



## How Mysticism Fuels Natalia Lafourcade's Musical Process

The iconic Mexican folk singer didn't know if she would keep working in music, so she lost herself in Canada and started paying attention to signs from the universe. In this episode, she shares how she found her way back home and the rituals she relies on to bring new projects to life.

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Lyrics: *Porque te quiero, quieres Llorona, quieres Llorona, quieres que te quiera que te quiera más. Si ya te he dado la vida, Llorona, qué más quieres, quieres quieres quieres más...*

Alicia Menendez:

That is La Llorona, one of the songs on Natalia Lafourcade's newest album, *Un Canto por México, Vol. 2*, a benefit project to fund the reconstruction of a cultural center in Veracruz. Natalia has won 14 Latin Grammys and two Grammys, and still somehow has managed to live an incredibly private life. We get into that along with how mysticism manifests in her creative process and how she rejects the urgency of any moment being her last.

I have to tell you I am a superfan. This means a lot to me. So, thank you for taking the time to do this.

Natalia Lafourcade:

Gracias, también. Thank you.

Menendez: Where am I speaking to you today? Where are you?

Lafourcade: Estoy en Veracruz. I am in Veracruz, in my house.

Menendez: How does it feel to finally have this album out in the world?

Lafourcade: It feels great because we've been spending so much time on it, so much energy and love, so we've been since January working on the visuals, the music, the mixing process, which is one of my favorite things. Whenever I work on an album, it's like one of my favorite parts, mixing. We had 70% of the album finished but we still had a lot of work to do. We didn't know when it was gonna be possible to finish this one because of the pandemia. Entonces bueno, at the end, we decided to put it out because this time is weird. You don't know when it's gonna happen, whatever you're doing, so we said, "Okay, we have the music. Let's put it out." So, we will see. Pero me siento contenta, muy muy contenta y muy orgullosa.

Menendez: It is incredibly special. There's so much texture to the album. You've said before the making of these albums found me at a specific moment in time when I was questioning myself, both as an artist and as a woman. Can you take me back to that moment in time when all of this was coming together?

- Lafourcade: Do you mean about the moment when we decided to make this project?
- Menendez: It seems to me, the way that I read it, that in as much as there was the catalyst of the earthquake, and wanting to contribute back, that it also found you in a moment where internally you were already asking identity questions about yourself as a woman, as a musician, and I'm interested in that piece.
- Lafourcade: It was at the point when you realize that you get to a place when this kind of being able to help other people or being able to mix the music with a cause, that starts to be a possibility. Existe este momento cuando en tu carrera alcanzas este punto donde dices tal vez ya podría comenzar a hacerme más presente o a empujar proyectos que tengan que ver con ayudar a otras personas o ayudar otras causas o hacer algo que impacte en otro espacio, en otros niveles.
- And I was thinking like, "Okay, I wish one day I could bring the money so we can build a house for children, and they can learn music, or they can learn different things. Or maybe I can do a cultural center in this place." So, this thing happened to the center and los Cojolites are very close friends, and I was saying, "Let's do it. Let's do it right now." And I didn't know what I was doing. It's been a whole process. It's been three years. I thought it was gonna be faster. I thought it was gonna be a project of months, maybe a year, and it's two years now. They're building the place now.
- But it's happening, you know? We put on that concert, we raised money, we gave the money to the architectures. There's many people involved now. It's a whole thing. At the end, we got to learn things, y podría ser como una rama en mi carrera y en mi camino, no?
- Menendez: You and I are about the same age and when I look back at some of the early parts of my career, it is hard for me to reconcile that I am the same person who was out there writing things, saying things 20 years ago. I mean, when you look back at 1998, when you look back at Twist, does all of that make you blush? Or have you found a way to integrate that part of yourself into who you are now?
- Lafourcade: Yeah. Well, I really try to believe that everything has a reason to be there. I am a very mystic person. Soy muy mística. Me gusta mucho creer que las cosas tienen un "porque" de suceder, que lo que es y lo que tiene que ser se va a revelar ante nosotros.
- I try to work by seeing and trying to pay attention to those little señales in life that will tell you, "Hey, it is this way." So, I believe now that I needed to have those experiences in life, and I needed to be searching in those places in order to be here and now. I can tell now that finally, from three, four years ago to now, I start to feel more like, "Okay. Now I feel more like this is my place." You know? This is the music that I love. This is my voice. Okay, I feel comfortable singing this music. I feel comfortable playing with these musicians. Now, it's not... I mean, it's almost 20 years, but I can tell you that for me, it's been like since six years ago that I finally feel like, "Okay, this is my place."
- Menendez: It feels good to hear you say that because you are so clearly artistically aligned, and so, it's nice to know that you have only come to that in the past few years. You know, I was recently interviewing Isabel Allende and she is, like you, prolific, and she talked about how every time she starts a new novel, she physically clears her space to make room for something new. When you are at the beginning of this process, do you have a ritual? Do you have a thing that you do to make space for what is new?

Lafourcade: Yeah. Of course. Of course. As I said, I am a very mystic person, so I believe in... How do you say, altar?

Menendez: An altar?

Lafourcade: I truly, like deeply believe in putting a space in my house where I'm gonna have a table with all the important and very, very special little things that had the energy of what I am doing and what is important in life for me. In my space, I have certain things that have this energy and this magic and will let me know that there's certain things happening in my life so I can keep focusing my energy into those things. I am such a dreamer, like I am Pisces, right? So, I am super like, "Okay, I want to do this, and that, and this, and that." I need to put myself a piece of paper on the wall and say, "Nat, these are the projects that are going on right now."

I truly believe in rituals. In rituals for life, in rituals for what you want to do. Before every project that I do, I sit down first with a piece of paper and I write down what I want to happen, what I dream of, and I try to design what I want, and then it happens. And sometimes it doesn't happen, but clearly, it's because no es para allá. Before a concert, I intention the music with my musicians and my band and my team, and also me, like it's like, "Okay. Now we're gonna play in this amazing stage, so let's put the energy together and let's think that the people are gonna have fun, and we're gonna give our best." And yeah, you know, like I try to think about that in life.

Menendez: I'm a water sign, too. I'm a Cancer. And so, I know the sort of joy and the burden of feeling everything so deeply and water being a thing that you can't hold in your hands, that we are hard to keep focused. I wonder for you, being so rooted both physically and metaphysically in your Mexican identity, when you come to the United States, when you had that period of time when you were living in Canada, did you have the experience of being Latina? Of being processed by other people and interpreted by other people in a way that you might not necessarily have been in Mexico?

Lafourcade: That's an interesting question. Yeah.

Menendez: I didn't realize I was Latina until I went to high school and nobody else was Latina and all of a sudden, I was like, "Oh, there are things that to me are very culturally normal," you know, besitos when you say hello. People didn't do that. You know, having to explain to people why someone had a quince instead of had a sweet 16. There were just all these tiny things where all of a sudden, I was made aware of my own Latinidad.

Lafourcade: Yeah. Well, when I went to Canada, I was going through a very interesting moment in my life. So, I was just like going in life. I was totally confused. I didn't know if I wanted to keep working in music. It was a hard time for me. One of the things that I hate about myself is that I cannot express myself whenever I need to speak English, so I said, "I want to learn it, but also I need to be in a place where I don't know anybody, and nobody knows me." And I meant I need to be far away from my family, from my friends, from my managers, from my music, from everything. I need to be a new person.

So, I went to Canada, to Ottawa, and then I remember there were people coming to me and saying, and they were Latinos, and they were like, "Natalia, what are you doing here?" And I said to them, like, "Please don't speak to me. I don't want to be your friend. I don't know how to speak English, but I don't want to speak any Spanish, you know? So, don't look for me." They were saying like, "You want to come for coffee? We're gonna go to this

museum. Do you want to come?” And I was like, “No. I don’t want anything. No. Don’t speak to me.”

No, I really want to stay in a place where I can’t speak, because I don’t understand anything. Nobody can understand what I’m saying. And that’s fine. So, I was like the weird person in the classroom having Japanese friends, having people from other places in the world that didn’t speak Spanish, and I was pushing myself to learn. I was feeling totally out of place. I really experienced that. There was a moment I was totally unable to speak any language. That was good for me because that was the way I... I don’t know. The way I was able to see what I needed to *como renacer, como reencontrarme, como reencontrarme con mi música*. With what I really wanted to do again with my music, with my project, to come back to Mexico. But I really needed to have that space. That was important.

I wasn’t asking, “I am a Latina, no Latina,” until there was a moment I said, “I am Mexican, and this is not my place. I was able to see it very clear. I was playing with my friends, and I was playing music. I got lost, good, but now I need to go back to my country, and I need to restart the thing and the story, and I need to try again, but the first place will be Mexico. I need to go back.

Menendez: It’s really the opposite of speaking in tongues, that you just couldn’t speak at all, which I imagine then forced you to look inward. One of the things I noticed in preparing for this interview is that at least in my little universe, you are ubiquitous. I don’t know someone who doesn’t know you. I don’t know someone who hasn’t listened to you. And yet you have managed to live a very private life. And I wonder, is that by choice? Is that by design?

Lafourcade: What does that mean? Is that by-

Menendez: There are many musical artists at your level that I could find out everything about their life on the internet. Here are the things I can find out about your life on the internet: You live in Veracruz. You had an injury as a child where you got kicked in the head by a horse. You have a dad who’s a pianist. Those are more or less the details that are out in the universe about your life. And I wonder if that is because in some ways you have tried to maintain a private life and your privacy.

Lafourcade: I feel very happy about that because there’s not that much information about my personal life, about my private way of living, maybe because I am all the time working on what I do. O sea, I don’t know. Maybe because there’s no parties. I mean, I love partying. I love spending time with my friends. I love traveling. I love different things, but it’s just that I found at the end myself giving it all to the projects that I am involved with. I feel grateful that there’s no... *esta cosa amarillista de mi vida, de me chismes, de mis cosas, como que no hay. ¡Qué bueno! ¡No sé!*

Menendez: It’s amazing. It truly is amazing. You should write a guide for other artists about how to be an international mega star but not have your business on the cover of *Hola!* Magazine.

Lafourcade: Yeah. Maybe it’s because I am very jealous with certain things about my life. I am very careful about certain things. I am careful with my relationships. I am careful with my family. I am careful with my mate. There was something about asking me like, “Why you never put a photo of your boyfriend on the Reddits?” On the social media. And I didn’t answer. There’s certain things that I just don’t even answer because I don’t want to put energy on that. I don’t show it because it’s my mate. It’s not yours. I don’t need to show you certain things, no?

So, I don't know, it's just my sensitive thing about putting limits in certain ways. It's about music, so I try to reduce more like about everything that goes around music, because that's really the interesting part for me to show. The other thing is... I am a super normal person.

Menendez: Well, there's also a corollary, though, to what you're saying, which is like I think it is really interesting that everyone is so big on trying to chase and figure out what is hot, and new, and trendy, and you have done the complete opposite, which is you have gone back to tradition and to canon and tried to iterate in ways that are new coming out of what is valued and old, and that is running in the opposite direction of what everybody else is doing.

Lafourcade: Yeah. Yeah, that's true. Yeah. And I don't think about it. It's not like I am saying, "I'm gonna go the opposite."

Menendez: Right, right, right. It's not on your vision board.

Lafourcade: No, no, no, no, no. I was saying the other day, like I am like a turtle. I know it could seem that I go fast and that I know exactly what to do, and it's not like that. Like for me, it takes time. I need to take my time. I need to think about it. I go like my step, my way, doing things. Sometimes I am like, "I can't believe the projects that I work on are getting this recognition." To me, the most difficult thing, I believe, it's how to ... cómo integrar el hecho de que mi nombre o mi trabajo en la música va tomando el lugar que va tomando, no? La inercia que lleva y lo que va sucediendo, porque proyectos como "Un Canto por México"... it's like you listen to that and then you're like, "Okay, this is huge. This is gonna be huge." So, I turn around, I see my managers, and say, "Okay. When we go on a tour with this music, it might be huge." I need to take a break before, because it's gonna be a lot, and they're, "Yes, it's gonna be a lot." And all the time it's like that, you know? And I keep doing that and trying to say, "Natalia, it's getting huge. It's getting huge." So, I don't know. I don't know if ever I'm gonna be finally able to really take it and understand its dimension, but maybe that's magic. That's the magic about it.

Menendez: You are such the perfect antidote to all of the other BS that is out there. Thank you for catching me on our little water sign wave. I so appreciate it.

Lafourcade: Thank you.

Menendez: Thanks for listening. Latina to Latina is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantigua-Williams and me, Alicia Menendez. Paulina Velasco is our senior producer. Our lead producer is Cedric Wilson. Kojin Tashiro is our associate sound designer. Manuela Bedoya is our social media editor and ad ops lead. We love hearing from you. Email us at [hola@latinatolatina.com](mailto:hola@latinatolatina.com), keep sliding into our DMs on Instagram, and tweet at us @LatinaToLatina. Remember to subscribe and follow us on RadioPublic, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, Goodpods, wherever you're listening right now, and know that every time you share the podcast or leave a review, you help us to grow as a community.

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