

Song Exploder
Silvana Estrada - Como Un Pájaro
Episode 309

Hrishikesh: You're listening to Song Exploder, where musicians take apart their songs and piece by piece tell the story of how they were made. I'm Hrishikesh Hirway.

Silvana Estrada is a singer, songwriter, and producer from Veracruz, Mexico. She won the Latin Grammy for Best New Artist in 2022, and she's been nominated for three others, including for her song "Como Un Pájaro," which is the song that we talked about for this episode. It's from her second album, which came out in 2025, but she started writing the song several years before that. So we talked about all the different versions of the song, and a couple versions of Silvana herself, that emerged throughout the process.

("Como Un Pájaro" by SILVANA ESTRADA)

Silvana: I'm Silvana Estrada Beverido.

Hrishikesh: Thank you so much for sending me all of the voice memos and demos that you made for this song.

Silvana: I have a lot, no? (laughs)

Hrishikesh: I would love to start with the first one, um, which says it's from October 21st, 2019.

Silvana: I remember that day perfectly. In the morning I was rehearsing for a Día de los Muertos show and, at the middle of the rehearsal, I was so sad I started to cry in a song. Because I was dealing with a really, really long, difficult relationship. And I was just very, very sad and, like, heartbroken. And then this friend, after the rehearsal, told me, like, "I'm gonna leave you my piano. So you can play the piano, and do whatever you need to feel better."

And I remember that night, just, like, playing the piano and like vibing. And I remember the quietness of the city.

(first voice memo - piano & vocals: "Se apagaron ya las luces / Ahora duerme la ciudad / Se entrelazarán las piernas / Por cariño y por piedad / Mientras yo prendo velitas en frasquitos de cristal / Que es con solo las enlases ya al final puedo cantar / Mientras todo el mundo duerme / Yo me trato de sanar")

Hrishikesh: Could you translate the lyrics that you're singing?

Silvana: "Now all the lights are off and the city is asleep. People is hugging. If it's not for love, it's for..." *Misericordia*. Pity... "While everybody is sleeping, I'm just trying to feel better."

And then it says, "While everybody is sleeping, I'm just trying to not love you anymore."

(Vocals: "*Mientras todo el mundo duerme / Yo te dejo de querer*")

Hrishikesh: As you were writing it, how were you feeling about what you'd come up with?

Silvana: Yeah, I really liked this idea. I really liked this sense of saudade, no? Like, this impossible kind of nostalgia of the present.

(piano)

Hrishikesh: At the end of this voice memo, there's a little thing that happens that feels like a real document of what your headspace was in that moment:

(voice memo ends, Silvana says, "Anyway...")

Silvana: (laughs) *Pobrecita*. (laughs)

It was one of those relationships, you never know if you're in or out. I don't know how to say it. (laughs) Have you ever tried that?

Hrishikesh: (laughs)

Silvana: (laughs) It's really bad for your health. But I guess I was starting to understand, like, whoa, I'm gonna be very miserable in this relationship, but I don't wanna leave.

Hrishikesh: One thing that was interesting to me, is that you said "anyway" in English.

Silvana: Yeah. I feel like, as a Mexican, we don't have that attitude. Like, we never "don't care." We always care. So yeah, that attitude, it's more accurate to say it in English.

Hrishikesh: There's also a lyric in this first version that only exists in this version, um there's a line where you say "Déjame seguir cantando."

(Vocals: "*Déjame seguir cantando / Aunque vaya a amanecer...*")

Silvana: I'm saying "Please let me sing even if it's about to... sunrise?"

But I changed it, because when I started to do the chorus, I was gonna talk about singing. So I need to hold the idea of singing. Because I was gonna say, "te canto como un pájaro en la bruma," "I'm singing you as a bird in the middle of the fog." And I really want this image of a singing bird to be like, *boom*, the strongest moment that it's gonna kind of glue all the verses.

And now, the song's more dramatic. It's like, "Please leave me alone, even if I'm crying. Because what else can I do if I love you and you don't love me?"

So basically I was like, "drama, drama, drama, drama, drama," and then, "singing bird." (laughs)

Hrishikesh: (laughs) And where did that idea of the singing bird even come from?

Silvana: You know, a few months before the pandemic, I was like, oh my god, I have my first apartment, I'm gonna do so many parties. And like, I'm gonna have the time of my life. And then, two months after, it was like, COVID and the lockdown.

And I was kind of starting to finally ending this super toxic relationship. And the pandemic was like this really difficult mirror that confronted me. It was like, you know, "What am I doing with my life," uh, moment.

My insomnia went so bad that I was like, waking up at 6PM, spending the whole night trying to learn how to play guitar and falling asleep at like 8AM in the morning. So my highest peak, it was like at five in the morning and I was in this eighth floor. All my windows were looking directly to the trees. Even some branches of the trees were, like, entering my, my apartment.

Hrishikesh: Hm.

Silvana: So I started to feel like a bird. Because, you know, they don't sing for anybody. So that was definitely like, stuck in my mind, like, oh my god, I'm part of this group of birds who are completely lonely, and we're just singing our sorrows, not for anybody but for ourselves.

(second voice memo - guitar & vocals: "Se apagaron ya las luces / Ahora duerme la ciudad / Se entrelazarán las piernas / Por cariño y por piedad")

Hrishikesh: This feels so different from the first version. Just, the music feels so much less melancholy.

Silvana: I was trying to sound happy, which sounds a little bit pointless since the words are so sad. I guess I was just trying to find some light in the chords.

(Vocals: "Mientras todo el mundo duerme / Yo me trato de sanar")

Hrishikesh: So, this was in 2020, but this song didn't come out until several years later. So, what happened in the meantime?

Silvana: Then a bunch of things happened, you know. That year, I toured like, I don't know how many countries. I won my first Grammy.

And really bad things happened also. My best friend, he and his brother, they were murdered that same year. And I was so sad. Like, the amount of sadness I'm carrying is not even possible.

But at some point I was also feeling a bunch of pressure to do something else. Like, let's do another album, because like, okay, I know you're sad, but like, you need to do something, right? You need to do another album. You have the songs.

So, I guess part of my healing process was, you know, producing this album and producing "Como Un Pájaro", and just trying to find the right sound. Because I was so lost and afraid that it took me a while to come back to me.

Hrishikesh: So the next demo that I have is from September 2022; what was happening then?

Silvana: I was in Spain. I was with my band doing this residency.

(demo instrumental & vocals: "Y yo que no soy más que un mar de dudas / Que sola con mis sombras me tropiezo")

I have a really cool band, so I was like, I'm gonna use your skills to try some ideas out.

I think that was the moment where I said like, should I work with a producer? No. This is something I need to do myself because it's so personal and it's, it's me that is lost, so it's me that needs to find the way back.

Hrishikesh: My conversation with Silvana Estrada continues after this.

Silvana: You know, all my composer friends are always like, Silvana, you need to do

bridges. You only do verses and chorus. You never do bridges. But you know, I come from jazz and folkloric music, and there are no bridges.

So sometimes bridges to me sounds like this moment where you're actually not saying anything specifically. You're just "doing the bridge."

Hrishikesh: (chuckles)

Silvana: And I was like, no, I don't, I don't want to do that. I'm just gonna whistle.

(whistling melodic line)

It's not singing but sounds different.

(cont. whistling)

Since it was a demo, I wasn't thinking much about doing, like, a professional whistling or whatever. And then at the studio, I tried so many ways of doing it. Like, I even called a friend of mine, which is like a professional at it, and he whistled the melody and it was so perfect. And we were like, nope, we still prefer this whistling.

Hrishikesh: So, when you went to make the final version of the song, the version that's on the album, where did you end up doing that?

Silvana: In Casa Estudio El Desierto, which is Daniel Bitrán's studio, the engineer of the album and a really, really dear friend of mine.

I went to the studio and I remember I took the guitar and I was like, "Danny, I don't know if this is gonna be the day because I'm feeling tired."

And, and he was like, "Okay, but let's try first. Like, I already set the mics. Just take the guitar and sing the song, and let's see what happens."

(guitar & vocals: "Se apagaron ya las luces, ahora duerme la ciudad / Se entrelazarán las piernas por cariño o por piedad / Mientras yo prendo velitas en frasquitos de cristal / Que me cure la penumbra todo bien y todo mal / Mientras todo el mundo duerme, yo me trato de sanar")

We were like, oh! It happened. Let's not try it again. Let's keep it like that. And it was really a magical moment for us. It was like, great! Let's keep going.

(piano chords)

Roberto Verástegui, my piano player, I was, you know, showing him the song.

And he started to play those chords, no? Like, very simple, just to learn the harmony.

And I was like, “Just do that for the beginning, no?” And he was like, “For real? Like, it's boring, no?” And I was like, “No, no, no, no. Keep it, keep it. It's really nice to establish like, this is their harmony. After that, you can open.”

(more intricate piano)

(add drums)

We put together the drums and the piano at the same time.

(piano fades out)

The drum is like a transcription of the sound of, like, a Brazilian surdo. It gave the song, like, something really playful, like musically playful.

There's a really deep rhythmical conversation between the drums and the piano.

(add piano)

(upright bass)

Hrishikesh: What made you decide that you wanted to have upright bass on this song instead of electric bass?

Silvana: This is funny because actually, the first mix, my dad told me like, “Oh, it's crazy that you're using a synth instead of a upright bass.” Because my dad, he's a double bass player, like a upright bass player. And I was like, “Dad, that's a upright bass.” And he was like, “Oh! It doesn't sound like it.”

And we actually had to do something, like, mixing, it was too clean. Anyways. I really, I just, I love it. Grooving in a really folk way. (laughs)

(instrumental & vocals: “Déjame si estoy llorando / Aunque vaya a amanecer / Que por más que yo te quiera / Dime tú qué puedo hacer / Mientras todo el mundo duerme / Yo te dejo de querer”)

Hrishikesh: It's interesting to me that, as you're building this arrangement, you still only have one lead vocal; there's like, no harmonies, there are no backing vocals, no double, anything like that.

Silvana: I always keep my vocals as simple as I can. I don't know why. I guess that's my

singer-songwriter vein. Like, I never want anything, kind of, *compitiendo* with the words. You know, the kind of the universe of the song. It's always in order to support the message. And for a song like this, I think it's so important to protect and take care of that truth and that transparency, because it's not something you can fake.

(Vocals: "Te canto como un pájaro en la bruma / Y todo lo que fuimos lo lamento")

Hrishikesh: Could you translate those last words in the chorus, after you say "I sing to you like a bird in the fog?"

Silvana: Um. "And everything that we have been, I regret it."

Hrishikesh: Hm.

Silvana: You know what, this song comes from a really angry place. Like, the words are really harsh. That's where I started this song, for sure.

But then when I came back to the song, I was like, I want this to be more about solitude and contemplation than a, just a heartbroken song. To me, it was very cinematic, just the idea of loneliness. And like, the problem with being alone is, then you need to see all your demons. You need to face all of them.

And this reminded me so much to, like, the Hiya Miyazaki movies,

(clip from "One Summer Day" by JOE HISAISHI from Spirited Away)

Like *My Neighbor Totoro*, like *El Viaje de Chihiro* I don't know, *Spirited Away*, I think it's in English.

HH: Mm-hm.

Silvana: That I was like, oh, I need that kind of orchestral sweetness on this. Because I need sweetness to face all my ghosts and my demons and my pain. And life in general, it's pretty much sadness and pain. But I think the thing that keeps us alive, it's sweetness. And this song, it's full of, like, these vulnerable moments.

So for me it was like, no, this needs an orchestra. (laughs)

(strings & vocals: "Que sola con mis sombras me tropiezo / Te canto como un pájaro en la bruma / Y todo lo que fuimos lo lamento")

Hrishikesh: So we're talking now, and it's 2026; the song came out in 2025. You know, from that first moment in 2019, I'm just wondering, like, what is your relationship to the

song now? Both in terms of the evolution that it had and just, I guess, what it's about?

Silvana: Yeah. It's crazy because the other night, this song made me cry, actually. But now it's a different feeling.

(Rhodes electric piano)

You know, something really interesting happens with songs. It's like, some songs are there for you and you're not ready for them. I feel it, but I don't know it yet, where this is gonna lead, but I need to kind of be patient.

I see myself in this eighth floor, in the middle of the pandemic just hanging with birds. (laughs) And nobody else, and singing for nobody. And I see this song as a testimony of,

(add upright bass)

Of this young girl just trying to figure out her life and figure out what to do with solitude and sadness and pain. And finding beauty in that.

Hrishikesh: And now, here's "Como Un Pájaro," by Silvana Estrada, in its entirety.

("Como Un Pájaro" by SILVANA ESTRADA)

Visit songexploder.net to learn more. You'll find links to buy or stream the song.

This episode was produced by me, Craig Eley, Mary Dolan, and Kathleen Smith, with production assistance from Tiger Biskup. The episode artwork is by Carlos Lerma, and I made the show's theme music and logo.

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I'm Hrishikesh Hirway. Thanks for listening.