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As told to Miriam Garcia, 1982 words.

Tags: Music, Business, Success, Money, Inspiration.

# On trying to create something meaningful

**Musician Maria José Llergo discusses why art is not an industry, the importance of showing gratitude, and what it really means to be successful. I read that you have a pet donkey back home. Can you tell me more about him?**

He's Manolillo! A very handsome and charming grey donkey. He's now in Porto Blanco, where I was born. That's my little village in the south of Spain in Andalusia. My grandparents were farmers and I grew up there singing with my grandfather while he was taking care of the ground, the plants, and the animals. So it was a wonderful childhood.

**You started your music career playing violin. How did you transition to singing and what made you decide that signing was something that you wanted to pursue full time?**

I wanted to be a singer since I was a child. Me and my grandfather used to sing together and I was copying his voice. I studied violin because, in my little village, there were no singing classes. So I took my first singing class when I was 20 years old, which is very late for a singer. I think I learned to sing by myself, but then when I found a way of being at the music conservatory, I started to improve my technique. I like to think that the violin was a very good partner that led me to sing.

**You just mentioned that you started singing when you were 20 years old. Was that an easy thing to do? Did you encounter any obstacles like people telling you that it was too late?**

Since the beginning, I knew that my technique was very good even though I was completely self-taught. When I arrived at the conservatory, I realized that the things that I did with my voice were on point. So I found a way of learning and collaborating with my teachers and peers, of course, but I had really solid foundations, and that helped.

**Your first EP, it's called *Sanación*, which means healing, and your album it's called *Ultrabelleza*, which is ultra beauty. I feel like both of those are really strong words like statement words, and punch words. What do you think were the biggest transformations that happened to you as an artist during the process of releasing *Sanación* to *Ultrabelleza*?**

I think *Ultrabeauty* is the consequence of my own healing. I needed to be in the right mental and healthy state of mind. With a calm and relaxed mind, had my own focus, and loving myself a lot while I was navigating a world of fame. I think *Sanación* was the first step toward having this kind of life in the music industry. I made that EP as a way to talk to myself and say nice things to me, to transform that pain into beauty.

Then "ultra beauty" is a concept or theme that I felt two years ago while I was spinning and traveling around the world singing and I just felt so in love with being a human being. I felt what could be called the Stendhal Syndrome, which is a state that you feel when you witness something of great beauty. I felt it for the first time when I visited the Fontana di Trevi. I started to cry and I couldn't stop. It was a sensation of being at peace in the world, with the human being and recovering faith in humankind. After that, I needed to put that feeling in my own musical language.

So, I did the album *Ultrabelleza* to have a musical reflection of this concept and to create a new world that is ultra beautiful. Where everything good can happen, and all the bad can happen as well. Where you can be yourself, you can love whatever you want. You can have it anytime. You can be yourself no matter who you are.

**You have had a lot of recognition and attention recently. In the past three years, you released an acclaimed EP, won the Goya for Best Song, and released your first album in the fall of 2023, and have some touring dates scheduled for Europe and the US. How do you navigate dealing with fame and the music industry?**

I don't know, because yes, I am in the music industry, but I don't do music for the industry. I do music for life, for humanity, for the human being. And it's my legacy as a person, not a product. It's a gift of myself with all my energy, with all my love. On the industry side, I can't control it. I don't want to control it. So yes, it exists, but it is not me. So thank you for being there. But I am not a product. I am an artist.

**I read in another interview that your grandfather has a saying that is "Charge but don't sell yourself." What does that mean to you?**

I think that it's my natural energy. It's my natural way of navigating the musical ocean where I am. We indeed have a capitalist system. We are in the machine every day doing everything the machine asks. We cannot escape. But I think that some things in life transcend all of that. The industry, or the machinery, is a consequence of art, it is the way to control art and to run it. But art is not an industry, and an industry is not art, but they need each other.

The way of writing my songs, and singing my lyrics, it's a reflection of my own life. My songs are a reflection of the society we live in, and what it means to be a human being. For me, singing is a necessity I'm a reflection of the society where I live and a reflection of the human being in 2023. For me, singing is a necessity. When I don't sing, I am very sad. I need singing. I am like a bird. So my relationship with that is pure. The industry is the tool that we have for making it great and to lead it to people.

**Can you elaborate a little bit more on this relationship to singing that you described as pure? What does that relationship look like?**

For me, a pure relationship, which can be with people or music, comes from love and from giving or making something and not wanting or expecting anything in return. I put all my energy, my whole mind, all my heart, and my voice into every single song that I do. And once I release it, I don't ask for anything in return. I only give.

**From what I can tell, success is not a transaction and it's it seems that you are not expecting much of the machinery and fame. But what is your relationship with the audience? Do you expect anything from them?**

For me, the success is to have the opportunity of making a good gift to the audience. And seeing someone crying while you are singing, and someone who comes to you and says to you that your music really means something important to them and your music makes them happy. That is my success. This is the best way of seeing that your music has a sense in this world. Fame and money come and go like a ghost. And you can't control it. Sometimes it gives you happiness, sometimes it gives you trouble. But you can't control them. And this is the planet that they are spinning around of what you do. But what matters the most is not fame, is knowing that what I do has a positive impact on people.

**Coming back to life on tour, I heard that the song "Rueda Rueda" is about life on the road. What was the process of writing that song and life on tour?**

The song "Rueda Rueda" is a celebration of the fact that I'm finally working as an artist, as a singer, living my dream. But sometimes I'm scared, and I pray for protection from the spirits and the gods. That's in the lyrics when I say "Romero Santo, Romero Bueno, fuera lo malo, venga lo bueno." Which means kind "Saint and good rosemary, out with the bad, in with the good." So on tour, I am always really excited and manifesting good things. Also in the lyrics, I say that if I stop, I die. Because constantly moving it's my natural inertia. It's my natural inertia to be on tour.

**The first song in your album starts with a recording of your grandmother praying. What is your relationship with praying and having a spiritual practice? What kind of rituals do you have that relate to your creative practice?**

Singing is my way of praying. It is my way to connect with myself and other realities. It is how I make good wishes. I'm a very spiritual person. I think this is why I need to be in touch with nature. I am very, very connected with the sky, and with the constellations. I love everything in nature and I connect with others and with the diversity of life. Like the sky's nature. There will never be two equal sunsets. Nature never repeats itself. I see in particular quality of nature in myself as well. I want to be generous, I want to take everyone in, just like nature. That is my nature of connecting. I know that I'm part of something bigger.

**This is an amazing answer and, just like you just said that there will never be two similar sunsets, I was recently thinking that there are never two clouds with the same shape, so I connect with what you just said about the qualities of the sky! I want to go back to something that you just said about making good wishes. How does this intention relate to your practice or how do you land on what you wish?**

I practice gratitude and being grateful with life. This attitude or this way of looking at life makes me

fall in love with both the good and the bad sides of life. And having the ability to make good changes in my own reality and with the people I love. I think being grateful is the best ritual that you can have. I appreciate being here for another day and I see it as a gift to learn. That is all I want, to be here for another day to improve myself, to do better music every day. I don't want to do songs that are the same.

I want to have diversity in my work, in my pieces, and in my songs. Just like nature, just like the clouds. This is the way of look at the life I have. Fame, money, it's okay. I think that if I work hard, I will pay the rent. I don't want more money. I want money to have a good life and to take care of my family. And that is enough.

**What are you excited about for the future?**

I want to have the opportunity to connect deeply with audiences around the world. Making a huge musical family. Be connected with the value of people, not the product, the trends, or the industry. I want to have my focus on creating good things for the human being. And anyone who listens to my music, I want them to feel so empowered, strong, and happy.

Maria José Llergo Recommends:

The documentary The Salt of the Earth by Juliano Ribeiro Salgado

La Veronal dance company

The film Triangle of Sadness by Ruben Östlund

The restaurant Sr. Ito Lab in Madrid, is a mix of Japanese and Spanish cuisine. Delicious!

The book The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari by Robin S. Sharma

Name

Maria José Llergo

Vocation

musician

Fact

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