



## Lido Pimienta Is Feeling Free

Canadian artist on her 2021 Grammys performance, her artistic triumph with 'Miss Colombia,' and what's next

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**Lido Pimienta** is at home in Toronto the day after releasing yet another visual feat — this time, it's the Orly Anan-directed video for her song “Coming Thru,” which features her presiding over an opulent table that brims with lush fruit and food. Her son, Lucian, chatters happily in the background of the interview as Pimienta walks around in her house, a place that seems to abound with just as much sound and color as her recent video set. “There’s not a single wall in this house that doesn’t have paint or crayon all over it,” she says.

A house draped in intricate crayon art fits into what someone might expect from an artist as preternaturally creative as Pimienta. Since the release of her 2016 breakthrough album, *La Papessa*, the Polaris prize winner has shown that her imagination is a bottomless wellspring of concepts and ideas. This Sunday, audiences will get to see some of that for themselves when she takes the stage during a Grammy pre-show performance, another collaboration with Anan. The description of the show that the singer offers is distinctly Lido: “It’s theatrical and curious. It’s like a dream, but it’s also a nightmare, but it’s funny. It’s all the things that I am in one song. It’s very special and I’m very extremely proud of this performance. People should grab a tissue — get some Kleenex, and just be ready.”

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In addition to the performance, Pimienta is also up for her first-ever Grammy Award. Her critically lauded album, *Miss Colombia*, is nominated for Best Latin Rock or Alternative Album, a category that is full of first-time nominees (with the exception of Argentine rocker Fito Páez). Even among a set of albums that include interesting sonic fusions and notable producers, *Miss Colombia* stands out with screaming vibrancy, like a confetti blast launched in a quiet exhibition hall. The megawatt songs bind indigenous and African folk rhythms from Colombia, where Pimienta was born, with glowing electronic sounds, all while tackling identity, inequality, and racism in the country. While *La Papessa* was an art project that Pimienta says “wasn’t even meant to be an album,” *Miss Colombia* is an album she created so carefully and deliberately that she hasn’t been completely surprised by the recognition it’s received. “I just feel like it makes sense,” she says. “This is exactly what needs to happen, because I put a lot of intention into this record.”

The inspiration behind *Miss Colombia* is a well-known story by now: In 2015, Pimienta watched with the rest of the world when Steve Harvey **mistakenly announced** the Miss Colombia contestant as that year’s Miss Universe over the actual winner, Miss Philippines. Pimienta, whose father is Afro-Colombian and whose mother is from the indigenous Wayuu ethnic group, saw how many people rallied behind the light-skinned Miss Colombia while lobbing racial slurs and attacks at both Harvey and Miss Philippines. It unleashed a knot of emotions for Pimienta and led her to rethink the concept of beauty, while interrogating the way she had romanticized the experience of Colombia as an immigrant in Canada. “When the Miss Colombia thing happened... I was like, ‘All of these things I’ve been feeling, I think I can put them in songs. ‘Eso Que Tu Haces’ came to me, ‘Resisto Y Ya’ came to me,” she remembers.

Pimienta dove deeper into songwriting and producing, teaming up with the artist and sound architect Matt Smith, a.k.a **Prince Nifty**. She’s likened making the album to taking a blindfold off, which explains the revelatory nature of *Miss Colombia*. Songs such as “Pelu Cuco” and “Resisto Y Ya” highlight black musical traditions and have also opened dialogues around the anti-blackness that runs through Latin America and Latinidad. Pimienta, who has always prioritized black Colombian music, has gone even deeper into these issues on social media. “I feel like I’ve been able to vocalize my thoughts way better, especially thanks to **Zahira [Kelly]**,” she says, referring to the scholar, thought leader, and critic who tweets as **@bad\_dominicana**. Particularly in the Latin industry, in which white, mainstream artists often build careers off of black genres without acknowledging their music’s black roots, Pimienta’s approach is distinct. “I don’t have to loot,” she says. “I don’t have to steal. My ideas are my own ideas. And that’s my currency.”

Her creative process has continued to flourish, and now, she’s crafting a new album, based on songs that capture the joy and freedom she’s experienced over the last few years. “They’re airy, they’re uplifting, extremely feminine, extremely soft, but so strong, like the brightness of the sun — I can only really describe it in metaphor,” she explains. Some of the music has come directly out of moments with her two children. “It started with this question, just like being with my baby and singing to her... It’s just such a beautiful moment that I was just like, ‘How can I turn this feeling into a song?’”

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The project has also found her at a time in which she’s been harnessing her power and recognizing the force she is artistically — particularly because she’s been true to her work, rather than tying her career to commercial objectives. In fact, she’s thrived: “I’m able to have integrity and I’m able to