



## How Buscabulla's Raquel Berrios Wrote Her Way Back Home in Regresa

Raquel Berrios left Puerto Rico for New York City to find herself as an artist. There, she met her musical and life partner Luis Alfredo Del Valle, and they formed their experimental Latin pop duo. As their music careers grew, receiving attention from fans and record labels, they surprised friends and family by moving back to the island—to live and make music on their own terms.

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*Lyrics: Viene vámonos que es tarde ya...*

Alicia Menendez:

That's Vámono by Buscabulla, and that dreamy voice belongs to Raquel Berrios, half of the indie pop duo. The other half is her partner and co-parent, Luis Alfredo Del Valle. The couple started making music together while living in New York, but after hurricanes Maria and Irma hit Puerto Rico, they decided it was time to go back home. That return and the very meaning of home inspired their new first album, Regresa.

I am not a native Spanish speaker, and so I had never heard the word Buscabulla, and so I loved it, and I love the definition, being a troublemaker. Are you by nature a troublemaker?

Raquel Berrios: I mean, I would say no, but I do like... I kind of like what it implies in a way. I do think that I'm always curious. I don't know. I feel like I do have maybe a troublemaker sort of nature when it comes to maybe making music, like I like to take two worlds that are not supposed to come together and bring them together. I like to create and work with tension, so maybe in a way that's why I was very much drawn to the name.

Menendez: Growing up in Puerto Rico, what kind of music was on at home?

Berrios: On my dad's side, a lot of salsa, Calypso, trio music, rock, he loved rock. And on my mother's side, my mom was more like an MTV head, like she just loved Madonna, Prince, Sade. She was more like mainstream, so I think that she always was more drawn to English, like English spoken music than Spanish music, so we heard a lot of that. And that's mostly what Puerto Ricans hear. Our airwaves are all like top-40 American music, so we grew up with a lot of American music on the radio.

But also, like salsa, and a lot of the Puerto Rican music has always been really important for my dad, and my dad really taught me to love the music that was from my home country.

Menendez: So, you grew up on the island. What's the turning point where you decide you want to move to New York?

Berrios: Well, I mean I studied architecture and design, and I was working at an office, and then I felt that really that maybe design wasn't really what I wanted to do, like I wanted to be creative, and so I got into Rhode Island School of Design for my master's degree and I decided to do textiles, and so I kind of knew that I... My ticket to get into New York was to actually go to maybe a school where I could get a job in New York. Because I always

dreamt about going to New York. I mean, my mother was born in the Bronx, and my parents were flight attendants, so I saw them come back and forth, and New York has such a powerful presence in movies, and the media, and I always felt like as a creative person that I wanted to go to New York and see, like I wanted to kind of find myself creatively there.

Menendez: How did you meet Luis?

Berrios: Luis and I met at a friend's party. I mean, I feel when you're Puerto Rican, you're Puerto Rican, you're in New York, you're bound to just be in a party where you'll probably meet anybody if you're around the same age. I had this sort of like a band with my friends, sort of this band that we-

Menendez: Wait, why are you putting it in quotation marks?

Berrios: Because I think it was sort of like mostly like a band that we never really kind of recorded anything. We had songs, but it was mostly to pass the time and have fun, like it was a time where all of our friends, we were all single, and we were just writing about just being single in the city, and it was kind of like a silly kind of project. But we were kind of playing our songs, and we used to do weird Spanish covers of pop songs, and we were doing a cover of Bad Romance of Lady Gaga in Spanish. And I didn't know how to finish the song, I didn't know the chords, and Luis comes in. He's like, "I know the chords of that song." And then he came in, and then we finished the song, and from there on, I knew he made music, that he had a whole history with bands, and he had actually come to New York to make music, and just like that, we connected and we started hanging out, jamming, and I showed Luis some demos that I had with the beginnings of what was Buscabulla, and he was super excited about it, and immediately we hit it up and we started making music and we fell in love.

Menendez: But which came first? The music or the romance?

Berrios: I'd say the music comes first, for sure. I mean, I'm seven years older than Luis, so in a way, I kind of felt a little bit like I don't really know if this is gonna be a good thing. I kind of felt a little bit nervous, but I'm like, "But I have a lot of fun with this person and he's super talented." So, the music did come first.

Menendez: What does the process of writing music look like for the two of you?

Berrios: I usually am the one that plants the seed, the conceptual seed. I'll usually write songs on the piano, or I sample, and I make these kind of weird maquettes, and then I show them to Luis, and Luis is usually the one that tells me, "This one's good, this one's bad." And he kind of goes through a process, and then we both kind of analyze them together, and then we sit down and we perfect the songwriting, like there's a bridge, perfecting the chorus, and then after we have the songwriting mostly figured out, like to know that it has the potential to keep being a good song, we then go into the studio together and we start producing together.

But Luis is mostly... He has more the engineering chops. He went to school for it. He plays most of the instruments, because he's a multi-instrumentalist. But the process of really creating and producing is pretty much both our heads working together.

Ad: *Miss Juleyka, nice to have you on. Must be a special reason.*

*Juleyka Lantigua-Williams:*

*Yeah, yeah. You know it's a special reason, since I like to be behind the scenes. All right, so when Cantu Beauty decided to come on board, I rushed.*

*Menendez: You rushed to volunteer to try the products.*

*Lantigua-Williams:*

*Yes, I know. I did. And it's the first time, I know. But I've already been using their Coconut Curling Cream for years, so I figured I wasn't gonna miss a chance to try out sister products.*

*Menendez: I like the photo you sent me the other day. Your hair looked really good.*

*Lantigua-Williams:*

*And that was just after one shampoo and conditioner. My curls were shiny and smooth, man, and my comb was not full of my own hair after I detangled it in the shower.*

*Menendez: Even in pictures, it's coming through, like your hair looks shiny, and hydrated, and just so healthy.*

*Lantigua-Williams:*

*Thanks. I really appreciate that you let me send you those, because I'm really excited about the change.*

*Menendez: So, how many products are you using all told?*

*Lantigua-Williams:*

*Right now, I've got like four, so I'm using the shampoo, the conditioner, the leave-in cream, and then can I just tell you what my favorite is?*

*Menendez: Mm-hmm (affirmative).*

*Lantigua-Williams:*

*The Wave Whip. First of all, that name is everything, but I love how my waves and my curls just are fuller, they're more touchable, they're less frizzy. I mean, I know, I sound like an ad, but let me tell you.*

*Menendez: Well, you can enjoy the benefits of the Cantu Beauty haircare line, picking up your favorites or ordering them from Target.com.*

*Menendez: Let's talk about some of the tracks on Regresa. Vámono, as someone who moved from New York to Miami and now back to New Jersey, the music video for the song haunts me, because you go to bed in your tiny, dark apartment, and as soon as the drums kick in, you awake on a bed at the foot of the ocean, which is like the dream. I understand that was the first song you wrote after coming back to the island.*

*Berrios: Yeah. It was the very first song, and it was sort of like one of those songs that I kind of just wrote, kind of pretty fast. Sometimes I don't know really what the song is gonna be about, and then I just start mumbling. I just start kind of like making up melodies and mumbling. My subconscious mind comes out through my mouth, and when I hear it, I realize what I*

was actually thinking. And yeah, I just wanted to make something that had a lot of drive and energy. Maybe that's a little bit naïve and being so positive, like I'm coming back home, like I'm gonna make everything better. You know, like in a way, there is sort of a naivete on the song, but there is also a very honest feeling of really wanting people to come back, or like I wish everybody could come back. But by the end of the song when I say ¿quiénme va a ayudar? I think my emotions break a little bit and I start kind of asking for help, like who's gonna help me out here? You know, like who's gonna help me make this thing better?

Menendez: And then NTE, which I also love.

Lyrics: *Tu pide, pide, pide, pide. Mi cielo, tu te me envolviste*

Menendez: What was the inspiration?

Berrios: That is definitely in the Buscabulla nature of not... Feeling like I don't want anybody to tell me what I am supposed to do. In a way, I felt like it serves both purposes. First was the purpose of a lot of people telling us that we shouldn't come back home. It felt like everybody had an opinion about it. And we felt like yeah, it might seem crazy, but this is what we want to do, and in a way, like No Te Equivoques is like don't get it wrong, this is sort of like what we're gonna do, and you can't really defy that.

And then on another note, also like just sort of as an artist, I feel like when you start gaining influence, like now with social media, feels like everybody has a control over your narrative as an artist, and in a way, I feel that the song was also written in saying like, "I am in control. I am in control of my own narrative. I'm in control of my own decisions."

Menendez: Where have you, as an artist, felt like someone else has tried to take control or misrepresented your narrative?

Berrios: I mean, it happens all the time. Not in a big firm, because we're not that famous, but sometimes... I don't know, I think somebody at some point said something about like, "Oh, your music is so hipster, it sounds more like it's gentrifier music." And then I'm like, "Give me a break. I'm literally, like if I don't make Reggaeton, and if I don't make salsa, and if I'm not making whatever Sony is putting out, then whatever other alternative music is considered hipster music, and therefore it could be considered gentrifier music?" And I felt that that was kind of unfair. Or like when somebody would just kind of label, "Oh, it's just hipster music because it's alternative." I just think it's something that happens when somebody makes something new and people can't really understand it, and then in a way, it's funny because Regresa is literally about actually trying to make something new, and something that has nothing to do with like...

Because I feel in a way, because we combine sort of American music and Latin music, then maybe people feel like am I trying to make music that people from the United States will like, or that white people will like? In a way, it's like no, it's like I'm literally trying to be as honest as possible, like Puerto Ricans have had American influence, and we've had Puerto Rican influence because of our colonial state, and so it's interesting how in taking these two worlds and putting them out, people might consider it that it's a type of music that's gentrified, and in a way, maybe it is actually gentrified, actually. Maybe it does come from that. But the intentions are not that. The intentions are literally to make something new that is honest and portrays another Puerto Rico that people might not know that it exists, you know?

Menendez: I have seen your music described as experimental dream pop, indie pop, alternative Latin pop, and I've seen you describe it as Caribbean music of the future.

Berrios: Yeah, and lately I've been mostly going more on the side of experimental Latin pop. I feel better with that now.

Menendez: What does that mean, that you feel better with that now?

Berrios: I mean, Caribbean music of the future could be, definitely, but I feel that in a way, it is Caribbean, but I think that maybe sometimes it can even go beyond Caribbean, and maybe I like the idea of experimental Latin pop because at the end, the songs are sort of in the style of pop, where there's a verse and chorus, and there's a lot of repetition, but I like to say that it's always sort of the alternative of whatever is pop, and like Latin pop right now, which is Reggaeton, or salsa, which is not so much, but maybe more like sort of these romantic ballads or what have you. We kind of present a different sensibility to Spanish pop, so I like to call it experimental, because I do think we're very experimental with the way that we're fusing sounds and the types of sounds that we use.

Menendez: When did you stop thinking of Buscabulla as a side project?

Berrios: I still had to keep my day job. I think it was very, very gradual. I don't think that it was like one day I realized, but I think that once we put our second EP out and we kept being called to play shows, and we kept touring, and traveling, and we saw that we got like a bigger following, I think that it manifested itself, and I'm like, "Oh, maybe this is actually something that we could live off of." And then eventually one day we played this great show in LA, we played a sold out show in LA, and I was just kind of blown away. I was so nervous that day. And then we got a call about somebody offering us a publishing deal and asking us who's your label, and we're like, "We don't have a label." And it's a small record label in LA, and then he's like, "Well, I would love for you guys to make a record under our label."

And then I think in that point I realized, I'm like, "I think we're gonna be able to do this." We were able to save enough money, and we were able to land a record deal, and we're like, "Let's do it. Let's go back home. Let's record a record. It's happening." I think that that's sort of the moment that I realized it. Because it wasn't until I saw the money that I couldn't really... I'm like, "Until I see the money, I can't believe it."

Menendez: Same.

Berrios: Because clearly I still have to pay rent, you know? So, when we saw that we could actually happen, I think that's the moment where I'm like, "Wow, I think this is not a side gig anymore. This is a main thing now."

Menendez: That's very interesting to me, because studying your story, it would be very easy to go back to 2013, when you win that contest through Guitar Center and Converse, and you have your first EP produced by Dev Hynes. It would be easy to see that as the turning point.

Berrios: Yeah, but it wasn't, because clearly... I mean, even if you have a slightly successful band in New York, rent was so expensive. I mean, I had my student loans from my master's degree. I mean, I just... like maybe if I would have been in a different economic place, maybe it would, but New York is such an expensive place, plus we had a kid. You know, we had a baby.

- Menendez: And then you become a mom.
- Berrios: Yeah. We literally approved masters while I was going into labor. Like I remember we got the masters and we were listening to them while I was just getting my contractions. It was pretty wild.
- Menendez: How did becoming a mom change you as an artist?
- Berrios: I think that once I had Charlie, I realized that... I mean, when she grows up, she's gonna listen to my music. She's gonna want to know what type of music I do, and I realized that I had the opportunity to make something that still had humor, but then make something that was profound. I wanted to do something good with my music, you know? I wanted to kind of... It felt like, "Well, what can I do?" And I felt, "Well, there's so many things that I feel passionate about." I feel passionate about Puerto Rico and all of the issues that it's going through. I feel passionate about spirituality. And I felt like I just want to kind of have more of that in our music, because I wanted her when she grew up that she would listen to the music and know that there was gonna be a value in that, or that I could be leaving her with something that was gonna be valuable to her.
- Menendez: So, when you look at Regresa, is there a track where you would say, "I would not have written that prior to becoming a mom?"
- Berrios: Nydia is the turning point of the record. Nydia is like such an honest, brutally honest song about something that I actually went through, and I felt that in a way, when I discovered that I wanted to make music, I went through a really similar process. I went through a process of just like fear, and I was afraid of what was going on. I had self-doubt. I had writer's block. I felt I don't know if I could do this. I don't feel comfortable. Or I just felt fear in general.
- Lyrics:* Tú... ¿Quién eres tú? Tú...
- Berrios: I remember that I started chanting, and I started to kind of tap into more of a spiritual practice to kind of make sure that... I wanted to go really deep inside, and I felt that I was able to overcome that, and I kind of wanted to make a song about being able, like I want for people to understand that I was in a really difficult place, and then I wanted to kind of showcase through the song that I was able to get out of it through not an easy process, but I did want it to kind of document that.
- And I feel that maybe before having her, like I don't think that I was able to write a song as deep as that. Or maybe I was gonna be afraid of going to that place. Maybe I felt that it was gonna be too melodramatic, or too serious, but now I feel that after I had her, like I felt like, "No, I think that I need to be extremely honest." Like I can only be honest as an artist. So, I think that having her made me kind of fearless. In a way, I feel like when you become a mother, you're just like, "I don't give a flying F about anything." Because you realize that all that really matters is your family, your community, the values that you have. You stop worrying about what anybody else is thinking, like it really grounds you in a way.
- Menendez: Same. 100%. It is what you said. You stop caring so much about what other people think, but you have never cared more about the things that you care about.
- Berrios: Exactly.

Menendez: Like the values you hold, you double down on, because you realize that they will transcend you.

Berrios: Yeah.

Menendez: You're handing it all over to somebody else.

Berrios: Yeah. For sure. And in a way, like I feel like it's so... Everything is so meaningful, like coming back home. So much of having her gave us the strength to come back home, because it was not an easy process at all, like it's such a huge transition, like leaving our jobs behind, having everybody tell us to not come here. And in a way, I feel like she kind of gave us the strength to follow our hearts.

Menendez: I also love the life cycle of your mother being born in the Bronx, having you in Puerto Rico, you then having Charlie in New York, bringing her back to Puerto Rico, like it feels like watching the life cycle of a butterfly. What was the conversation that you and Luis were having, because I imagine it was ongoing, about moving back to the island?

Berrios: Well, the funny thing is we were meant to move in September, which is literally when Maria hit. I think that in a way, we never felt that it was like this is... We're calling it off. We were like we had had enough of New York and we knew that eventually it was gonna happen. The question now was like, "When is this gonna happen considering what's going on?" So, what we did is that in the meantime, we just got busy. I started this nonprofit with my friend, Annie Cordero, PRIMA, Puerto Rico Independent Musicians and Artists. We started raising money to send to independent musicians with like emergency grants, emergency \$500 micro grants. We kind of saw how all the different sectors got together to kind of help their communities, so were like, "We're musicians. Let's help our independent music community."

And then came February, we pulled the trigger and we said, "Let's go."

Menendez: Raquel, thank you so much. This was so great. I appreciate you.

Berrios: Thank you so much.

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](mailto: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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