

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

She Almost Slept In. Then Hulu Threw the Hail Mary.

Vanessa Gonzalez's debut hour, Mamona, is a love letter to Laredo, a dare to the girl who was afraid of looking extra, and the special she paid for herself before a streamer called at the last second.

Interview by Paul Salfen • AMFM Magazine



Key art for Vanessa Gonzalez: Mamona, now streaming on Hulu. Courtesy Comedy Dynamics / Hulu.

Vanessa Gonzalez did not want to get out of bed. That is how the conversation with AMFM Managing Editor Paul Salfen starts — not with a press-kit victory lap, but with the opening line of her own hour. She had told herself she wasn't coming. She could sleep in. Then the room filled, the laughs landed, and the comic who has spent a career talking herself into the mic had to admit the thing comics hate to admit: the night they almost skipped is often the night that matters.

It's honestly so surreal, it's a dream come true. I keep pinching myself. I can't stop smiling. My face hurts.

The dream now has a home. Vanessa Gonzalez: Mamona, her debut stand-up special — written by Gonzalez, directed by Symone Baptiste, executive produced by the comic herself — premiered September 15 on Hulu. Runtime: fifty-nine minutes. Distributor: Comedy Dynamics. Origin story: a self-funded tape shot in Austin last December that was supposed to live on YouTube until Hulu walked in late, the way Drew Pearson used to walk under a football.

Salfen likes that comparison. He co-hosts with the Cowboys Hall of Famer, and the Hail Mary question is house ritual at AMFM. Gonzalez did not have to hunt for an answer. The special is the answer.

THE WORD SHE NEVER WANTED

Salfen asks her to explain the title, then admits he is not sure how to say it on the radio without stepping on it.

Mamona is Mexican slang Gonzalez learned growing up — someone who thinks she is better than everyone else. In the special she tries to wear it on purpose. She gives examples. She names the behavior. And she tells the truth underneath the joke: it was the one thing she never wanted to be called.

I would get in my own way, because I didn't want to be thought of as mamona. But now I'm trying to embrace it and be the most mamona I can be.

— VANESSA GONZALEZ

That is the engine of the hour. Raised by a devout Catholic mother and a witch grandmother in Laredo, on the Texas border, Gonzalez built a set about family chaos, cultural expectation, and the strange courage it takes to stop pleasing the room and start chasing the thing you actually want. The official logline is almost identical to what she says on tape. The tape just has more teeth.

She talks about her Catholic upbringing. She talks about the witch grandmother. She talks about starting to exercise and it not going so well. She talks about her trauma with hammocks. “There’s a lot going on,” she says, which is comedian for: the hour goes where it wants.

She also insists it is for everybody. Watch it with the family. There is language. Kids, parents, grandparents will still find themselves in it. Border stories travel farther than people who do not live on a border think they do.

WHEN FUNNY WAS THE ONLY WAY THEY LISTENED

Salfen wants the origin, not the bio. When did she know she had the gift — because a lot of people think they are funny.

I've been told I was funny since I was little. I think I first realized when my parents told me I was funny. They would actually give you attention if you made them laugh, but if you were crying or doing anything else, being bad, it was like, go to your room. But when you were funny, that's when they listened. So I learned that at an early age, that it's a good way to get attention.

It is a small sentence that explains a career. Attention as survival. Laughter as the room you are allowed to stay in. Years later she would be named a Just for Laughs New Face in 2017, Best

Stand-Up Comic in Austin by the Austin Chronicle in 2017, 2022, and 2023, and one of Variety's Top 10 Comics to Watch in 2022. The credits are real. The first laboratory was the kitchen.

She also names the artist who put the picture in her head. Growing up she watched John Leguizamo's one-man shows and thought: I want to do that. I want to make my own version of that. The thought that a little girl might watch Mamona and want the same thing "is just so overwhelming."

Advice for that girl is not soft.

Do it. Do it, you can. If you want to do it, don't listen to your parents, and just do what you want to do.

Salfen, who has spent two decades putting artists on the record, lets that one sit.

THE NIGHT YOU DON'T WANT TO GO

Before the Hail Mary, there is the ordinary terror of the job. Salfen tells her the opening of the special got him thinking — there are nights you are apprehensive to put yourself out there.

Every stand-up comic that I know, we book our shows, but a lot of the time, we don't want to go to them. Some days you don't feel funny, or you're tired, and it does take a lot to stand in front of a room and make people laugh. So it's great when you're feeling it, but when you're not, you really gotta look for it.

That is the unglamorous half of a special that now lives next to Disney-owned comedy on a streaming menu. Gonzalez knows the other half too. Creative people are hard on themselves. The downs come with the job. Her way out is not a mantra. It is a page.

Any time I'm in a down, I always just tell myself to write myself out of it. Write something new, get out there, do a show, and just start building the next thing. I just love writing, and I think it's therapeutic. Instead of waiting for the opportunities to come, it's like, make your own opportunities.

She is already building the next hour.



Vanessa Gonzalez onstage in Mamona. Photo: Emily Hicks / Comedy Dynamics.

HAIL MARY: SHE PAID FOR THE TAPE HERSELF

Salfen puts the Cowboys question on the table: the moment you have to go for it, and it works.

It was definitely this special. I self-funded this special last year in December. I was taking a shot. I invested in myself. And I thought I was going to just put this special on YouTube. But my director, Symone Baptiste, she was like, I think we should go for it. I think we should shop it around. I feel like someone will buy it.

Gonzalez was not convinced. The market is crowded. Everybody wants a comedy special. Why would anyone pick hers?

They started shopping it at the beginning of the year. A couple of nos arrived first. She was already mentally preparing to dump the file on YouTube.

Hulu came in, like a Hail Mary, at the last second, and was like, we want it, and we love it. It did feel like I caught the football and got a touchdown.

— VANESSA GONZALEZ

Salfen tells her she is basically a Disney princess now. Gonzalez wants the ride. “They gotta make a Mamona ride at Disneyland now.” Someone, somewhere, will have to explain that attraction to a child. She seems fine with that.

Pulling up the Hulu app and seeing herself there still registers as crazy. “I know,” she says. “It’s crazy.”

The shot itself was not an industry handout. The December taping was the comic putting her own money on the table and asking a room that already knew her to hold the hour. Baptiste's instinct — don't bury it on YouTube, take it to market — is the second Hail Mary inside the first. Gonzalez had the tape. Baptiste had the nerve to shop it.

A LOVE LETTER TO TEXAS

Without spoiling the set, Salfen asks what people are walking into. Family hour with some language. Border childhood. Catholic house, witch grandmother, failed exercise arcs, hammock trauma. "I think everyone will relate to it."

Then she places the geography, because the special is not generic stand-up with a Texas sticker on it.

I'll be in Texas on September 27th. I'll be doing a screening in Austin at Hyperreal. And I'm excited that I shot the special in Austin. The material is very — it's like a love letter to Texas. I grew up in Texas, in Laredo, Texas. So a lot of stories about growing up in the border, and I'm excited to come back and just say thanks to the people of Austin that have supported me my whole career.

That last clause is not courtesy. Austin named her best in the city three times. She built rooms there after Alexander High School in Laredo and a theater degree from Texas State. She ran with the Latino Comedy Project. She left for Los Angeles and kept coming back. The hour is the thank-you note with a microphone in it.

Fall dates are coming. Follow her at Vanessa G. Comedy — @vanessagcomedy everywhere that matters, vanessacomedy.com for the shop and the calendar. She is also going back to theater. A friend wrote a play. She started there. She wants more acting. She wants the world to see this special first.

WHAT'S NEXT — AND THE SPELL

Salfen asks the last question the magazine always asks when a first special lands: what do you want to accomplish next?

I would love a second special, that would be great, and hopefully you'll see me on my own show, on Hulu soon. We'll see.

Salfen says you have to throw it out into the world. Gonzalez agrees. "Gotta manifest. Gotta do all the spells." He suggests it might be a witchy one. Given the grandmother, that tracks.

Before they sign off, Salfen asks what made her laugh today. She has been on a press tour since morning. She cannot stop smiling. She cannot believe she is talking about her hour special. She is trying to take it all in.

And then the civic instruction, because Gonzalez does not treat comedy like a private luxury.

You just gotta laugh. I encourage you, wherever you are, look up some local comedy shows and go out to them. It's a good time. It's a way to get your mind off of work and anything that's going on, and you can just laugh for an hour and de-stress. It is the best medicine.

She almost slept in. She funded the tape. She collected the nos. Hulu called. The girl who learned that funny was how you got to stay in the room has an hour on a major streamer, a screening in the city that raised her stage, and a new definition of the insult she used to dodge.

Be the most mamona you can be. Then throw the ball.

FIND VANESSA GONZALEZ

Vanessa Gonzalez: Mamona — now streaming on Hulu and Hulu on Disney+

Directed by Symone Baptiste · Written by Vanessa Gonzalez · 59 minutes

Distributor: Comedy Dynamics · Executive producer: Vanessa Gonzalez

Austin screening: September 27, Hyperreal Film Club

Tour dates + merch: vanessacomedy.com

Social: [@vanessagcomedy](https://twitter.com/vanessagcomedy) · Follow Vanessa G. Comedy

Interview conducted by Paul Salfen for AMFM Magazine, September 2026.

Paul Salfen is Managing Editor of AMFM Magazine and a veteran interviewer of film, television, music, and sports figures. He is the author of Going For It!, a collection of Hail Mary moments from the artists and athletes he has spent two decades putting on the record.