



How Lory Martinez Rooted Her Business in Multicultural, Multilingual Audio Storytelling

The CEO and founder of Ochenta Studios, a Paris-based podcast company, shares the skills that have allowed her to differentiate her business and her audio offerings, the trick to scripting hilarious audio comedy, and how the childhood experience of communicating with her abuela shaped her new Spotify fiction podcast, La Cabina Telefónica.

Alicia Menendez: Lory Martinez produced for others for years before she stepped out on her own and founded her Paris based podcasting company, Studio Ochenta. Whether you've listened to her award-winning fiction podcast, Mija where each season explores the story of a different immigrant family or La Cabina Telefónica, Spotify's first bilingual podcast starring Fanny Lu and Isabella Gómez, you know that Lory's commitment to multicultural storytelling runs deep. Lory shares how she makes audio magic happen, how living and operating a business in France shifted her hustle mentality, and the life changing moment when she realized that a skill she had long undervalued was in fact her superpower. Lory, thank you so much for doing this.

Lory Martínez: Thank you for having me. It's an honor.

Menendez: Lory, there is a thing that our good friend, Juleyka says, which is, "Look, I'm from the Bronx." And sometimes she'll say, "Look, I'm Dominican from the Bronx." If you were to say, look, I'm Colombian from Queens, what is it you'd be trying to tell me with that revelation?

Martínez: Anybody who asked me about why I do multicultural things, that would be the answer. Because Queens is the most diverse place ever. There's 800 languages there. We don't have 800 languages at Ochenta, but maybe one day. And so yeah, it's definitely the context that I grew up in and that is who I am and that's all everything that we do at Ochenta is from there.

Menendez: What were the earliest indicators that you were a storyteller and that audio was going to be your preferred medium?

Martínez: One of the things that inspired me the most to tell stories was my grandfather, who was an editor at El Tiempo in Colombia. He was covering reporting the Amazon region, so he would go out on reporting trips for two to three days and talk about the indigenous tribes that are still there and bring back that news to the capitol essentially. And he would tell me about those trips when I was visiting Bogota and I went to journalism school. I went and did that path to follow in his footsteps. Ultimately decided on audio by a trick of fate actually. I was accepted into a school, but I was kind of disappointed that they didn't have a very specific journalism track. It was like English rhetoric or something, and I was kind of a worried that I didn't have the right school path, that I was going to end up maybe changing what I thought I was destined to do.

I decided to travel a bit and I went to visit an aunt who lives in London, and the person next to me on the plane turned out to be a reporter for BBC Radio Four, and she said, "Why don't you shadow me while you're here in London?" And it was my first exposure to

audio and I got to interview, I didn't interview directly, but I got to be in this room to speak to be Pedro Almodovar, the Spanish director. And my first work experience was being in the room when BBC Radio Four was interviewing this man.

Menendez: And did you find yourself heavy breathing?

Martínez: Oh my God, I was heavy breathing, but not only that. It was actually the first time that I felt like my Spanish was worth something because so much of my youth had been spent kind of being not necessarily ashamed, but not necessarily seeing the value of being bilingual in professional spaces, in school spaces, trying to avoid having an accent, all of these things. Spanish was my first language. Even though I was born in New York, my parents spoke to me in Spanish growing up. And so when I was in this work experience in London, I was the only person in the office that spoke Spanish that day, and that's why I got invited to be a facilitator for this interview that they were doing with this very famous director. And it was like the first time I realized this is a superpower. If I don't use this, if I don't use the fact that I'm bilingual, then I'm dumb, I'm not going to get very far. This is going to be the thing that helps me stand out.

Menendez: That story both affirms and breaks my heart, Lory. You produced audio for others for years for some big name outlets. Can you take me back to the moment when you realized what you really want is to found and run your own studio?

Martínez: Yes. It was a podcast festival, so backtracking to 2015. So I came to Paris in 2015 for a master's degree and I wanted to become an international journalist. And so for years I was working in this space as a freelance journalist, as a podcast producer for other journalists or other outlets here in France. And I was like doing it very solo. I guess I didn't feel like there were other people like me kind of going through the experience of being independent like this in Europe. And I started to kind of research and try to find community, and I joined a couple of Facebook groups and went to my first ever podcast festival. It was like an audio festival called the Hearsay Festival in Kilfinane, Ireland. There were folks from Radiotopia there. There were a ton of producers from all over, the BBC, all producing fascinating podcasts and all of them struggling with this questioning around self-doubt, which for some reason inspired me a lot. Because I was feeling like I was solo and that I didn't have maybe the right to even try because I was like first gen daughter of immigrants, you're hustling. That's all you can do. You're not going to start a company. You can't do that. Seeing the people that I admire actually asking themselves a lot of the same questions gave me the strength to be like, you know what? If everybody is doubting themselves, why don't we all just try? Why can't I give myself that chance? Why can't I dare to do something different and make something more than just me by myself? I came back from that festival and I had already kind of been drafting Mija, but I wasn't sure if it was going to be what it was. I'd been drafting it like a documentary and it wasn't sure if that was the right format. I wasn't really sure of myself, but when I came back, I wrote it in two months. I wrote the whole thing and then I published it in September and I thought it wasn't going to be the podcast that got attention for Ochenta. I worked with some influencers to do some other originals on the channel and really just to kind of show that I was able to produce cross-culturally and also multi-lingually. But something about that show, and I think because I really put my heart and soul into it drew a lot of attention and we were able to get press for it and awards and things that I'd never dreamed of having in my life. And it gave me the strength to also say, wow, we have

this space for this kind of story. I'm going to build a platform with it and I'm going to give this space to other people.

Menendez: I don't want to overshadow your first baby with your most recent baby, but I do want to talk about La Cabina Telefónica, which growing up in Union City, New Jersey, I remember when all of a sudden Bergenline Avenue became flooded with these spots where folks could call back home. We forget that before cell phones and before WhatsApp, it was actually not easy to communicate with folks back home. Do you have a personal connection to this? Was there a memory in your mind that was the genesis of this story?

Martínez: Yes, so I grew up in Jackson Heights in Queens. I would remember going to these cabinas to make phone calls to Colombia, and most of my family was still in Bogota at the time. I remember the woman at the counter was always beautiful and I would admire her nails. I could really picture the space of going in there, hearing the music playing. They always had a TV or a radio playing in the background. There's always a bachata video going on or something, and you would go into the cabina and it would either be really small and cramped, or there'd be a little bit of space with a chair and being the three of us trying to go in, it was me, my mom, and my brother, and it was like a ritual. We would go once a week, once or twice a week to do this, and it was a way of connecting to home. And I remember the walls of these cabinas were so thin and you could hear everything other people were saying, and so you'd exit and you'd be curious to hear what other people were talking about a little bit. And so in finding the idea for the cabina, like, well, if we were to make a show around something like that, this is the perfect place. The owner would be your main character, and then you'd have all of these people coming in to make their phone calls and they could be phone calls about literally anything.

Menendez: We asked you to send your favorite clip from the show and like a proud parent you sent like 17 because you could not choose. But I'm going to ask you, choose one and tell us what it is, give us a little bit of context for what it is we're listening to.

Martínez: Sure. So Matty Cardona is the owner of la cabina, Matty's Llamadas y Servicios 82, and she runs the shop with her daughter, Rossy. So you'll hear her and her daughter kind of talking. Matty is always looking for love and she also has a very frequent customer named Gadiel who is really ... She's been crushing on him, they've been crushing on each other. There's a little bit of a back and forth playfulness there. And this clip is one of my favorites because it really demonstrates how we kind of blended English and Spanish in the show. It's funny without you understanding Spanish, you can understand why it's funny because there's just a lot of very quick back and forth. We use sitcom style writing for this.

Menendez: All right, let's listen to this excerpt from episode three of La Cabina Telefónica.

Clip (Matty): No, no, no, no. Gadiel!

Clip (Gadiel): Matty's, Llamadas al 82, Gadiel speaking. ¿Qué tú quieres, hombre?.

Clip (Juan): Hola. Quiero hablar con Matty, por favor. [music clip]

Clip (Gadiel): Quiere hablar contigo.

Clip (Matty): Dígale, dígale que estoy busy. Y averigua lo que quiere, porfa!

Clip (Gadiel): Esta busy. May I ask the punto of this call?

Clip (Juan): Quería saber si Matty recibió mi bouquet. Y si tenía planes este fin de semana.

Clip (Gadiel): Aha, un momento plis. Dice que si te gusto el gran bouquet que te mando. Y si tienes tiempo este fin de semana.

Clip (Rossy): This is amazing (laughs).

Clip (Matty): Dígale, dígale que estoy enferma.

Clip (Gadiel): Matty esta enferma.

Clip (Juan): Ay! Que tiene?

Clip (Matty): Ay, no se. Ay, what do I say. Ay, gonorrhea!

Clip (Gadiel): Que tiene gonorrhea!

Clip (Matty): Ay no, no no, Gadiel! ¡Eso es una expresión colombiana, como un insulto!

Menendez: Lory, I mean, this is comedy writing. This is a different muscle than the muscle you had been flexing. What did it require of you to really hone that skill?

Martínez: So I grew up watching telenovelas and the drum of novelas was very familiar to me. So even when I was writing Mija, there was a lot of drama in that show, and I wrote it with that vibe. And I realized that I talent for drama writing in that sense, I feel like the drama and sad moments of being an immigrant. I know, I feel that. But for this show, the energy of the space really gave us the opportunity to do a lot of different kinds of stories, and I really wanted it to be lighthearted because ultimately it's a positive thing connecting with family in this case. Doing the comedy thing was really hard for me at first because I was going in a very specific dramatic cliffhanger at the end of every episode format. And then our lead editor on it, Jackie Pereda, she is a fantastic writer. She brought us this comedy formula.

Menendez: Share it, tell us. What is the device, what is the mechanism for doing that?

Martínez: It's heightened sense of reaction. So every character has to come into the scene with their main goal or purpose, and someone else has to be either in conflict with that or is going to be reacting to whatever their goal and purpose is. So for example, one of my favorite characters that we wrote was Abogado Perez, and he's like a local lawyer that's just out there to make a sale. He is always looking for a client and whenever he comes in, he's doing his sales pitch, he'll come in and say, this week we have this deal on divorces and marriages. So you can divorce your wife and marry your girlfriend in the same day and everyone reacts to him. And then the main storyline would be related to somebody dealing with a relationship problem because we kind of introduced this issue that Abogado Perez could potentially help with. It's very situational comedy, and that's what really drives the show and why it's like bingeable because every episode is a different thing that happens to these different people.

Menendez: We talk all the time about how there's a growing Latina podcast audience, which means that in many ways, podcasts like Mija and Latina to Latina are familiarizing our community with podcasting itself. And so I have to imagine that something like La Cabina, which is expanding that out by being bilingual, by being a teleplay, it helps when it has star power, when it has a Fanny Lu and and Isabella Gómez. Was it a struggle to cast them or ... Yeah, I can't tell what your face is telling me.

Martínez: It was a struggle. It was a struggle, not only because ... I mean we've done casting for other shows before, but I guess I had a vision of the main characters in my mind, and one of the important things was that they be Colombian in some way or had connections to Colombia. And for lack of representation, the list is not very long, and it's true in the media and acting space, there aren't that many Latina actresses on one side. And then the other side is the relationship with Spanish is very particular for this show. So the character, Fanny, she's been in the States for a long time. She speaks English fluently, but she will always have an accent, and that's part of her charm. And the daughter, she came to the US very young, and so she's lost her Spanish, and that's something that a lot of people can relate to.

We wanted to make sure that her journey with the language was also represented. And so talking to Fanny and Isabella about that and their rapport with English and Spanish, and even though it's not exactly the same as the characters like Fanny, she speaks fluent English, and Isabella's Spanish is impeccable. Both of them were like, yeah, I get what you're trying to do here and I will do my best to represent it. And that was so perfect. And communicate it not as a stereotype, but really as a lived experience. Like yeah, I know people who talk Matty. I know people who talk Rossy. And I want to show them, so because both of them respected that idea so much, it was ultimately like the dream cast.

Menendez: You moved to Paris in order to become this international journalist, but something else happens while you're in Paris that makes you stay?

Martínez: Yeah. I got married. I married a French guy.

Menendez: All right. Now I've got a lot of questions. You're not just married and living in Paris, you're also running a global company in Paris. What is that work environment like? What is the attitude around work? And how long did it take you to become accustomed to it?

Martínez: The first couple years I was here, I definitely had the American mindset of work, work, work, work, work. And of course, as an entrepreneur, you already automatically feel that way because you really want to make your company successful and you're doing the extra hours because it's worth it. That's the point. You're doing it so that you can build something, paying your dues. And that was the mindset. As I started my company, I realized that I didn't want to perpetuate that kind of American like hustle, hustle, hustle, all the time perspective. I wanted to bring the French side of it. And the French side of it is something that I learned really through my husband and the way that he works and the way that just the French workplaces are designed here, which is that, you work in the morning, you take a smoke break, then you take your second smoke break, then you have a really long lunch, an hour and a half at least.

Then you take another break in the early afternoon, and then you leave 6:30 max. And you don't answer your phone after work hours. You don't email after work hours. In fact, there's a law about it. You're not supposed to. Like in corporate spaces, you have a work phone and you have a work email, and you're not supposed to check it after hours. And there's like a real separation of work life and home life because they value that here. It's quality of life is above everything. The French believe that, that work isn't everything. You don't live to work, you work to live. And so I instilled that also with my team and a lot of people that we work with are former journalists that were working in newsrooms that had no work-life balance. And so making sure that they understood that that's what I believed in, and that's what I wanted the team to have from the beginning was really important to making Ochenta what it is and why we have a good work culture.

Menendez: My last question to you, Lory, which is we have a lot of creatives who listen to Latina to Latina who probably feel the same way that you do. Who am I? Daughter of immigrants, first gen, to step out on my own and take on the risk of being not just my own employer, but an employer of dozens of others. What is your best counsel to that Latina, whether what she wants to start is a studio or any other type of small business?

Martínez: I would say don't get in your own way. I think everyone has this little voice that says, no, it's not worth it to do. Or what if it's not successful? A lot of us are taught, well, you have to be successful. Your parents sacrificed so much, and I 1,000% feel that because, yeah, my parents sacrificed so much. They're all working class people. My dad's a cab driver, my mom's a secretary. They came to the US, they tried to build something and they struggled,

they struggled a lot and saying, you know what? They sacrificed something for me also, to be able to have the privilege to decide whether or not I'm going to do what I want. The privileges that I gained as an American to be able to speak English and have this bilingual culture that I have, I'm going to use them for something greater.

And recognizing that all of the trauma and all of the past things that could get in your way that are telling you no, it's not worth it. Those are actually the things that are going to make whatever you do successful because you know how hard it can be and you're going to do your best so that you don't have to struggle like that. It's like the driving force. It's like make the opportunity you want to see, and that's what I did. And I think that is something that should drive every Latina who's doing whatever project it is that they're doing, have that energy, positive energy of making something that not only your parents will be proud of, but you'll be proud of.

Menendez: Lory, thank you so much for doing this.

Martínez: Thank you so much, and thank you for this show. I have to be honest, I've been a fan of this show from the beginning. At my hardest moments as an entrepreneur, I listen to Latina to Latina, and yeah, it's just an honor to be part of this space that you've created for women, and thank you for inviting me.

Menendez: Thanks for listening. Latina to Latina is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantigua and me, Alicia Menendez. Paulina Velasco is our producer. Kojin Tashiro is our lead producer. Tren Lightburn mixed this episode. We love hearing from you. Email us at hola@latinatolatina.com, slide into our DMs on Instagram or tweet us at Latina to Latina. Check out our merchandise at latinatolatina.com/shop and remember to subscribe or follow us on Radio Public, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, Goodpods, wherever you're listening right now. Every time you share the podcast, every time you leave a review, you help us to grow as a community.

CITATION:

Menendez, Alicia, host. "How Lory Martinez Rooted Her Business in Multicultural, Multilingual Audio Storytelling." *Latina to Latina*, LWC Studios. March 27, 2023. LatinatoLatina.com.

Produced by:

