



How Sasha Merci and Dee Nasty Found Their Comedic Calling

They're funny and they know it. But they're also observant and really quick witted, which makes their brand of comedy a little bit underhanded and conspiratorial in a really appealing way. After honing their standup chops in live shows, and building faithful social media followings, they've launched a sketch show on Fuse TV, Like, Share, Dímelo—a natural next step in their ascension as Latina queens of comedy. But, as this shared interview reveals, it's not always smiles and laughs; they've seen each other through tragedies, dead-end jobs, and creative slumps. But they just keep laughing.

Sasha Merci: Hey, Dee. Can you hear me?

Darlene Demorizi:

Yes, bitch!

Merci: I think being the only Latinas in the room strengthened our bond or something, like we got telekinesis or something.

Demorizi: Yeah, yeah, ¡el diablo! Yo, you know what I think? They think that we Latinx.

Merci: Yeah, I think we are. I think that's what it is.

Demorizi: You sure? How you know?

Merci: This is what they're calling us, I'm pretty sure. They keep looking at us when they say it.

Demorizi: Who is us?

Alicia Menendez:

Childhood friends Darlene Demorizi and Sasha Merci were working at a hotel in midtown Manhattan when they started making funny Instagram videos to entertain themselves. Those videos, about everything from what happens when your sister steals your clothes to the things a New York girl cannot resist took off. Now, Darlene and Sasha have a new series on Fuse: Like, Share, Dímelo, where they take on pop culture, politics, dating, all with no filter. Today, we talk about growing up as funny, outspoken kids, their plan for a total takeover beyond Insta, and how they've stayed true to who they are as the stakes start to rise.

So, how do you two know each other?

Merci: Okay, so my family and her family were friends way before we were even born, so we would always see each other at family gatherings, when we were younger, and then we started getting very close in our teenage years. And that's when we found out we were identical.

Menendez: Identical. Yes, indeed. Dee, what was Sasha like as a kid?

Demorizi: Sasha was very artistic, like I remember when I would see Sasha, especially because when we were kids, we kind of hated hearing about each other, because our parents would kind

of pin us against each other. Like my mother would always be like, “Oh, you know, Sasha is doing a play in her school, in her middle school and high school,” and this and that. And I, and then her aunt, who was raising her, would be like, “Oh. Well, you know, Dee gets straight A’s all the time.” So, we would just be tired of hearing about each other all the time. We’d be like, “I don’t even want to hear it.” But we started becoming a little older and we were forming our own opinions about one another. I just remember her being super artistic. Always drawing, always singing, always creating, and so loving. Her energy, always like the first thing you would see when you see Sasha, especially when she was younger... Well, still now, but you know, as a first impression, is she would always hug you. She was always loving and stuff, so that was how I remember her as a kid.

Menendez: Sasha, what was Dee like?

Merci: Dee was very smart, like I just knew if you want to know something, it’s like Dee already, she knew facts all the time. So, my aunt was always telling me that she has straight A’s. I was very impressed by how young she was, and she was able to articulate herself, and I’m like, “Man, I’m over here being artsy fartsy, and I can’t even express myself like she can.” But one of the things that I do definitely remember is that Dee has a huge heart, and she’s just willing to help anybody. She’s willing to save everybody, and that’s one thing that I admire about her, like she’s amazing.

Menendez: Dee, when you were kids, did you think that comedy was in the cards for you?

Demorizi: I knew that it was gonna be in the cards in some shape or form. I come from a very funny family. Everyone’s always roasting each other. And then my older brother also was very into comedy. And there was one TV in the house. I would have to watch what he was watching, because there was no other option, and he... At a very early age, I knew about Richard Pryor and Eddie Murphy, so I knew that I wanted to do it, because it was something that would show my humor, and also if I felt very strongly about something, or if I wanted to just talk about something that I recently learned about, that can be a snoozefest. But if you make it into humor, if you make it funny, then everybody wants to listen to it.

Menendez: And Sasha, for you?

Merci: No. I didn’t think comedy was ever going to be something that I was gonna pursue, because I wanted to be a singer, and I wanted to be the next Whitney Houston, and I didn’t sing like her, but I wanted to make songs, and just... People always told me, like, “You’re funny. You have a funny personality. Or you know how to make jokes.” And that also stems from my family, because we don’t know how to be serious, and if anything that’s dramatic that happens in the family we always tend to figure out what’s funny. But they also put me onto Dave Chappelle, Eddie Murphy, and all these great giants that I look up to these days, you know?

Menendez: Sasha, take me back to you’d graduated from high school, you were working at a hotel?

Merci: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Menendez: And you start making videos on Instagram. So, before the videos, what was your plan working at that hotel?

Merci: To retire and die there, like that was my plan. My plan was just make sure I have enough money to pay my rent, and possibly get married and have kids. But the thing is that I always wanted to be an entertainer. I just never put the foot forward to make it happen,

and so when Instagram had the video feature, I guess I was just talking about things that were funny to me and my friends. Me and Dee would have conversations, and you know, so things that I felt like was on the mind of everyone on me, I would just do videos about it, and then it started taking off, and then I started doing things here and there, and then I was like, “Oh, this is real.”

Menendez: And that, see, where were you when you... You graduated from high school, then what happened for you?

Demorizi: I was working in the hotel with Sasha, as well.

Merci: Yep.

Dee Nasty: And that was also, like I think that was kind of the beginning of us working together in that way, because we were working at this very small basement office, with all of these other women, so you can only imagine. We're all synced up, estrogen crazy, and a lot of drama. There was a lot going on in that little office. But we were the comedic relief all the time. So, I think that's when we were like, “Yo, I think we could do this. Let's just do it.”

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Menendez: Tell me when you were making those first Instagram videos, like were you just turning on the camera and going, or were you scripting, and plotting, and finding time, and good lighting to do it? How much of it was really being produced and how much of it was off the cuff?

Demorizi: So, when I first started doing the videos, some of them were kind of skits, and others were just rants. So, the rants ones were off the cuff. It's just something that popped into my head. I'm very opinionated, so I would just be like, “I don't like this. I don't like toilet...” I would talk about certain toilet paper, like just silly little things or whatever that would come to my mind. When I was doing the sketches and the skits, that would be like something that would pop into my head, and then I would take the time with that. I wanted good audio, I wanted good lighting, and I decided to... People didn't understand how time consuming it is to do a skit, like if you decided to wake up that day, 10:00 AM, you probably wouldn't be finished with everything until like, I don't know, 10:00 PM at night. Because you would record it, you have to stop, you have to get things from different angles, make sure the audio is good, and then you have to edit it.

Menendez: And were you learning how to do all of that on the fly?

Demorizi: On the fly. To this day, I still don't know how to edit on a computer. When I do edit stuff, I'm doing it off of iMovie on my phone.

Menendez: Sasha, what type of opportunities started to come your way?

Merci: My friend, he was really big on my rants, and the skits, and all that stuff, so he's like, "Let's create a web series." So, we ended up creating a web series called Dating Has No Merci. I ended up getting auditions for movies and TV shows and stuff like that, but I would be in the room not knowing what the heck I need to do, or like sending them tapes and I'm like, "I don't know what I'm doing." So, a lot of those opportunities started happening for me. It was more so acting.

Menendez: Dee, what started coming your way?

Demorizi: A lot. I think just with Instagram and doing our skits, and then in 2017 I think it was, VICE Media crept up into my DMs and were like, "Hey, do you want to come in for a screen test?" I've been freelancing with them since then, and I have my franchise, Dee on the Street, where I just go out and ask people questions on whatever is trending. And I learned so much working there, just like production wise, and just hosting wise, and little things that we were learning alone and on the fly with our phones, I would call VICE almost like my school, in a sense. And then just more, like now me and Sasha have our show, Like, Share, Dímelo, it's on Fuse, and if it wasn't for those little videos, none of these other media companies would have paid attention.

We also did do an independent film in Dominican Republic a couple years ago, and it was all through Instagram. Most of my opportunities have been directly through a DM.

Menendez: I do think that that sort of is the big question of talent in this moment, which is clearly Instagram, and before that YouTube, were creating a different system of talent, and as you're describing, a much more democratized system of talent, where if you are talented and you have a phone, you can make content. But the question is how much of that talent can translate and jump to other mediums?

Demorizi: I agree, and I think that goes to show... We've heard a lot about those stories about people that have millions of influencers, and no shade, either. I mean, not influencers. Excuse me. Followers. No shade to them, but I've heard many stories where they're very good at what they do when they're controlling it, but once they start working with other people, it doesn't translate. Also, same thing for a stand-up, because I remember the very first time that I did an open mic, me and Sasha went together. This was before I even started doing the Instagram videos. I bombed, obviously. Everybody bombs their first time. And then once I started doing the Instagram videos, that kind of gave me the courage to go ahead and to stand-up once more, and I do remember just having some people that were already in the stand-up circuit, and they doubted us. They doubted me and Sasha, because they thought, "Oh, nobody from Instagram is funny on stage."

So, we proved them wrong.

Menendez: So then, how did you get good at doing stand-up?

Merci: I feel like even though it wasn't around a whole bunch of people, I feel like I was always doing stand-up, because that's how me and my brothers used to talk. So, I didn't know that I was being groomed throughout my teenage years on how to make stand-up, right? And then when me and Dee started working together, she went to the front desk. When we were together, everybody was like, "Oh, here comes the show!" We were always like at

work, and people gathered around us and listened to our stories. Then Dee went to the front desk and I stayed in instant service in the basement, and it was the same thing. She's over there upstairs making people laugh, I'm making people laugh downstairs, and it was just... That was why people wanted us around, because we always had jokes. We were always... So, I think that it was already embedded in us, and I think the reason why we bombed is because we didn't really understand the talent that we already had, and then with the whole... with being able to record our videos and doing that stuff, and then actually going on stage and just doing what we already know, that's when things started really changing and it's like, "Oh, shit. We been known how to do this shit." You know?

Menendez: What inspired you to get together and start Sancocho, your comedy show?

Demorizi: We wanted to do something that was mostly for us, right? So, we were already doing stand-up on our own, she was in LA doing stand-up, as well, and we were seeing that a lot of people were putting shows together, and hosting their own gigs, and it was cool, but we didn't see anything that was for our voice.

Menendez: By your voice, do you mean Latino? Or do you mean Dominican from the Bronx? What was missing?

Demorizi: I would say Latino and then bring it down a little bit to Latino from the Bronx, but I also think it's just like it's not even about ethnicity at this point. I think it's just a certain type of person and who you are, right? So, a lot of the time you watch television and you see that there's a woman on stage, or the main protagonist, she's female, and most of her conversations are circled around a man, or they're always talking about makeup tutorial, or tips, or this and that, right? And no shade, no tea, no shade, because I do all of that, too. But I just felt like it was different, because you hear so much about women not being funny in the media, and Sasha always says it. As a Dominican, as a Latina, even just somebody from the Bronx, everybody's funny. Dudes are not gonna stop making fun of you just because you're a girl, and you have to have tough skin and come back at it.

We wanted to have that voice and show what kind of people we were, and we just wanted to show how many different layers there are with people like us. And that's pretty much the point, the reason why we named the show Sancocho, because in every culture around the world, no matter if you're Latino, or Black, or Asian, or white, everyone has a stew, right? That's what a sancocho is, and it has a whole bunch of different things inside of that stew. It was just a mixture and we wanted to bring that mixture of people up on stage, and I thought that that was very important.

Menendez: How did the two of you convert your online fanbase to people who would actually show up in person at events?

Demorizi: Girl, our fanbase is legit. So, like you know, me and Sasha, I have 130-something thousand followers. Sasha has like 140, I think. So, we don't have the biggest following on Instagram, right? There's people that have multi millions of people. But the people that do follow us, they're real. They really support us. Our community supports us. And the one thing that I took away, especially when starting with Instagram, was even looking back now, some of those videos are so cringe worthy and corny to me, like I'm like, "Oh! I'm terrible!"

But I think it was just the lack of a Caribbean-Latina voice in the media that people kind of flocked to the things that we were doing, because it's something that's not shown. Especially on TV, which I think is super confusing. Dominicans are the largest Latino demographic in New York City, and we're all over the place. There's even a huge

demographic of Dominicans in Alaska, so I think it was just the lack of people that sounded and looked like us on TV that made our fanbase super supportive. Because they're like, "Whatever you do, even if it's not even completely perfect or that funny, we know you're gonna grow! We want to see you." So, they come out. Every Sancocho show has been sold out.

Merci: Yeah.

Ad: *Hey, Latina to Latina Listeners. It's Juleyka, executive producer of this show. I want to invite you to listen to How to Talk to [Mamá and Papi] About Anything. It's my show, that I host, and every week I talk to adult children of immigrant parents like me, and you, probably. We talk about things that are difficult, especially conversations that we've been avoiding with our loved ones. Things like mental illness, being the first to go to college, politics, we get into all of it. Subscribe to How to Talk to [Mamá and Papi] About Anything wherever you listen to your favorite, Latina to Latina. Thanks!*

Menendez: Your new Fuse show, Like, Share, Dímelo, how did it come together?

Demorizi: So, we had been talking about doing something on TV or in the media together for a long time.

Merci: For a long time. Yeah.

Demorizi: And we're actually both represented by the same manager. We spoke to her. We're like, "We want to do this." We attempted... Well, not attempted. We were doing Sancocho as a podcast first, before it was a stand-up show, and when Sasha moved, we did put it on hiatus for a second, but we would be like, "We want to bring something up like that again, but just a little bit more formatted." And I know that we were both good on camera, so I was like, "Let's do something that we're talking and bringing both of our strengths, right?" Like Sasha's super, super, super creative, especially when it comes to creating sketches and writing, like storytelling in that way, she's super good at that.

And me, I still do like the podcast format. I like to have conversations, whatever's trending, or whatever is topical or important at the moment, so I wanted to bring that in, as well, but just not... Basically, think of it like the medicine in the candy. We wanted to talk about things that we thought were important to us, but we also wanted it to be humorous, and fun, and just light.

Menendez: It has been described as a cross between Saturday Night Live and The Real. That's one description.

Demorizi: Who said that? I love that! Oh my God!

Merci: Yeah! That's the goal, baby!

Demorizi: I love that!

Menendez: I was gonna say, what is your vision?

Demorizi: That's it. That's perfect.

Menendez: How do you want people talking about it?

Merci: You said it. Yeah. Definitely would be great, because Dave Chapelle is definitely... The Dave Chapelle show was definitely a show that's always been ingrained in my head. Because I just love how his humor, how he would go on stage, he'll talk about whatever

he's talking about, and then the sketches are somewhat of his experience as a African American, as a Black man, and just make things that way. And so, that is where authenticity shines, right? When you say, "Okay, this is who I am. This is what I represent." Because people are going to identify with it, whether they are from your nationality or not. They're going to see where you're coming from. And so, just making sketches and making things that are coming from our perspective, and then showing, shining a light as to from how the outside is seeing us, and from us, from the inside looking out, and just doing sketches like that and that's how we're having these conversations... Because in the first episode, it's like who's Latinx? And we're just looking around. And then we go off to talk about, "Okay, what do we actually think?"

Menendez: The best moment of that thing, though, is when you guys are communicating telepathically with one another. And you're like, "Oh, they're talking about us?" I've been in the room. I've made contact with someone else where I'm like-

Demorizi: Yeah! Exactly. Like, "What the hell is this?" Yeah, and I think that you'd see, to use the first episode as an example, that's exactly what we wanted. We wanted to talk about things, because I feel like in today's day and age, this can be a good thing, but I feel like it's also not always the best thing. I think the PC culture is going really far in certain aspects, and I think that when it comes to... I don't know who's making the rules, right? And I don't know if it's a way of protecting Hispanic, Latin, Latinx people, but have the conversation with us first. I didn't learn that term until I started working in the media, but here in Washington Heights, where I live now, you never hear that word. So, who's the word really for? So, I just kind of wanted to talk about things that people aren't really talking about, and I want more of the episodes to be that way, as well.

But again, we don't want it to be preachy. We don't want it to be like, "Who are these?" You know, we just want to share our opinions and where we're coming from, but we also just want to keep it light and fun.

Menendez: Sasha, I have to say reading your bio, I was pretty overwhelmed by the amount of loss that you've experienced in your life, and like experienced as a kid. First your mom, and then your grandma, who was raising you, and going back and forth between the DR and New York, and just how... what that must have been like as a kid. You've said that comedy has the capacity to heal.

Merci: Yes.

Menendez: And I wonder how it has done that for you?

Merci: Being able to look within yourself, right? And understand that things happen to you, and they're not your fault, but then you carry on, you carry this thing like it is your fault. Like I am responsible for all this loss in my life, right? And that's like me just taking myself too serious. So, I would always figure out a way to turn that into something positive, like I don't have a mom, I have multiple moms now. Or maybe it's... I don't know if it's just that I'm a positive person or positive kid, but I was able to just see things differently, and just see the abundance of things that I do have, and I don't know if that's why I can see humor a certain way.

And whenever I see someone going through struggles, I see it as like, "Okay, I've gone through struggles too." And if I can lead by example that we don't have to always hurt ourselves, like how is it on self... What is that called? Like self-destruction. We don't have to go into self-destruction and pity ourselves. I just feel like, "Okay, I went through all this

loss. I can use it as an example, and I can use humor to help people move through all of this.” And I remember one time being very sad when I was a kid and I was just thinking like, “I am going to use my voice to help people never feel alone.” And that’s why when I walk into a room, I don’t know what you’re going through. I want to give you a hug. I want to be there for you. And even like if my followers come to see me, I don’t know what they’re going through, and they’re talking to me, I talk to them back and I try to be as present as possible. Maybe I’m not gonna remember the conversation afterwards, but I was there, and I held you, I want to let you know that things are gonna be okay.

Menendez: Dee, does that show up for you at all?

Demorizi: Yeah. I mean, look, comedians, we all crazy. We all got problems, like legit. I got daddy issues. I got... We’re all nuts. So, I don’t know. I’m lucky enough that I feel that I have dealt with some of my internal issues, but I feel like working them out on stage is something that’s super important, because I think a lot of us, if we feel ashamed about something, or we’re feeling bad about something, we think that we’re the only people going through it. And then when you make light of it in a joke and people are like, “Yeah, I understand,” or, “I can relate to that,” it makes you feel less alone, and it’s also just very therapeutic. You let it go. Like I’m still broke. I can’t afford therapy, so comedy is my therapy in that sense.

So, yeah, like it’s just a way to relate to other people and just... If they’ve ever gone through anything similar to me, or vice versa, I want us to know that we’re there for each other. Even if it’s just 10 minutes.

Menendez: It’s just really hard for me coming in at this point of your story, where like you’re both clearly super talented, so ascendant, to hear you each talking about each other, to hear Sasha be like, “No, Dee was the smart one.” And Dee just be like, “Sasha was mega artistic.” That there was a moment where you were just gonna go work in a hotel.

Demorizi: We was making bank at the hotel.

Merci: I know! We were making-that money, girl!

Demorizi: We lived our lives!

Merci: We lived our lives.

Demorizi: Yeah, but I agree. Listen. Sasha, even before Instagram, she wanted to sing. She was going to studios, and I feel like the thing that brings us together is our curiosity for the world and our want for something bigger, right? So, even when we were still working there, like I dropped out of college. I couldn’t deal with the math. Sorry. But we always were... We are dreamers. Like we’ve always been that way. And when we would work in the hotel, we would get out at similar times. I would come to her apartment or vice versa. We would sit down. We’re like, “Okay, so this can’t be it. We gotta figure out a plan to get out of it eventually.”

And we never knew what the plan was gonna be per se, like the exact steps, but we knew we were gonna get there. There’s never been a doubt in my mind that I was gonna do what I wanted to do in some way, shape, or form. I didn’t know what it was. I just put that trust into the universe, as cliché as it sounds. But I was like, “I’m not gonna be here that long.”

Menendez: Anything? Anything you want to add? Anything you feel sort of goes missing in this narrative?

Demorizi: I just also want to people see, like I know that we've talked a lot about representing our communities, and representing where we come from, and that's 100% what we want, but if anyone does take anything from this show, is that we are best friends, and that I want other girls with their friends to see, "Look at these girls. They're just silly and they're talking, they're pursuing their dreams together as best friends." And I want people to see the authenticity in our friendship-

Merci: Absolutely.

Demorizi: And I want them to be like, "Wow." Like if there's two girls watching this from their couch, or two sisters, or two cousins, I want them to be able to think like, "Wow, look. They're not white. They're not Harvard graduates. Whatever. They're just two girls having a good time and just sharing who they are together."

Merci: Yeah. Yeah. What I would say to people, because people always ask me this question of like how do I get these followers, and it's like you're asking me how you get clout, and it's just like that's not the actual question you should be asking. It's like what should I do that I love to do? What is my calling, kind of? And I feel like comedy is my calling. Just be authentic, be you, and just put that first.

Menendez: Thank you both so much. This was awesome.

Demorizi: Yo, thank you so much. This was great.

Merci: Thank you for having us, girl!

Menendez: Thanks, as always, for joining us. Latina to Latina is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantigua-Williams and me, Alicia Menendez. Virginia Lora is our managing producer. Cedric Wilson is our producer. Manuela Bedoya is our social media editor. We love hearing from you. Email us at hola@latinatolatina.com, and remember to subscribe or follow us on RadioPublic, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, wherever you are listening, and please, please leave a review. It is one of the fastest, easiest ways to help us grow as a community.

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