I could do something else. I didn't want to go knowing this is the only thing I can do. I felt like if I was gonna really pursue acting full time, I needed to know that I can make money at something else in case I needed to walk away. I needed to know I could walk away, so I walked away.

Menendez: Was there a moment, though, that led you back to acting?

Garcia: Jessica Alba on Dark Angel. I remember, if I ever see her, I'll probably tell her. Yeah. Another representation matters. I mean, I saw her on a motorcycle, and she was this bionic, really ahead of its time headliner, and I thought, "That's so cool. I want to do that." And that was it. That was the catalyst.

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Menendez: You move to LA, you get cast as a series regular in the WB's Greetings From Tucson, George Lopez's niece on The George Lopez Show. You have been working for a long time. I was scrolling through your IMDB and I was like, "Keep scrolling. Keep scrolling. Lots to see here." I think a lot of us know you most from Dexter, Lucifer in its fifth season. What is the secret to consistently working in an industry that runs so hot and so cold?

Garcia: It's funny. I don't have a sexy career. I don't have a, "I was so beautiful DJing at the party, I was discovered." I wasn't the female lead in a huge franchise. I don't have... I have a very blue collar career, to be honest. It's just a very one foot in front of the other, one brick, two bricks, one line, two lines, one scene, two scenes, and I'm proud of that. Maybe not having the ego I should have to say no. I just am a yes person, you know? And there's a lot of people... Even on my current show, they said, "You know, you were up for the female lead in Guillermo del Toro's show. This Ella Lopez role is not big enough for you."

And I thought, "I've never seen a Latina scientist on TV. I don't care if it's big enough. I just think it's cool." I don't not take a role because it's not the cool show. Lucifer was not the cool show. Now it happens to be the number one show in the world, but it didn't start out that way. It started out as a complete underdog, a complete joke, a crime-solving devil. It wasn't supposed to last. I would have never joined the show if I listened to the zeitgeist close to me saying, "Oh, you can do so much better."

And so, I guess it just... I just say yes. And I don't know if that's right or wrong. I mean, I think sometimes you have to say no to leave yourself open for a yes. I am just such a

workhorse that I learn from every failed pilot, I learn from any indie film I do. The key is put your ego aside and just say yes, and not worry about whether it doesn't have the sexiest actors in it. Everybody wants to do the thing that's cool. I just do the thing that I want to do.

It might be cool. It might not be cool. What excites me, what gets me out of bed in the morning, and what is gonna inspire me to go that extra mile so that I can go to be exhausted because I thought, "Oh my gosh, this is so cool." And if other people think it's the nerdiest thing or the dumbest thing, I can't concern myself with that.

Menendez: I'm learning a lot. I'm gonna replay this interview many times so that it sinks into the depths of my soul.

Garcia: I have been so heartbroken in this particular industry that... You know, one more no isn't gonna kill me. I say one more no is closer to a yes. And you learn from noes. I think *The Strain*, with Guillermo del Toro. That one crushed me. Oh, this is a crazy story. This is funny. I was up for the female lead and it was down to three girls, and they're all talented, we all know each other, and it could go either way. And we went in like seven times, and we screen tested with the male leads, and all this stuff. And on my way to give a speech to this nonprofit I work with called MOSTe, Motivating Our Students Through Experience, it's a membership program for girls in lower-income areas. And so, I'm about to give a speech to them at their retreat and I get the call that I didn't get it.

And I'm like, "No worries. Another no is closer to a yes." And I'm holding it together in the car. I'm like, "No problem. I gotta get it together. I gotta talk to these girls." And onto the next one. Oh my gosh. I get to talk to the girls. I go, okay, and it's their lunch time. And it's probably like... I want to say maybe 100 girls. And I get up to give a speech and I just start bawling in front of these girls, and I'm supposed to be there to inspire them, and be a role model, and they all... Half of them are filming me on their phones and I just... and I'm trying to get through it and I'm like, "So, and, and..."

And I just stopped in front of them and I said, "Look. I'm actually really glad that you're seeing me like this, because these are the moments that define who you are because of how you respond to news that didn't go your way. It's not gonna be the first time. If you don't get a job interview, if you don't get into that school you wanted, if you don't get the health report back that you wanted, whatever it is," I said, "This is okay. I want you guys to know that it looks like we might have a charmed life, right? But I want you guys to know. I want you guys to remember this moment, that if you ever have a moment where you feel really heartbroken about something that didn't happen, it's okay. And just remember this moment and hopefully remember that I'm gonna just get back up again and you should too."

And I totally changed my speech and I thought, "You know what? This is great. It's gonna do them no good for me to talk about all my success stories." What will probably help them is to just be reminded to just get your ass back up. It's cool.

Menendez: And bad days happen. Bad days happen even to people who live very charmed lives.

Garcia: Yeah. And you don't always get your way and that's okay. You're not always gonna get everything you want.

Menendez: You once said that the hardest part of working in Hollywood is not giving up who you are. You said Hollywood is a very seductive business. There's a lot of powerful people, a lot of

money, and a lot of temptation to take shortcuts. Can you tell me about a time when you were offered a shortcut and chose instead to take the long road?

Garcia: There was a project that I had done, and the same director of that project went off to direct a very successful movie. And that director had asked if I wanted to go on his private plane to the Caribbean. And I knew that if I went, I'd probably get the role for the next movie that he was doing and did not even entertain it for a second and said no. I didn't get the movie and I was totally okay with that.

Menendez: Because you felt it was a romantic overture?

Garcia: 1000%. 1000%. And it happened again on another show I had done. A friend of mine who was on the writing staff went to another show, which was one of the most successful shows of all time, and he said, "Hey, I wrote this role for you." And I said, "That's great." And then I went through the steps of auditioning and I did great and I didn't get it. And I thought, "Oh, that's so weird. I did great. Whatever." And he said, "Between us, he knew that you wouldn't sleep with him, so you didn't get hired."

And that's just devastating, because like how do you compete with that? But that's okay.

Menendez: Well, no. It's not okay. What's okay is that you held your own line on it, but it also speaks to what makes this so complicated, which is an industry is different than a workplace. Like there's no HR department of the industry to go report that to.

Garcia: I don't know if that would fly today. I mean, this was years ago. You know, it's one thing to say... Like you don't know who you are until situations come up. You might think, "Oh, if someone breaks into my house, I'm gonna friggin take off my chancla and I'm gonna hit them and then I'm gonna run." You don't know. You know what I mean? You don't know who you are until these... You don't know what kind of mom you're gonna be until you're a mom, right? You're like, "Oh, I'm gonna be the mom..." You just don't know until you're presented with these circumstances.

It's just it gets easier. I think it gets easier to do you if you just keep doing you and surviving doing you, and then you're like, "Oh, I survived. I can keep doing me."

Menendez: One of your next projects, Match Me If You Can, you'll executive produce and star in it. Such a good premise. A talented computer nerd gets rejected by an online dating service. They say she's unmatched. Her status goes viral. How much, if any of this, is inspired by your own experience of dating?

Garcia: I actually have never online dated. I'm a total hopeless romantic idealist. But I loved it because first of all, I love geek culture. I loved this because I think it's today's world. I think a lot of people find themselves online and I think it could be really disheartening when things don't match up in reality like they seem on your phone. And you know, you can be anyone you want online, but I think I've had girlfriends be like, "Dude. He does not look like his picture." And it was like, "That picture was like 10 years ago." I thought, "Well," and it was like, "He put on so much weight." And I said, "Well, I don't know. I mean, he probably... He's not lying. That was him 10 years ago."

I thought there was so much humor in that and then when they came to me with it, I just... I loved it. It's been wonderful to just be able to set the tone. I think the best part of being a producer is making people feel safe and inspired to do their best work, and sometimes if

I'm not headlining a show, or if I'm not a producer on a show, I don't want to overstep my boundaries, you know? I want to be respectful. But as a producer, you can really effect the most change, because you can kind of set up the pieces of the puzzle for hopeful success.

Menendez: What did I miss?

Garcia: One thing that's really exciting work wise is M.O.D.O.K., that my character, Jodie, is now officially part of the Marvel Universe, and M.O.D.O.K. is voiced by the incredible Patton Oswalt, who's also writing and producing, and I think it's gonna be one of the first biracial families in the Marvel Universe, which is really cool, because you know me and comics.

I guess what I want to say is that we're moving in the right direction. I think that there's a lot of work to do and I promise to do what I can to create cool, fun superheroes for the next generation, so that they're like, "Oh my God, that's me!" And they don't have to kind of cherry pick their role models like we did in our generation. But I guess I just want to... In such a dark world right now, I just want to tell people it's gonna be okay. We're gonna get through this, and we're gonna come out stronger, and we're gonna be okay. So, that's really it. I just want to kind of inspire people to just take it one day at a time, do what you can, and all you can do is all you can do, and that's okay.

Menendez: Thanks for joining us. Latina to Latina is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantigua-Williams and me, Alicia Menendez. Paulina Velasco is our senior producer. Virginia Lora is our managing producer. Cedric Wilson is our producer. Carolina Rodriguez mixed this episode.. Manuela Bedoya is our social media editor. We love hearing from you. Email us at [hola@latinatolatina.com](mailto:hola@latinatolatina.com) and remember to subscribe or follow us on RadioPublic, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, wherever you're listening right now, and please leave a review. It is still the fastest, best way to help us grow as a community.

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