



## Why Doris Anahí Brings a 'Heart of Service' to Her Art

She began her music career as a talent manager, before making the big pivot to working as an artist herself. Now her journey through the industry as a first generation daughter of immigrants from a mixed-status family is the focus of a Disney+ documentary, *Mija*. Doris shares the deep emotional process of following her calling, and how she chose to say no to security in order to bet big on herself.

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Alicia Menendez: Doris Anahí is having quite the year. She has pivoted from her work as a music talent manager, where she made a slash in the industry with acts like Cuco and La Doña, to launching herself as a singer and songwriter. She's also the protagonist of a new much buzzed about documentary, *Mija*, that examines what it looks like to take big risks and how those risks are even more complicated when your family is mixed status. Doris and I talk about what it required to make this huge leap into the next phase of her artistry, how she resisted the pull towards security, and what it means to approach the work with a heart of service.

Menendez: Doris, thank you so much for being here.

Doris Anahí: Thank you so much for having me.

Menendez: I want to talk about how you started in music, which is a little bit different than what you're doing now. I mean, you seem like you knew that this was the industry you wanted to be a part of. But, you didn't enter as an artist, you entered as a manager. And it's my understanding that that's because those opportunities were really coming to you, and then you were excelling at those opportunities. What were those opportunities that were coming your way?

Anahí: Yeah, I mean, where I really, really started with music, if we want to go way back, was since birth. I was born into a family of musicians, and I was raised with tíos and tías that were worship leaders, so I was raised singing in the church since I was a baby. And, it wasn't until college that I went and studied musical theater, and then I went and figured out that wasn't really it for me. And then I studied communications, and then I got a job on campus booking shows for my university. And that's when I started meeting agents and managers and indie bands that I was into that were coming up in LA Orange County to play, now my university and, eso es cuando me estaba como ubicando. When you're first trying to get into any industry, I feel like it's just estas super norteadas, like you don't know where to start or where to go. Yeah, my first internship ever in the music industry was an artist management internship, and then I just started putting myself out there to intern everywhere under the sun before I graduated. And then, my first gig out of college was tour managing. And then when that ended, that's when I started my own management company.

Menendez: During the pandemic, we're all home, doing a lot of thinking in our homes about who we are, who want to be. That thinking takes you down a really big path. Tell me about, was it a moment? Was it a series of moments? How did this pivot start to come to you?

Anahí: It was definitely a series of moments throughout 2020. I think a few weeks into the pandemic was when my biggest client and I parted ways, and the music industry shut down almost immediately after the pandemic really sank in, and we realized how long we were going to be in this. And, I had to just sit with myself. It hit me, like a delayed reaction in the summer of 2020, when the world was on fire. Everyone was protesting. The tension was in the air. And, I'm quite open about this online, and the film scratches the surface a bit on this, but like, *toque fondo*, when it came to my mental health. And, it really became a moment of survival for me. And so I logged off the world. I deactivated and disappeared and lived with my brother in Baja California for a few months, just so I could heal.

Menendez: Can you tell me though, Doris, how did you know that you were burnt out?

Anahí: Oh my God. My body was screaming. My mind was screaming. I didn't feel healthy nor happy anymore. I deal with anxiety. I do. I deal with bouts of depression, but this was different. My body was crying for help. And, it wasn't until I went down to Baja and got to spend that quality time with my brother, and my mom really took care of me, I had this beautiful moment at La Bufadora in Ensenada. And it was June gloom. And, I went down to the water to talk about how mystical these waters are. For those who don't know, there's only four in the world. It's a wonder of the world. And one happens to be in Baja. The waters have healing properties, so recalibrate you if you need. People travel to these waters. And I had no idea because we didn't really get to go to Mexico that much growing up.

Anahí: So when I was there, the water just baptized me basically. I had no idea how far up the water was going to shoot and then basically drenched me. But then, shortly after that, the sun came out. And, a few minutes after that, I got an email from USC, offering me a fellowship with their Annenberg Innovation Lab, and it was going to be a cohort of 16 beautiful, brilliant minds that are at the intersect of media and social impact. And, it really held me through the pandemic. That's when I started reconnecting with being creative. And there was a talk given to us about self-care, and the first point was how pivots in your career sustain your wellness. And, it really clicked in that moment that I had to close my management company, really close that chapter with the last artist that I was managing, and start a new one.

Menendez: And then, what I like about your story is, the real world cuts in real fast, where you get offered a full-time job in the music industry. And, I have to say, I value safety. I value security. There is a lot about your own life that would allow me to believe that you have needed to value those things as well.

Anahí: Oh, of course.

Menendez: So I have to imagine, it was a hard choice not to just jump right into that.

Anahí: Oh my God, of course. I mean, I'm a provider. I'm the youngest in my family, but I'm the one who takes care of those things that I think a lot of kids of immigrants can relate to this. And so, yeah, once people found out I wasn't managing anymore, all these record labels started hitting me up, and then other opportunities started opening up to me. And, it was like a balance of... Simultaneously, while I was figuring out, negotiating my next possible full-time job in the industry, still continuing the music executive route, all these doors

started opening up for me to express myself as an artist. And, it was this crossroads I've never been presented with, ever. And, it was the hardest decision I ever had to make.

Anahí: But, when I was about to start Mija Management, and I really dive into my entrepreneurial phase of life, I was also presented with a full-time job in the publishing world, in the music industry. And, my gut told me that that wasn't meant for me and that I was meant to start my own business. And, at the end of the day, my team, et cetera, all the signs were presenting to that, I couldn't sign on to this full-time job because I was then given all the signs to follow this path. But, I didn't want to disappoint people. I didn't want to disappoint myself in the process either. But, it felt like, if not now, then when?

Anahí: And, it wasn't until I had a really wise sit down with someone I consider to be one of my mentors and an amazing producer composer, Camilo Lara. He was like, "I already see your trajectory. It's going to end creative, but just don't take as long as I did." And so, that's what I had on the back of my head. I'm like, "Don't take as long as I did. Okay." I was like, "Okay, okay, okay." And, it wasn't until November of last year, where I had to make a very difficult decision to turn down a full-time job, with salary and the whole thing, to then really launch myself as an artist and think that I can still be of service and open doors to other artists and my own career as an artist myself, and not deny myself of that opportunity to finally express myself. And, I felt like, once I finally said yes to that, every door started opening.

Menendez: You have that conversation with Camilo. You also begin to sort work on some music together. And it's my understanding that that's how your first single, Que Sufras, is born.

Anahí: Yes.

Clip of Que Suf...: "Te gusta el dolor, que sufras pues, que sufras pues. You really had me going, you were in my dreams, in front of me..."

Anahí: Danny Murcia, Ex Mañana, produced the project, and he was a really dear friend in the pandemic for me. And, during the time of the fellowship, I was given homework to assign myself a studio day a week. And, Danny was down, and so we recorded demos, but allí llego. I was just like, "Let me just record these demos of these songs that I've written over the years."

Menendez: So you're writing both the lyrics and the music?

Anahí: The music was in collaboration. The lyrics and the melody are all me. But, yeah, they're songs that had been living in my voice notes for years. A jam session was one person, and it was another person over the last four years or so. And so, Que Sufras didn't become a demo until fall of 2020. And then summer 2021, when I was sitting down with Camilo, he's like, "Well, are you writing anything?" And I was like, "Well, I do have this demo." And then I showed him Que Sufras. And that's when he was like, "Can I contribute to this?" And that's when I was like, "Oh, Doris, this is the push. This is the push." And even then, I sat in the song for till February, 2022, this year. I didn't really set, because it took me a lot of time to really make the decision to, "Okay, let me put out this one song and see what happens." And then everything happened.

Menendez: Which is also funny to me, because sometimes those of us who take that tack do it from a place of, "We'll see what happens. I'm not going to put everything I know I would need to put into this thing to make it happen." So it's kind of amazing. Actually, to our listeners, I'm like, "Do not take Doris's story as an example."

Anahí: It's not. I know. I am the anomaly. I am the exception to the rule. And that's the same thing that I would say about Cuco and his meteoric rise. From him going from backyards to US major festivals and international within a year and change, that doesn't happen to

everyone. But, on my end, I've been working in the music industry for almost 10 years. So, everything that's happening for me now is because groundwork was laid. And thankfully, the people that were champions for my artists when I was representing them are now champions for me too.

Anahí: I'm definitely an exception to the rule. I'm definitely... When there's divine intervention and some people are just chosen, since I was a little girl, I've felt that notion, that I was chosen, for something bigger, for something that not everyone gets to experience. And I think, since everything that has happened with the film and the music, and my life in general in the last few years, it has been living proof of that manifestation. I hope that my life can just be an example of how to dream and how to hold onto hope. But, my journey is definitely... It's not linear at all. At all, at all.

Menendez: Now, this is all set against the backdrop of the reality of your family, which is, as you said, you are the provider, you are the retirement plan, you are everything. And I think something that your story complicates, Doris, is... I have lots of friends who are or were undocumented, and they are journalists, lawyers, doctors, whether because they wanted to or because there was that push to, you need to do something that is going to be secure, something on which you're going to be able to provide. So your story is like, it's different.

Anahí: Yeah.

Menendez: How did you come to terms with that with your parents? And how did you come to terms with that with yourself?

Anahí: I think I had to come to terms with it with myself first, to then come to the table with my parents and be like, "Okay, ¿que vamos a hacer?" You know? Because since I was a little girl, I knew the pressure that I was under. And, it was made very clear to me by my oldest brother, I'll never forget it. And he had grilled this into my brains, "You have the key to this country, and it's called a Social Security number. Don't mess it up. Don't take that for granted." And so, since I was a little girl, my trauma response was like overachieving, and I wanted to do anything possible to get into college. That was my first goal right there, that I felt like college is going to be my way out.

Anahí: Then, when I was in college, my brother was deported, and that's when I had to then come to terms with my parents. Yeah, we've been living in the shadows my whole life, but I need to say something. I need to do something. This deportation was unjust. I need to raise money. I need to fight for his case. Something. Because before that, actually, my brother was detained by ICE, and that's the first time that I fundraised to try to bail him out. Because my brother was two when he came to this country. He was 29 when he was removed. That's when my parents and my brothers were "¿Sabes que? You know, use your networks to what you need. If you want to help us and we'll receive the help." And that's where it really started. And it wasn't until like 2017 when the previous administration came into power and fear mongering was heard on the airways, on the television, et cetera, that's when I felt like I had to really take matters into my own hands and raise funds for my parents' safety and their security because they were in legal limbo for 30 plus years. And so that's when I started to put on concerts to raise funds for their legal services. And then, it was a snowball effect from there.

Menendez: You say that you have felt, since you were a child, that you were called to this, which I think also has imbued in it a sense that this work is still service work.

Anahí: Yeah.

Menendez: And that there is still, as you said, meaning that extends beyond you as an individual. Do you have a sense of what that call to service is?

Anahí: Oh my God, yeah. I mean, I don't necessarily prescribe to the church that I was raised in, but I am still very much aligned with coming to the table with a heart of service wherever you go, and especially sharing your light with those who need it most. I'm very much rooted in that. Everything that I ever do is an opportunity to pay it forward or to speak to a younger version of myself that really needed it. If the film was just about me, I'd be like, "Oh no. But why?" But, the fact that the film was about my family and a whole movement, and we're one of millions that have that lived experience, it felt like a part of my purpose, a part of my duty, a part of the calling, that I'm just a vessel to tell this story.

Anahí: When I was a little girl, I was so obsessed with people's testimonies at church, when they were able to sobresalir, to survive. A lot of immigrants go to church. That was a lot of the churches that I was raised in. It was a lot of fresh immigrants in this country, and a lot of their testimonies were rooted in how they came from El Salvador and Guatemala and Nicaragua. These churches were a melting pot of that. And so, I just felt like, "Okay, one day, all these hardships that we're going through is just going to be a testimony for other people to see themselves in and know to not give up." So, yeah, everything that I do is very much rooted in that purpose and that service of that. As scary it is sharing my story, as fear-based as it is to feel "embarrassed" for taking up space, et cetera, I know that it's for a larger purpose that's beyond me. It's for millions of others that look like me or have a shared experience as I do that need that.

Menendez: Doris, what did I miss?

Anahí: Since I was a little girl, I knew that I was meant to dream big. I think of that Selena scene where she's looking at the moon, and I really internalized that as a little girl. And I would look at the moon, not knowing the power of manifestation and just really gearing my thoughts towards getting out of our current situation and being able to help my family along the way, we're all getting out of this. I was very fortunate to have parents that were supportive of me being creative. And I know that's not a traditional immigrant parent scenario, but thank God for that. And I encourage any other immigrant parents to follow that route, because it allowed me to get to where I am today.

Anahí: But yeah, when I was in middle school, I went ham on my room and my parents let me paint on my walls. And, I remember, on the back of my door, I painted my hands and I wrote underneath it, "These are the hands of Doris Anahí Muñoz, and they're going to touch the hearts of millions." And I wrote that when I was in middle school. I didn't know how. I really didn't know how, but I knew I was, and I've always been rooted in that, and I never really shared that too outwardly because it sounds kind of... I mean, I guess it could come across kind of funky. I wish people would stand in that purpose and they shout their purpose really loud like that where... I was in middle school when I wrote that, and unbeknownst to me, if I knew what I knew now at that age, that would've been like, "Oh yeah, it was what you were meant to do. Those dreams and seeds that were planted to you as a little girl, as a preteen, et cetera, those are meant for you to go and do." All the fear stuff is just conditioned to us because of adulthood and our teenage years that come along the way and knock us down. But, I hope that people can look back at their earliest memories or things that sparked joy in them or made them feel very sure in what they were doing as a kid, and remember that's probably what they're meant to do on this planet. So, that's really all purposes, and I hope people follow it.

Menendez: Doris, I don't know about anybody else, but this was a conversation that I needed today, so thank you so much for showing up and being so present.

Anahí: Of course. I'm just a vessel, so thank you for connecting with that and reflecting such a beautiful conversation. I needed this today too.

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