

Interviewee: Naalia
Interviewers: Wendy Villalva
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Abstract:

Naalia shares her experiences at 24 years old, as a black and Mexican woman who is bisexual. She is a singer and songwriter in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Sharing about her upbringing, Naalia shares topics such as mental health, identity, the Covid-19 pandemic, and about her journey as an artist and what she hopes to accomplish in the future. Towards the end of the interview, she sings a verse from one of her songs.

Wendy **0:03**

Alright, so today is the 30th of November 2021 and is currently a little after six it's 6:50, central time for Wisconsin So when [greet in spanish] it is a pleasure to finally meet with you. As a recap tonight's interview is a product collaboration with the Chippewa Valley Museum, our goal is to understand how local latinx artists influence Eau Claire and the surrounding area, we want to recognize your role in this Community. I don't want to waste too much of your time, so I will get right into it. So the first topic that I have is a little bit about demographics. Would you mind sharing some of your demographic information such as age, gender identity, pronouns, race, and ethnicity?

Naalia **0:49**

Yeah, so I am 24 years old, I use she her hers, I am black and Latina my family is from Mexico. Yeah I am Bisexual and just you know I don't know yeah just a young adult I suppose. [laughter]

Wendy **1:14**

Okay. So my next topic is on identity. So being Latino in the US means a lot of different things. There's a tendency to group people into different categories and subcategories that are easily distinctive. However, we know that being Latino is not just conforming yourself to one category so with this being said, how do you identify yourself?

Naalia 1:37

That's been quite the journey with me finding exactly the right words, because I did used to say Afro Latina and I've learned that that is not entirely correct, since my blackness is from the United States and so I've been saying just, I say I am- I say I am Black and Latina or Black and Mexican that's how i've been identifying myself.

Wendy 2:09

So what have you learned about yourself and your identity? For instance, how has your family impacted your identity? How has music affected your identity? Can you speak a little bit about that?

Naalia 2:22

Yeah. So my family has been great as far as my identity goes for as long as I can remember all through growing up. I grew up predominantly with the Mexican side of my family, but- so i've always had a strong tie with my Latina side, and so, but they made sure to- that I saw myself, while growing up, whether that was with like toys or TV characters or just like my hair, for example. So that I made sure I stayed connected with my black side as well, which I am forever grateful for them, because I haven't necessarily had too much of the identity crisis that a lot of mixed kids go through. But yeah so that definitely helped shape just how I create my music. So like a big artist and my family is Selena who everybody knows you know and so I just have like a strong connection with her as far as not necessarily being able to speak Spanish the best, but still loving that side of myself and loving to sing music that is purely in Spanish. So just with my music today I've been trying to like little beats here and there, just rhythms trying to incorporate that into the music that I create and I know here going forward, I want to have more like spanglish music I should- you could say but-so there's definitely a heavy influence thanks to like my upbringing for my family and as well as a lot of, as far as like my black side, a lot of musicians from like the 90's, a lot of the rap rmb so it's like it's a nice blend of both I would say, like, I have a lot to go off of due to my upbringing, and so it comes together.

Wendy 4:32

That is very interesting. Going off of the Spanish portion of your music, can you kind of take us through your journey with Spanish and how your performances have helped you navigate the language?

Naalia 4:48

Yeah so I was Spanish is actually my first language, and so I only spoke Spanish until I was two, three years old, and then we happened to move to a predominantly white area in Montana, and so I did end up losing it as soon as elementary school came around, but I always, still continuing through elementary school middle school, and I got it back in high school once living with my grandparents, who are from Mexico, but still like with the music still being around like with my family and everything, I still was able to sing in Spanish, even though I might not know exactly what I was saying all the time. Just being able to hear it and kind of mimic the sounds as a child as best as I could that definitely helped keep it around and so when I was finally with my grandparents again that it just kind of came back, oh sorry [laughing]. It came back real quick and so with like, as far as singing in Spanish goes, sorry it's just gonna be a little dark. So, as far as singing in Spanish, these days, and everything, like, for example, I did a selena set a couple of times within the past year and, just sorry [laughing]. It's just been nice. I suppose. I hope I answered that question.

Wendy 6:31

Yeah. Yeah no definitely. You talked about how you listened to Spanish music growing up, what type of Spanish music did you listen to? Is it the same type of music that you now perform, or is it a little different?

Naalia 6:45

I would say it's a little different. Definitely a lot more of like the classics. I'm not sure if I'm saying the right genre entirely but I want to say, like it on [____?]. And I know, like a lot of old- I have an aunt and uncle who are like 10 years older than me, and so there is a lot of like the early 2000's that [____?] music as well, and so i've just got like this mixture from the music that my grandparents would listened to and then from what the first generation of our family would listen to. And so what I sing mostly these days is a lot of r&b music. So, since I have such like a heavy influence from you know the 90s artists like I said so it is an interesting representation of both worlds, I suppose I'm just like singing the r&b type style and then trying to incorporate the language that is Spanish at the same time.

Wendy **7:59**

That is really interesting. Are there any songs in particular that you love to sing and that reflect your heritage or your culture very well?

Naalia **8:09**

That is a good question. There- let's see, there's the song that I like to- that I like to sing along to. I suppose. [laughter] It's just like Oye Mi Canto by Nori and it's just like a bunch of different artists. I believe they're like based out of New York, so you know the melting pot, that is New York, but it just basically talks about-- which is one of the songs that I also listened to growing up, but it's just talks about how you know it doesn't matter your race- there's literally a line that says it doesn't matter your race, because you know you're Latino and so that was just like a good one for me.

Wendy **8:56**

That is really nice. I actually really like that. So growing up as Black and Mexican can you share a little bit about your experience and how the two cultures kind of just mixed or when they didn't or just your experience in general?

Naalia **9:16**

Yeah um so since I did grow up mostly with my Mexican side of the family, you know I've gone to a lot of events. You know how we like to throw big old birthday parties for when we were three and stuff like that. [Laughter] So I would go there and like I grew up dancing cumbias and everything and I love it. Like I would like to say I'm kind of good at it. There is always like- there was always kind of a downside of where, you know, people will see me and I do have a lot of African features, the thick hair and everything, and I'm darker and so people will see me and just like not assume that i'm Latino or Mexican you know they'll just assume. I just felt like I'm a friend, or something or even when I tell them or when I try to speak to them in Spanish, it'll- they'll still fall back on trying to speak to me in English or not really believing me in a sense and so that's like always been a recurring theme just throughout my entire life and so that kind of takes a dig at me in a way, because I identified so strongly with that side of myself and it's just like oh well, how can you tell me I can't when I am telling you I am you know what I mean.

Wendy **10:47**

Right yeah.

Naalia **10:52**

But yeah so as far as that side it's been- that's like one of the only negatives or like comments about my skin color. Like not trying to go outside and get too burnt or something like that which I know is like colorism is something that our community is working through, of course. That we're still trying to unlearn what was taught to us, but just I know it's still there it's still prevalent, but I know we're working on it at the same time but yeah. As far as my other side goals you know, there is this kind of- like sometimes put on top of a pedestal once like people find out that I'm Mexican if that makes sense from a Black viewpoint. Which is just, I always like combat it every time because I know that when mixed kids are like kind of put up on a pedestal in that Black Community it is detrimental towards full Black women, specifically dark skin women, but so it's just it's hard to hear that knowing what like the effects will be having that language around or communication being like oh you're spicy or some stuff like that. So it's kind of interesting how it's opposites, in a way, one side versus the other. But I don't know I've been able to navigate through it and try my best to speak up when needed, and everything, and you know so it's a learning process but it's getting better for other Black and Latina kids.

Wendy **12:51**

So how do you feel that your experiences- so backtracking a little bit. You said that you didn't have such a harsh experience with your identity and knowing your identity compared to other people. So, can you kind of tell us a little bit about that. How you kind of knew that you knew how to identify yourself, and if you ever saw any times when someone else did not and how you would compare those experiences.

Naalia 13:24

Okay yeah. So once I got into college, moved out, I did a lot of research as far as trying to identify a little better with my black side and so, with that came watching a lot of interview type situations or like table talks with whole black people, as well as mixed black people and one thing that like kind of came out or popped out at me was for this- during this one video this guy said how he had never really had an issue with his identity. That he felt secure in it, but it was because of the fact that he had very serious talks with both of his parents, you know, they would sit him down, and in his case he was a half black half white kid, but they would sit him down and tell him, you know, talk to him about the privileges that he had and the reality of it, as well as going through the world as a black man still. But that just, once I heard that that kind of resonated with me because it just reminded me and I kind of had like a little flashbacks I suppose of just all the moments that my family really did make sure that, like I said I was seen through like dolls, TV shows, they even have like this little Nativity set where they're all just as black as I am, and so. That- through the research, it just helped me realize that I was very lucky in that sense, because of the table talk videos that I did watch I did see a lot where people were kind of the black sheep of their family, in a sense. Where they would like want them nothing to do with the other side, whether, no matter what they were mixed with. Where there have been plenty of cases or plenty of people speaking about how one side of their family would want them to completely neglect the other side of their identity and so just hearing that also made me realize that that wasn't my case even more so, and so I was very lucky to have the family that I do have growing up, because that could lead to more more identity crisis issues as a child. Like trying to navigate through puberty and everything, while also trying to figure out where you stand in your own cultures. So that could potentially delay other things, or cause some sort of internal hatred within yourself. Which I do have some experience with that, but I would say it's not quite the level of- because I've heard of people bleaching their skin, and so I would not say that, like mine was ever quite at that level. And so yeah I just have to keep saying it, but just so much props to my family for that, because it can be a lot worse, and it can be a lot more detrimental to yourself as a being, so.

Wendy 16:55

That is very powerful. I like how you said that. Moving on to another section, this is a little bit about your background. So I did some research and I have found that other than in Eau Claire you have also resided in California and Barron, Wisconsin. You also mentioned that you lived in Montana, for a little bit. Can you kind of tell us a little bit about your time in those areas and how old you were when you lived there? Just your experiences in general.

Naalia **17:28**

Yeah. So I was born in Eau Claire, but then we ended up moving to Montana when I was like three, which is where my dad is from and most of his family lives out there still, or a good chunk of his family does. Then we lived out there for a couple of years, I want to say, and then I did move back, we did move back to Eau Claire. And I went to school here through the eighth grade, and then, in my freshman year of high school, was when my parents got a divorce, and I was with my mom, and so we moved out to California. In southern California and, like the high desert area, which was such a culture shock. Such a completely different world than little old Eau Claire, Wisconsin, but I think it was good for me in the long run for like a number of reasons. It was much more diverse out there, which I think was good for me to experience. I was a part of the show choir life, which is so different in California. Like just think California, movies, big show choir life was just like that it was insane, but I think that definitely helped with my love for music. Like help me find my passion, a little bit more, as far as that goes. So that was a really good thing, and I got to see myself, like you know California has a huge Mexican population, and so I was able to go to the grocery store and they had everything that I needed like I didn't need to go make a special trip or anything. So we were out there until I was about 16, almost 17, and then my grandparents live in Barron, and California was just like very expensive, and so we came back and went to live with my grandparents for the last year and a half or so of high school. That is where I started regaining a lot more of my Spanish. It definitely had happened out in California, but just living with my grandparents, they would just only speak to me in Spanish, and so I'm really thankful for that, because you know, well I'm not able to speak it as well, I can definitely understand it now. So yeah that was just my last year and a half a high school, I graduated, and then I came back here. [Laughing] Eau Claire.

Wendy **20:16**

That's really interesting. You said that there is a really big culture shock in California, can you give me some specific examples where it was so different and you did not expect it?

Naalia **20:29**

Yeah, one big thing was that- just the way people dressed, I suppose. Like everyone dressed to the nines like it was a fashion show every day at school, and I was like showing up. I was used to just like wearing my gym clothes all day at school. [laughter] And then everyone's like- they were like seniors in these tall boots and different colored leggings and I'm like oh what is going on here and I just realized, I did not have any fashion sense. [laughing] So that was like- that was a huge one for me for sure, but like also just the choir scene. Like I know Eau Claire has a huge show choir scene as well, in the surrounding areas too, but it's just it was- it's so different out there, like the costumes and the changes, the themes of the shows, the stages, and everything. Even for one of our shows, actually, we had Lance Bass from NSYNC was one of our judges, so that was pretty cool.

Wendy **21:43**

Wow, that's incredible.

Naalia **21:48**

So, just stuff like that. Those were the two really big things that just kind of blew my mind.

Wendy **21:55**

So you mentioned show choir a lot. I also did show choir when I was in high school, not to that extent, but I definitely know the environment very well. Would you say that show choir was one of those organizations that really influenced your yearning to pursue music?

Naalia **22:15**

Oh yeah for sure, because I was in like choirs in elementary and middle school, but they were just like your basic you know general choirs, but then once I got to high school and then I was able to get into the show choir, then I found out there were like a bunch of different choirs as well. Like an acapella choir or like an all girls choir. There's just- I just got to see, like all the little details that went into music. As well with the people that were in my choir they introduced me into so many different genres of music and just different artists and they would like play- sometimes for choir we would require sometimes an entire class, all we would do is just play like random YouTube videos or something, and they would point out like what were some really cool parts or what they did differently here that you may not have noticed before. So definitely just a combination of being in show choir and then specifically where I was at for show choir just help open my eyes to so much more about music and made me realize that oh, I really love doing this like I love singing that it's I mean I knew it before by really know it now like after being part of it so it's great.

Wendy **23:45**

That's awesome. I have one final question about just Eau Claire in general, so have you noticed any changes in your audience, since you first performed in Eau Claire? So, more recently, there has been a larger Hispanic population in Eau Claire, have you noticed any of those trends or changes in your audience?

Naalia **24:09**

I will say I did notice that my audience was predominantly white when I first started which does make sense, you know Eau Claire is still mostly a white city or town, but it has like more shifted to a- I haven't had too many shows recently, but I have seen that it's more of a little bit of a younger crowd and with that there are more mixed, I would say. I don't want to like assume anybody's ethnicity or anything but definitely not the same faces that I was seeing before. So I definitely have seen like a couple black kids, some Hispanic kids, I believe and so which is pretty cool you know I always wanted to reach out to people that look like me and hope that they like my music as well. So yeah there's been a little bit of a change, hopefully with more shows coming I'll be able to see that bit more.

Wendy **25:27**

Okay. So this next section is a little bit about your family. So, can you tell us a little bit about your family? I remember at [____?] Latina your brother was on stage with you, so do you have any other family members that also help you with creating music, if so, what role do they have with your music?

Naalia **25:53**

It's just my brother who really helps me create the music. We definitely go like 50/50 with writing, writing the lyrics and creating the instrumentals, but I suppose I can say my family helped with my appreciation for all music. I have a very talented family, not to like to toot my familial Horn or anything but. You know, my grandpa plays guitar and he sings and has a very good voice as well. I actually did a show with it, or not a show, but like a school talent show with him once. My uncle also plays guitar very well and piano, and my mom and my aunt both sing. My mom was on- I did the cultural festival in Altoona back in August as selena and my mom was on stage as like my background singer and dancer so that was pretty cool. But yeah I've just got like a bunch of different families like that. Like I have a tío [uncle in Spanish] that plays the harmonica like crazy and so they've definitely helped with my love for music and they always helped me out whenever I need, for anything related to Naalia.

Wendy **27:10**

That is really, really cool. Your family is so talented, that's amazing. [Laughter] Can you tell us a little bit about your family's journey to Wisconsin? You mentioned that your parents or your mother is from Mexico. So could you tell me a little bit about that?

Naalia **27:29**

Yeah my mom is Mexican but my grandparents her parents are from Mexico, and so yeah she's first generation, and my grandpa's from [____?] and then my grandma's from [____?] and they came back in the 70s. My grandpa came first he was- he came up here with my great grandpa to the Turkey store, that is in Barron actually, that they still work at it's [____?]now, but it was Jerome's when he first came, Jerome's foods and so that's really why I believe they came up to Wisconsin specifically, is because of that work, and I want to say it was- they did come up seasonally at first, but then they just, I forgot exactly why, but they made the decision to stay here and so both of my grandma and my grandpa got their work at [____?] and so they've been

there for the past 40 something years now. But yeah the same with like, I think, almost all of my tíos work at the same Turkey store just because you know it pays super well and they were hiring and so. Yeah just a big big factor was that Turkey store up here and so yeah they've just been here, ever since.

Wendy **29:05**

Can you tell me a little bit about your dad's side of the family? If that's okay.

Naalia **29:12**

Yeah. So my dad is from Montana. And then, but my grandma, his mom, lives here. And so I think he moved over here when he was like- a couple of times once in like middle school and then once in high school. Which is how he met my mom because my grandma had-my dad's mom lived in the same school district as my mom's parents and so, you know, when he came over here like the second time in high school that's how they met, but other than that he's from Montana, and my grandpa lived out in Montana, as well. As well as my great grandparents, I was really lucky to know both my great grandparents, but yeah just like been there for as long as I can remember, most of his family, a good chunk of his family is still out there. yeah.

Wendy **30:18**

Do you still maintain ties with any potential family in Mexico?

Naalia **30:26**

Oh yeah most definitely. We are all like this [crosses fingers] super close with them. Like my great grandma is still alive and she's down there and then all of my grandma's siblings are all down there and i'm really close with- I have a bunch of cousins who are around my age. Like the ones all up here are like 10 plus years older than me. Still really close, but it's kind of nice having the cousins that are my age, and so I make sure to talk to them. Social media is a huge factor. So that helps a lot and I get to stay up to date on their daily lives. Some are married and have kids. They get to see the same with me and there's- they're actually really supportive of my music too, down there. Which is super awesome.

Wendy **31:21**

It is really awesome.

Naalia **31:21**

Yeah we're really close, which is- I'm very thankful for.

Wendy **31:26**

Do you ever go back and visit them in Mexico?

Naalia **31:31**

Yeah I've gone a couple of times. I've gone once when I was like, I want to say like three. And then, once when I was 14, 19, and then 21. So it hasn't been too often, but I would say it's a significant amount of times. This last time I went, I spent a month down there, a little over a month down there, so that was really nice. I kind of got to see my family's everyday life and hang out with my cousins. I got to go to the club, and so yeah it's pretty cool. I definitely have to go again.

Wendy **32:14**

That's amazing. A month is a long time, and it definitely gives you a lot of opportunities to try new things so that's amazing. Then this next section talks a little bit about your career. So this is a very broad question: how did your career begin?

Naalia **32:35**

That is- I actually just the answer for that, because it was just so random. My brother and I were talking for a little bit because he had done bands in high school and stuff like that, and just randomly around town and so he was kind of already well known and then he obtained like a studio space at the Ivy media that was down in barstow and we were down there casually one day working and like cool this like this worked out. You know I had never tried this whole side

of singing before, like actually creating my own music so I was like cool I'll just show up here and we'll do some stuff and then we just happened to get this opportunity where there was for the npr tiny desk concert series and Converge was looking for people to they were going to record their song for them and then send it in and so. But we had like two weeks to come up with an entire band and write a song. I had never written a song before, and so the pressure was on and. It's kind of like a running joke, we have to this day that we work great under pressure, like we work our best under pressure, because of the two weeks. Like we found band members, which within like a week, and then we wrote the song within like three days, and so yeah, and then it finally just all came together, thanks to converge radio. So thank you Converge. [laughing]

Wendy **34:16**

That's amazing. What influenced you to pursue a career in music?

Naalia **34:26**

I suppose, just the opportunity and the fact that I never had tried before. Since I was just in choir and like the whole technical side of things for so long. I just thought to myself, like hey you like singing it's pretty fun you're not in school right now, and so why not just go for it. You know, give it a chance, like what's the worst that could happen and yeah here I am.

Wendy **35:01**

What have been some challenges or struggles performing in Eau Claire or more broadly performing in Wisconsin?

Naalia **35:15**

I would say one thing that happens is that we don't really like fit in with any sound specifically. I know around here there's- it's like a lot of singer-songwriter indie type of music or like rock or there's rap, but just with like our- or like bluesy music, but just with our more like rnb type of slower sound like- which I don't think is like a bad thing, but we just never really fit into any event really unless it was like our own thing and so. That's kind of made me feel a little awkward, I suppose. Like are you sure you guys want me to be here [laughing] but it's always

been like welcomed you know. Even if people are unsure at first it's been pretty good feedback afterwards.

Wendy 36:23

That's really good. So kind of going off of struggles and challenges, how has the pandemic specifically affected your career and maybe things such as live performances?

Naalia 36:40

Oh definitely it was a punch to the gut because we were- we had just won Best New Band for the Volume One best-of awards, and we had just done our Selena set for [____?] and it was just everything was going super well and we had shows lined up for like the rest of the year. And that was just like so far, you know, as the beginning of the year, as far as- it was the beginning of March, when everything was setting itself up and we were getting ready to tour, because we had mostly- or not tour necessarily but do shows outside of Eau Claire since we were mostly performing, well only within Eau Claire. And so we just had so much planned like I'm sure so many other artists did as well, and just getting that all taken away, you know swept under us. That was quite the hit. It did a little bit of, I would say more than a little bit, of damage to my mental health. As I'm sure you know, the pandemic was like that for everybody. Just for me it just really took a lot for me to get back to doing things. Like I would say, within the past few months has been the most I've done with Naalia since. At least like consistently and so just the hardest part really was just getting out of that mental rut and just getting back into things, pushing myself. And yeah it's been a really long road, but I think I am finally here.

Wendy 38:32

So how have you kind of handled some of the- you said that you were kind of like in a rut in that your mental health probably was not the greatest. So how were you able to go beyond that and work up with Naalia again?

Naalia **38:55**

I think I definitely have a lot of supportive people in my life, right now, as far as my family goes. As well as like, my work environment actually is pretty amazing and my boss is super understanding as far as mental health goes. And I'm really good friends with her and just my co-workers. And then, just like the friends that I have, it's just been- that support system like if I didn't have it, I don't know if I would necessarily be doing this right now but. That is just like good to start off with, but just I think the one thing that I do tell myself is like allowing myself to feel the negative emotions or the negative- or having like the really down days, where I'm just like in bed all day for like or even for like a couple of days I'm just in bed, and I just allowed myself to go through that, because I just I didn't think keeping it in would be a good thing, but also, you know not like having that be my entire life, but just when I have those moments I was like okay we're gonna- we're not gonna do anything today and we're not even like gonna shower or something gross [laughing] and just letting myself just experienced that, as well as like going through therapy. And finally starting on medication, which I haven't done before. I definitely- that was definitely a struggle just testing out which ones worked which ones did not. If it works for you like it did for me, you know, I think it can be really beneficial for your mental health. And so just just finding the tools and everything that I needed having that support system and just yeah letting myself feel everything out. And then finally I think it got out of my system enough where I'm like okay, you did that this is what you really want to do so let's get back at it.

Wendy **41:02**

That's really insightful. Kind of switching up a little bit. What have been some positive experiences that you have- that have influenced you in some way? It doesn't have to pertain to the pandemic at all.

Naalia **41:19**

Did you say positive experiences?

Wendy **41:23**

Yeah, with your career. I'm sorry.

Naalia **41:25**

Oh okay cool. Sorry. [laughing] I think let's see. Definitely one of them was for sure just the fact that like I had mentioned that we had won Best New Band for Volume One and that kind of blew my mind and so. Like especially since we had all only been a band for like eight months prior to that, maybe, not even. So that was definitely like as far as coming back around goes we not to plug myself [meaning promote] but we just got nominated for a few awards again. And so, just like knowing that support is still there from somebody, you know, somebody had to nominate me. So just to know that somebody is out there, like still thinking of Naalia, and like still a fan of the music and everything, you know. Just that it kind of is weird to think about but it really helps uplift me is just the fact that people actually like my music. And so it was just like just being nominated again was just like such a good reminder and just really filled me with endorphins. [laughing] Like I feel great really helped with everything.

Wendy **42:58**

That's amazing. Congratulations on Best New Band. That is so impressive. Are these nominations, that you talk about, are they happening currently?

Naalia **43:09**

Yeah, so I think the voting just opened, and it goes through until the 12th so we're just currently in the process, and then I think we will find out if we want like a month later, so. [_____?]

Wendy **43:27**

Yeah. What are some of the nominations for?

Naalia **43:31**

It is Best Overall Band and then Best Individual Musician and then Best Musical Performance and that was for the Selena tribute that I did at the cultural festival back in August. So that's just cool, you know. [_____?]

Wendy **43:55**

That is really cool. Congratulations. So, can you walk us through how you would normally prepare for a performance?

Naalia **44:07**

Yeah. Just me myself or with everyone?

Wendy **44:12**

Either or, or both.

Naalia **44:14**

Okay cool. So I, you know, as soon as I find out how long it's going to be and where it's going to be at and what they're looking for I just go through the songs and I think about what order of the songs we have done things in the past. What seemed to work, what felt right and I make sure that it's kind of that- the set, I usually come up with a setlist, and that it is flowy. If that makes sense. Like make sure, like the more upbeat songs and the heavier music is separated from the slower songs or there's like a nice build up or something. Depending on the event. I just make sure that there's some sort of break between the songs throughout it. And then I just send it to the band, and we all just- we jam out through it a little bit. Which just always is a good time I just always really feel it and I test out little moves and everything. We sometimes switch things up when we're all together, like a little different intro or a little bit more of a instrumental break in the middle of it. And at the end of the day, Naalia really is like a collaborative. Which is pretty awesome. We have got some great minds. Then just myself like I usually am just super nervous up until I get up on the stage like my heart is beating like crazy. It never, every single time, it has not gone away. Just a crazy beating feeling and I practice the songs like crazy. I'm playing them in my car like on this bluetooth speaker radio thing that I have. Every chance that I get singing them when I'm getting ready. And then, just like doing little things to distract myself like plan my outfit and how I'm going to do my hair and stuff like that. [laughs] But then I just go for it. Yeah and it's great and I always, every time, I wished it lasted longer, you know, once it's over.

Wendy **46:43**

Well, you sound great for being a little nervous at the beginning, so props to you. [laughs] So how did you decide which style of music you wanted to perform?

Naalia **47:00**

I think it was just like a lot of trial and error growing up. Like doing- like I would do talent shows and stuff and so I would say being part choir definitely helped with that just because I was able to find my own voice and understand what- how it sounded in certain genres and when it sounded best. Since I like always had this love for- and actually my mom, she would always be like no, you can sing the songs like as far as like Gospel songs came, or like the r&b song. She would be like no you don't understand you can sing them and I was always like no mom I cannot. I was like my voice isn't strong enough, or something, but then I just- I would- I started listening, a lot more to like the 90s music like Boys to Men or Monica or TLC, yes WV, all of them. I would just sing along and I would just realize that one, I'm like really into this music like a super groovy and then I just- I ended up singing like this song called His Eyes on the Sparrow at this local- the local star quest when I was like 18, 19, and that's like when I realized oh okay, I do have a pretty big voice, and it can like do these little runs and stuff like that, and I really enjoy it. It's just like was like a spoiled realization moment where like yeah you love this music, you can do this music like this is what you're into and then just listening more to like the new age type of r&b I just felt fell in love with it because it has so much influence, of course, from the originals but it's just got this new twist and it doesn't necessarily have to follow any certain pattern, and I just decided, I want to do that, I want to make that music. That's it. Just finding that sound.

Wendy **49:12**

That's very interesting. So throughout my research, I also read that you compose your own music. So can you share with us how you choose to maintain your connection to your culture and your experiences as a black and Mexican woman through your music in the Midwest?

Naalia **49:34**

I've definitely been- I just make sure I do like mental checks as far as let's say I'm listening to the radio or something or notice I'm listening to this specific artist, I made sure to be like hold up, backup, you need to go back and listen to some- like put on like a Reggaeton classics spotify

playlist or something or you know pull up some older Selena or something like that. I make sure that, I make sure I keep that pretty prevalent and just listen to that and I always keep on finding new songs and now it's like mostly that's the only music I listen to is like the the both sides of my music that I had growing up, and then the new age versions of that. I'm sorry, what was the second part to that question? I apologize.

Wendy 50:29

I can just rephrase the question again. So how do you maintain your connection to the culture and your experiences as a black and Mexican woman in the Midwest. So how do you like- [both talking at once] Sorry. How you integrate all of that into your music.

Naalia 50:56

Okay. I know it's definitely, like with me being black and Mexican in Wisconsin and in Eau Claire I definitely never really fit in, I suppose. Just because growing up there wasn't- I would be in school there I would be like either the only black person or the only person of color a lot, and so. As far as, you know, that kind of helps with me like how I described earlier, like not really fitting in necessarily when I am asked to play somewhere like I never really match the sound, and so I think that's kind of like a twist on it. How it wasn't necessarily like a positive thing growing up, but now I'm just kind of more embracing it as far as my music goes. I'm just like being a little bit more unapologetic, which is something I'm still working on, but I'm just yeah just like loving it and not apologizing and like this is me take it or leave it, I suppose.

Wendy 52:05

Awesome. Okay, so we're coming up on the closing section of the interview. Where do you hope to see your career as an artist in the next 10 years?

Naalia 52:21

Big old question. [laughing] I hope that I am traveling. I hope I have already traveled, you know, the states, the world, like internationally. I mean, I can see myself doing that, I've always kind of had this little feeling in the back of my head and so just being well known and like have gotten through that travel phase, gotten an album out already. And then also doing a lot of songwriting

because I know there are quite a few artists out there who write music for other people. I do really enjoy that process, so as far as writing my own music and singing it, like I- that's definitely where I'm going to be, but also just writing the music as well for so many people and helping someone discover the right words for themselves to be able to express what they want to, for their songs.

Wendy **53:36**

Is there anything else that you would like to add? Or is there anything else that you want people to know about Naalia?

Naalia **53:46**

She's just coming in hot so I guess watch out. [laughing]

Wendy **53:52**

Perfect, so would you like to send us out with a song? Would you like to perform?

Naalia **54:02**

Yeah, would you like me to sing a whole song for you?

Wendy **54:07**

Yeah sure, or it could be like, I guess, like a section on this have a song to whatever you would prefer.

Naalia **54:15**

Okay, yeah cool. I'll do like a section of one song. Sure. This is like the first, this is the first verse of my song, For Me, which is a bit more of like the more upbeat heavier one and so yeah I will sing it. [singing] A past portrait of who I'm supposed to be. Lately I see what is left, what is

meant to be. Yet I still stumble, I'm dedicated to my heart. To know who I know where I'm coming from. [stops singing] Is that okay?

Wendy **55:21**

It's perfectly fine. Thank you so much, that was so beautiful. Yeah, thank you for this interview.

Naalia **55:31**

Thank you so much for having me.