

**STEPPING**

**OUT**





Stephanie  
Beatriz

Stephanie Beatriz has many voices – from gruff Rosa in *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* to *Encanto*'s plucky Mirabel. She tells **Jessica Prupas** how not finding a niche helped her find her place in Hollywood

PHOTOGRAPHS: ALEX G HARPER

# STEPHANIE BEATRIZ LETS OUT A SHRIEK AS HER IMAGE POPS UP ON MY SCREEN.

Behind her, I can see a fiery hellscape that resembles a post-apocalyptic Vegas – cars smoking, casinos dissolved into rubble, the Las Vegas sign upturned and flickering.

“Oh my God,” she yelps, “I left my green screen on from the press junket yesterday.”

She’d been promoting *Twisted Metal*, a new Peacock series based on the beloved PlayStation games, in which she stars opposite Anthony Mackie. She fumbles with some buttons, the right one escaping her (“You can put all this glamorous shit in the article,” she assures me). Eventually, the nightmarish scene is swapped for the seafoam walls of her home recording studio.

It’s early in LA, where she’s calling me from. We’re chatting before she settles in for a long day of voice work – one of her most successful hustles, having lent her voice to projects like *BoJack Horseman*, *Bob’s Burgers* and Disney mega-hit *Encanto*, in which she plays the story’s singing hero, Mirabel Madrigal.

But the voice that she’s perhaps best known for is the deadpan growl of *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*’s leather-clad “badass cop” Rosa Diaz. There are countless compilations online of Rosa’s most epicly stony one-liners, all delivered in a register that’s lower than the ocean floor. Stephanie’s real-life voice, though, is startlingly different: high-octave and enthusiastic, her sentences punctuated by exclamation points and the occasional, emphatic “girl”.

But I soon learn that there are many Stephanies: the self-proclaimed “nerd” from Houston who never quite found her place; the seasoned theatre actor who couldn’t see herself onscreen; the sitcom secret-weapon with impeccable comedic timing; and, finally, the serious thespian who shines in indie dramas like *Short Term 12* and *The Light of the Moon*.

All these Stephanies exist in tandem and make her an extremely versatile talent. And it’s this adaptability that’s allowed her to move through the Hollywood machine, especially since, according to her, she grew up as the “opposite of a nepo baby”.

When she told her family she wanted to pursue acting, they couldn’t offer any guidance. “Nobody, nobody, nobody knew how to start or what to do. Like, no one. My husband, when he was a kid, he wanted to be an actor and his parents helped him find a modelling agency and helped him find auditions. My parents didn’t have a clue.”

Her father, who is from Colombia, and her mother, who is from Bolivia, were living in Argentina when Stephanie was born. After she turned two, they brought her to Texas. It was a radical change of scene, but Stephanie doesn’t really remember the move or her early years in South America. In fact, she tells me she feels “deeply American”. When I ask her about her school years in Houston, she paints a cosy picture of teenage Americana that almost feels cinematic. “It’s stuff like, you know, learning how to sneak out of your apartment by opening the front door in a way that didn’t squeak, and climbing in the back of your friend’s truck and going to the movies on a Friday night... Sitting around in a basement playing video games for hours and hours,” she says.

Not to oversell it, she hastens to add: “You know how some people are like, ‘I would love to go back to high school.’ Absolutely not. No. It gives me the ick, as they say on *Love Island*,” she says, laughing.

She also had some access to Latin culture in Texas. On the weekends, she’d hang out with an extended group of Latine families her mother befriended through their church. “Maybe it was this big Easter celebration where everyone would be speaking Spanish; there’d be all this kind of different food. There was a piñata, there was an Easter egg hunt. There were all these Latino kids running around,” she tells me. “And then I’d go back to school and my friends were not Latino at school. And so, in a way, I was really balancing two different worlds.”

So, despite the star-spangled Americanness of her school years, she tells me that she still finds a kind of home in South America when she visits. “I feel very calm [there] and as if some part of me understands that I’m home. It’s really this feeling of, like, I’ve been here before. I know this place. It’s also the same feeling I get when I go to Texas.”

Stephanie has spoken about the importance of centring Latinidad – the great diversity of experiences and backgrounds shared by Latin people. Mainstream entertainment has, in many instances, flattened and stereotyped the Latin experience (see: the “spicy Latina” archetype, gangster shows like *Narcos*, narrow casting that gives the impressions of all Latin people looking the same). *Encanto* felt like a watershed moment for Latinidad – its characters are racially diverse and the animation brings to life the unique beauty of the Colombian landscape. ▶

Previous page:  
Top & skirt: Etro  
Shoes: Sam Edelman  
Ring: Saule  
Opposite: Vest & trousers: Dorothee Schumacher  
Shoes: Alevi Milano  
Earrings: Melinda Maria



Stephanie  
Beatriz



Playing Mirabel was also a watershed moment for Stephanie. First off, she fulfilled her dream of playing the modern-day equivalent of a Disney princess. Second, she was pregnant with her daughter and, famously, went into early labour when she was recording Mirabel's solo song, *Waiting on a Miracle*. "Oh, it was so cool. It was a special time," she recalls. She experienced contractions throughout the day which, thankfully, didn't affect her performance – but she tells me that she couldn't hide what her body was feeling during notes. "Lin-Manuel Miranda is giving me a note about trying to sing something a slightly different way and I'm just, like, gripping the chair," she recalls.

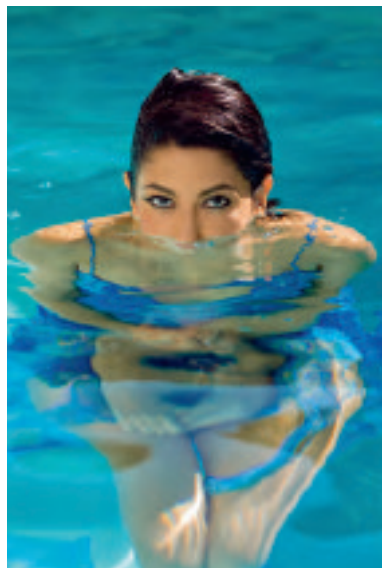
She tells me she wants to make clear that she "didn't feel pressure from Disney or anyone else to show up to work" that day. "What I felt was that I

## "THERE IS A FEELING OF BEING IN-BETWEEN ALL THE TIME. LIKE IN-BETWEEN CULTURES, IN-BETWEEN DIFFERENT GROUPS OF PEOPLE"

knew that [I wanted] to take my mind off this big thing, this birth of a kid, that I'd never experienced before. I mean the amount of people of colour, particularly Black women, who die in childbirth is insane in the United States, and I was really fearful going into labour and delivery."

Now that her daughter has just turned three, Stephanie watches *Encanto* with her. Being able to show her such a richly realised Colombia – having that direct line to their shared heritage – is a "phenomenal" experience, she tells me. Though she's not sure if the toddler has made the relevant connections yet. "It's sometimes weird because she'll point to [her Mirabel doll] and say 'Mirabel' and when we let her watch the [live] *Encanto at the Hollywood Bowl* show, she says, 'Mama,'" Stephanie says, laughing. "So I know she knows it's me, but I don't know how much she really, totally understands yet."

Another win for representation came on season five of *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, when Rosa came out as bisexual. The storyline came ▶



Opposite:  
Dress: Self-Portrait  
Shoes: Schutz  
Earrings: Nickho Rey  
Ring: Anabel Aram Jewellery  
Below:  
Dress: Francesca Miranda

## REACHING NEW HEIGHTS

### STEPHANIE BEATRIZ'S CV



#### Born

Stephanie Beatriz Bischoff Alvizuri was born 10 February 1981 in Nequén, Argentina, but moved to Texas with her family when she was two years old, settling outside Houston.

#### Education

She attended Clear Brook High School in Texas and went on to study theatre at Stephens College in Missouri before moving to New York to pursue acting full-time.

#### Fun fact

After she'd been cast in a string of indie dramas, Stephanie kept telling her agents she'd like to work on a "comedy like *Parks and Recreation*". Then she got the audition for *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, created by Dan Goor and Michael Schur, the same duo behind *Parks*. "Dreams come true, they really do," she says.

#### Key works

##### Brooklyn Nine-Nine (2013–21)

This long-running cop comedy has a stellar ensemble cast, including Andy Samberg and Terry Crews.

##### In the Heights (2021)

Stephanie got to show off her range in the film version of the Lin-Manuel Miranda-written musical.

##### Encanto (2021)

Stephanie plays heroine Mirabel Madrigal (above) in this monster Disney hit – also scored by Miranda – about a magical Colombian family at the turn of the 20th-century who lose their powers.

##### Twisted Metal (2023–)

Catch Stephanie as a brand-new character written into the TV version of the video-game series, released last month on Peacock.

after Stephanie's own public coming-out via a tweet, which inspired the showrunner, Dan Goor, to approach the actor and ask if she'd be "supportive of taking Rosa's storyline in that direction". "I said, 'Absolutely, f\*\*k yeah,'" she recalls. "And then I met with our writing staff and basically talked about my own experience. I felt that I gave them enough that I was comfortable having parts of that laced into the show."

She thought that it was important for the writers to address how, even still, the experience of bisexual people can be dismissed or diminished. "Many people will say, well, bisexuality's not a real thing. Oh, well, if you marry a man then it's fine," she says. "I just have heard that so many times from people that are bi, that you're not bi anymore if you marry the opposite sex."

This dismissive attitude from other people in the community can make bisexual people feel a sort of identity whiplash – alienated from the queer community, but clearly not belonging to the hetero world. That caught-between feeling is one Stephanie is familiar with in many arenas of her life. "There is a feeling of being in-between all the time," she says. "Like in-between different cultures, in-between different groups of people. I feel constantly like I've got one foot on one part of it and the other foot on another part of it. And the crack in-between me is a fault line [that's] always moving."

Dress: Kika Vargas  
Shoes: Charles & Keith  
Earrings: Nickho Rey



**"WHEN I'M ALLOWED TO DO THE THINGS I KNOW I CAN DO, PRETTY GOOD STUFF HAPPENS SOMETIMES"**

Still, this kind of fluidity can be ripe ground for creativity. In her early career, Stephanie felt like she didn't have a place in film and TV. The industry was different then – narrower – and she became content with the idea that she would be a theatre actor performing classics at festivals across the country. But when she was booted out by her New York roommates, she decided she'd go to LA and "figure it out". She was cast in *Short Term 12* fairly soon and then *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* not long after. "It made me feel like, oh, there is a place for me," she remembers. "What I can bring to the table is specific and it's not always going to fit everything but, when I'm allowed to do the things that I know I can do or push myself, pretty good stuff happens sometimes."

These days, she's feeling more confident than ever – particularly in her comedic ability, which she puts down to the freedom she and her

co-stars were afforded on the set of *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*. She's also feeling confident in the power of art to spark social change. "One of the things that we might be seeing right now is how art is affecting change against these big institutions that seem to have all the power, but really we, the people, have all the power," she says, then catches herself. "Oh my God, did I just quote the Constitution?"

🎧 Watch *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* and listen to *Encanto*

## COP TALK

### ROSA DIAZ'S GREATEST LINES



**"There's this thing I do whenever I feel. Burn. Everything"**

When fellow cop Boyle asks Rosa for advice on getting over his breakup, he gets a typically chaotic response.

**"Plans are plans. I'm a badass, not an anarchist"**

Even though Rosa thinks her parents are "smiley morons", she won't cancel plans with them.

**"I never throw up. I just tell my stomach to deal with it and my body is terrified of me"**

Rosa has remarkable control over her own faculties.

**"A place where everyone knows your name is hell. You're describing hell"**

Bubbly Amy gets shut down when she compares the pub they're in to the one from *Cheers*.