



## Why Marjorie Garcia Advocates for Recording Artists

The entertainment attorney behind J. Balvin, Juanes, Los Tigres del Norte, Carla Morrison and Snow the Product shares how she forewent a performing career of her own to advocate for others, what she's learned about protecting artists' rights, and the necessity of studying and understanding the entire entertainment industry.

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**Alicia Menendez:** Marjorie Garcia has made herself the go-to entertainment attorney for some of the biggest musical stars in the world. J Balvin, Juanes, Los Tigres del Norte, Carla Morrison, and Snow Tha Product, just to name a few. Marjorie's ability to translate complex legal matters, recording agreements, publishing agreements, sponsorships, endorsements, catalog purchases. It all comes from a place that's going to be familiar to a lot of our listeners. Being a first-gen kid doing lots of translating for her immigrant parents, Marjorie is the real deal and she's here to share what she's learned about negotiating. Getting your foot in the door when you have few contacts and learning the community advocacy can take many different forms. Marjorie, we have battled illness and children's illness in order to make it to this moment, so thank you so much for being with us.

**Marjorie Garcia:** We did it.

**Alicia Menendez:** Yes, we're here. Marjorie, so interesting to me that you really could have been on the other side of this business. When you're very young, you do get discovered by a producer. Tell me what that experience was of being someone who could have been a performing artist.

**Marjorie Garcia:** It was all I wanted when I was a kid. I was that super annoying kid who was just singing everywhere around the house, singing into parking lots, and I was a little, I'm five feet tall right now, so you can imagine me as a little twelve-year-old. All my singing heroes were these big beautiful black voices, Aretha Franklin, Ella Fitzgerald. And so I was, here's my little Latina self singing these big R&B songs and I loved it. I truly, truly loved it, until I started to do it for a living and started touring and started really feeling like, is this the thing that I love the most in my life? And I realized that what I really liked was the business part of it. I was interested in the business side of these things, and that's when I made that decision, that that was a better path for me.

And a lot of things were the reasons I made that decision. One of them was signing a deal that I didn't understand. I didn't have the opportunity to get a lawyer. The deal was presented to me and it was take it or leave it. My parents have a third grade education from Guatemala and Mexico and they didn't speak fluently in English and couldn't understand the agreement either, and they had to

sign for me since I was a minor. And that whole experience was very sad to have as a kid because you're so excited to make music, but the business side of it is so heavy and I just took that with me as I went through college. I studied music business and I said, "I'm going to be a lawyer. I'm going to be that person who's going to be there at those very moments when someone like me is just feeling completely overwhelmed and not just them, but their families." That was the reason I am here now.

Alicia Menendez: One of the things I love about your story, Marjorie, as I understand it, your parents were undocumented for a period, yes?

Marjorie Garcia: They were.

Alicia Menendez: Okay. When I have heard that story before, it often leads the daughter of immigrants, the first gen Latina, to go and become an immigration attorney so that she can advocate for people like her family. And so what I find interesting about your story is you are still advocating on behalf of others. You're still advocating on behalf of members of our community who might not feel that they are protected by the legal system in their capacity as an artist, may not have the resources, the education, whatever. But you resist the pull to go the hardcore advocacy route. Was that ever pulling at you or was the sort of like corp law, get a solid paycheck right out the gate, daughter of immigrants pull ever there?

Marjorie Garcia: I have always been overconfident because I have really, really strong women in my family. Work ethic was just something that's so ingrained in me and I just knew I had to succeed for myself and for my family. I knew I wanted to be in music. I knew I wanted to be an entertainment lawyer, but I also didn't have somebody to look at and say, "Well, that's how I want it to look like," because there wasn't anybody like me doing it. I came out of law school and I went, "Who would like to hire me?"

And I sent out so many emails and nobody wanted to hire me because I was new. And I got really lucky because I heard about a job at Univision Records and they needed a Spanish speaker. And I said, "I'm your girl, that's me." And I went and I interviewed and I was really honest with my former boss and I said, "I know theoretically how to do this job. I studied music business, I'm prepared. I haven't practiced, but I promise you that I will be the first one in the office and the last one to leave every day and I will not let you down if you give me this opportunity." And he gave me that opportunity. I stayed there for seven years. I felt this desire, and I think a lot of first-generation children have it because they look at all the sacrifices that their parents make for them. I needed to give it back.

Alicia Menendez: When you talk about being new and not being a known quantity, it also strikes me, you and I are about the same age that we are of the age of the, "Latin boom." So part of what is interesting to me about your career is you are coming to entertainment law as a young Latina at almost exactly the moment when that field is burgeoning. When there theoretically should be additional opportunity, there's more opportunity for clients. I wonder what you saw being in-house, about the ways in which artists can be exploited and the ways in which artists can be

protected. If you can give me a specific example, name or no name, that would be even better.

Marjorie Garcia: I think what people would say is in-house, at the Latin side of the labels, because every label has their Latin division, their Spanish music division, they'd say that the deals were a third of what they were worth, let's call it the Anglo side. And to me, that never made sense because it takes just as much money in marketing and promo and Indie promo and development and recording, to make great music and to promote great music to the public. I also think that there was a lot of, in general, and I'm not speaking particularly to my former employer, but there was a lot of taking advantage of the fact that there weren't lawyers there to negotiate these deals. There wasn't proper management for these artists.

To this day, it still persists where the managers are people who are friends and uncles and theas and moms and they do their best, but they're not prepared to have these conversations or to understand the complexities of a recording agreement. And it's sad because it's a problem with the people who are asking these people to sign, them not pushing and saying, "Hey, it's better for you to go and find proper representation." But also a problem with not having enough of us to go around for all these artists. It still persists. People are being signed without representation, and that's crazy.

Alicia Menendez: When you cross over to the firm side, how do you begin to build your client list?

Marjorie Garcia: Oh man, I got really lucky because two things happened. I was poached by a woman named Jo Berliner, who used to be a named partner at the firm. She was on the other side of me when we were doing deals at my old label. And so I got to know her really well. And when I went over, she was like, "Here you go, do all this." And I was like, "Oh my God, how do I do this, on this side?" But I got to know those people really well. And when she decided to leave the firm and go and build a practice somewhere else, her clients stayed with me, most of them, because I had built that relationship with them. I was the one that was doing the day-to-day stuff. Not only that, but I had the experience of being in-house. And so I had that background.

And so people really liked that because I could translate what was going on with the label to the artist. And then I had this wonderful person who came into my life, Rebecca Leone. She is a fairy godmother. She has lifted so many women, just rocketed their careers like mine. So the first client that she brought to me was Jay Balvin. And Jay Balvin at that point was just starting to bubble. I said, "Well, yeah, I'll take him on. He's starting to grow and starting to get a little buzz." And then it just went crazy.

And from that point on, using that name, Balvin, the floodgates had opened and people were like, "Whoa, there's a Latina attorney out there. Wait a minute, that speaks fluently in Spanish and that understands agreements. Like what?" And I had to sort of pump the brakes and go, "This is great, but I got to get better at what I'm doing. I got to be a little bit more mindful of how I build my career," because sometimes it happens that way where it's easy, you get a lot of clients because you know a lot of people, but if you're not there to actually service it and

you don't know what you're doing, it comes in and it goes right back out. Because in the end, they want service. We're service people. They need us to service their life and their career. And if you can't do that, bye-bye.

Alicia Menendez: Can you give me a sense, Marjorie, of the stakes here? When you're talking about a client of that caliber wanting to be well-served, it's not just about wanting to be floofed, right? It's not just about the right type of water in the green room. It is about a lot of zeros at the end of a paycheck. And so can you give me a sense of what the stakes are of you getting it right, getting it wrong as a baseline, but also in a negotiation to be able to advocate for more, especially given the ways in which the music industry as a whole is changing right now.

Marjorie Garcia: In entertainment lawyers, I think it is so different than any other type of lawyer because we are there for every single moment of the day or as needed. I am involved in every aspect, not just in reviewing documents, but advising, counseling, therapy, sometimes, dealing with things that are not entertainment-based. But I've had issues where I've had somebody stuck at the airport in customs. I've had people stuck at the border. Taxes, have you ever paid your taxes? I mean, I ask questions from the beginning to understand the entirety of their universe, so that I know what things have not been done, what things need to be cleaned up, and how do we move forward, so this person is set up for success. And once they're set up for success, if the music is good, the little tricks inside the accounting provisions, inside those contracts, can have really lasting effects. And also a translator. I have to say, "Here's this complex 60 page document. Here's the six things that it's about and this is how it impacts you."

Alicia Menendez: First gen, daughter of immigrants doing translation, you don't say.

Marjorie Garcia: Oh, exactly. And I think about that a lot. I think about how everything that we did as kids, I didn't get to go to camp. My camp was going to clean houses with my mom in the summers, so I learned how to work really hard, translating how to speak to adults in a way that is courteous and how to translate difficult things. And the way that we were raised, it's like, they all translate into a characteristic that's really helped me build a practice and have success. And I didn't know it was happening.

Alicia Menendez: Marjorie, do you still work with Snow Tha Product?

Marjorie Garcia: I do.

Alicia Menendez: I'm a huge fan of Snow's. I have followed her career for years. And part of what I love is that independent streak, right? That she really understood, she wanted to be independent from a label that she has understood the power of YouTube and social media, and especially in our communities, the ways that those can be great portals and can be leveraged. I've heard you speak in the past about how you and Snow had small wins that gave way to big wins. Can we use her as a case study of where you as an attorney play a different role than a manager or an agent, but have been able to successfully advocate on her behalf?

Marjorie Garcia: I always tell her, but I think she thinks I'm joking. She should teach a masterclass in it because she's so smart and is so mindful. She podcasts, she does videos, she keeps up with her socials, she makes music, obviously. She toured twice in 2023. She did two tours back to back. She's raising a kid, a great kid. She has a farm with animals on it. She bought a bus because she knew that renting a bus wouldn't make sense because of the way the economy was going and how much hard costs are in tours these days. And now she can rent that out and make money off of that.

She built a studio where she can record her videos because she knew that it was going to cost her more to go and rent out a facility. To have that kind of foresight, it's so, so smart. And I feel like I've been playing a supportive role and also an advisory role in her life, but also just, I've learned so much from her. She's taught me to give myself grace, as I'm doing this, as I'm feeling moments of, am I not being a good enough mom? Am I not being good enough attorney? She's so smart. I've been in rooms with her where she has taught people at major distribution companies, major streaming platforms, how to do their job.

You're impacting DSPs. You're impacting how people are consuming music. You are living a career where you're living the exact life that you want to live, and nobody gets to say what you do. What freedom, having somebody do this in an independent way, it really is such an amazing lesson, which I've really had the privilege to be there with her since, God, where have we been? We're on probably year seven. It's really amazing.

Alicia Menendez: What is your council tactically about how one decides if entertainment law is in fact what they want to do? How do you set yourself up for success in those college, law school years so that you have a soft landing on the other side?

Marjorie Garcia: If that's what you want to do, you should start in college, because you can take a lot of different types of internships in the summer, during the semester, in every single factor, every single division of entertainment. If you want to do film, go work at a studio, go work at a management company, go work at an agency, get exposure everywhere to see if it really is something, because I think entertainment is very glitzy and people think it's very, you're going to be at parties and in backstage and concerts. Man, it's a lot of work and it requires a certain something to work that much and to hopefully enjoy it.

So you got to figure out in what area, because entertainment is very, very broad. Take all the internships, you'd be surprised how many people are willing to come and sit with you, have you take them to lunch or give you 30 minutes of their time, 15 minutes of their time. I have a lot of people who reach out to me, I talk with them, I mentor them, and I keep up with their careers. And then as soon as something comes up and I go, "Oh my God, I have the person for you." And that's how it works. But you've got to test all those waters to see, do you like rivers? Do you like lakes? Do you like beaches? What do you like?

Alicia Menendez: My last question for you, Marjorie, I think of your parents being handed that legal document when you yourself were recording artists and trying to make heads or tails of it. And the fact that their daughter now does that for some of the biggest

artists on the country globally, does that mean something to them? Does the success register as their own? Do they feel it was worth the sacrifice?

Marjorie Garcia: Oh my God, yes. Funny enough, my firm is located in Century City. One of the sides of the floor faces the Los Angeles Country Club, and that's where my dad worked and retired after 30 years of working there. So I can look out the window and see where my dad worked from a bus boy to being the head of the restaurant every day. And to me, it is such a reminder of the sacrifice that they made to come to this country, to risk it all, to work really hard labor jobs, to raise three kids on nothing, to make us feel like we had the best, best life. And then every time my dad introduces me to somebody, he always says, "Oh, this is my little lawyer. This is my lawyer daughter." And he's so proud, and my mom's so proud. Sometimes they still ask me, "What do you do?" They ask me, "What do you actually do?" But they're so proud. But I'm also proud of them.

Alicia Menendez: Marjorie, thank you.

Marjorie Garcia: Thank you.

Alicia Menendez: Thanks for listening. *Latina to Latina* is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantigua and me, Alicia Menendez. Virginia Lora is our producer. Kojin Tashiro is our lead producer, Trent Lightburn mixed this episode. We love hearing from you. Email us at [hola@latinatolatina.com](mailto:hola@latinatolatina.com), slide into our DMs on Instagram or tweet us @latinatolatina. Check out our merchandise at [Latinatolatina.com/shop](https://Latinatolatina.com/shop) and remember to subscribe or follow us on Radio Public, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, Good Pods, 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.

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