

## The Politics of the Austin Music Scene through Ginger Rodriguez's Eyes

As an emerging, self-made artist from Austin, Texas, the Live Music Capital of the World, Ginger Rodriguez has found herself and a connection with her local community through her indie-pop music. In this interview, she discusses voting rights and mental health access in Texas and explains the relationship between music and social change in marginalized communities.

*Written by Nico Grayson*



Photo courtesy of Sidney Wisner

This year, for Dia de Los Muertos, the Mexic-Arte Museum of Texas teamed up with Austin Lowriding to put together a cultural showcase for the Latinx community of Austin. Dawning a violet boa and a vibrant flower crown, born-and-raised Austinite Ginger Rodriguez took the stage to join in the celebration. The event was filled with people in Catrina costumes and sugar skull makeup shopping from vendors selling lush flower bouquets, colorful art pieces, and intricate jewelry. Singing songs from classic artists such as Selena and Thalía, Rodriguez attributes her love for music to the innovative pioneers that went before her. From the shimmering sequins on her jumpsuit, to her sheer, black gloves, Rodriguez included stylistic choices from the classics like Ritchie Valens, while also embodying her own modern flare.

Rodriguez started producing music when she was 13 years old and began performing in local Austin bars and clubs at 16 years old. Inspired by artists such as David Bowie, Lady Gaga, Madonna, and Diana Ross, Rodriguez told Afterglow that these queer icons also heavily

influence her indie-pop sound. She remembers singing along to their songs in her childhood bedroom. For Rodriguez, representation is important across all of her intersecting identities.

“That’s why I think music in general is so important, especially when you’re growing up, because I think about the artists I listened to when I was in my formative years, how their voices were their messages,” Rodriguez said. “They shaped me and they taught me new things.”

Growing up, she noticed how queerness within the Chicano community was often seen as taboo, and she wanted to change that. In 2022, she released her first Spanish song, “Leo.”

“It was all about how I like both women and men,” Rodriguez said. “I hadn’t heard a lot of songs like that, especially in Spanish. I love my culture, I really do. But especially in Latino culture, I don’t see that representation for queerness as often, so I’m really proud to be able to do that.”

For Rodriguez, being herself means being creative. But it also means so much more than that.

“It means to be among the voices of young queer Latina women in the south who are trying to make it in a western world, a place where these systems aren’t so kind. But we still try our best, despite everything,” she continued.

Rodriguez said her identity shapes her experiences, which she writes about in her songs in hopes to connect with other people who have similar stories. In her song Don’t Panic (Panic) she describes what it’s like to live with an anxiety disorder. She proclaims in the track, “I feel so lost, don’t feel right in my skin” and “I should talk to my doctor about increasing my dosage, to leave this room seems impossible.” Rodriguez explains that living with a panic disorder is only made worse by the conditions of society that she is forced to live within:

“As a songwriter, I am talking about my own life experiences, but we’re all living in the same world,” Rodriguez said. “These are things that directly affect both me and you. So when I write about them, they make me emotional because my rights as a woman are being stripped away. Other people’s rights — people who I care for — their rights are being stripped away.”

For Rodriguez, music is a way to heal. This mindset comes to life in “Melancholy,” with the lyrics “Why waste my time feeling low? I have to give myself permission to grow”.

Rodriguez believes that the mental health care system has failed queer women of color, especially in Texas. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, in 2019, only 50% percent of women with mental illness received treatment annually. Simultaneously, 34% of Latinx individuals and 33% of Black individuals received care. To make matters worse, according to [Mental Health America](#), in 2022 Texas ranked 51st out of all of the states and the District of Columbia when it comes to access for mental health care.

This ranking is affected by a wide variety of factors, such as access to affordable insurance, well-paying jobs, and high quality education.

Rodriguez said it's important for everyone to have an equal opportunity to not have to fight their battles alone.

"I am diagnosed with depression and anxiety, and I have had a very difficult time internalizing political turmoil and events happening in my own backyard," she said. "It's very intense for me to think about hundreds of families being neglected by and even outcast by the state, and so I do share some of that in my music, like in my songs 'The Freedom Club' or 'The American Dream (Intro)'" In the intro track to her album "Melancholy," she proclaims a warning call in a dystopian, robotic voice:

"The American, the American, American dream  
The American, the American, it' a scheme  
In America, In America, we're dying"

"I am very vocal about these things and I honestly just want everybody to have equal opportunity," Rodriguez said. "It just hurts to know that it's not like that."



Photo courtesy of Spectrum News

Rodriguez said that, after the recent Texas election cycle, she has issues with the [voter suppression](#) targeted towards the Latinx community.

"Our system, it's not meant for everyone; that's why there's voter suppression," Rodriguez said. The whole system is created to help a select few kinds of people. But I don't know how possible it is that we're just going to be able to change the entire thing overnight. So if these are the limitations we have, we just have to do work in our communities to fight these limitations."

Last year, Texas tried to limit [tens of thousands](#) of voters based on flawed Texas drivers' license data. The year prior, Latinos doubled their turnout at the polls.

"If you feel disillusioned about voting, I think that you should also remember this is the situation we're in," Rodriguez said. "Voting is what creates some change and [gives groups of people representation](#). Not everyone has the privilege to vote, so if you're not sharing your voice when you have the chance to, how do you expect things to get better even in the slightest?"

Rodriguez proves that music is a force that transcends boundaries by sharing her songs with her family in Mexico via the internet. Rodriguez said this is how she stays connected to her loved ones who may not get to see her perform live. However, when she does perform live, she wants everyone in the crowd to know who she is and what she stands for as a young latina activist, especially younger audience members.

On top of feeling the pressure of growing social issues, Rodriguez thinks many young people may feel very undervalued and overworked. The minimum wage is only \$7.25 an hour in Texas.

As an emerging musician, she wants to be able to be an example to artists who have had to make it on their own.



Photo courtesy of the Mexic-Arte Museum

“Not growing up with generational wealth has made it really difficult in comparison to those who have,” Rodriguez said. “Something that I appreciate about myself that I realized is that I will go after what I want. Even with my limitations, I will figure something out. I will DIY it.”

Learning to write, record, and produce on her own, Rodriguez was the only individual who contributed to the creation of her last two albums.

“I think about the kids who might see themselves in me, might feel the same way. If I'm able to keep them going, if they see themselves through me, I want to let them know that they can do that too,” Rodriguez said. “I want to use my platform as an artist to support these young people who are growing up in this world that isn't doing enough for them.”

Rodriguez is set to release her newest album, *Pop Cult*, this year, and plans to continue performing at local Austin showcases and events.