Ruben Blades

Ruben Blades enrolled at the National University of Panama to study law. In 1974, Ruben graduated from the University, a full-registered lawyer, and went to work at the National Bank of Panama as one of its attorneys. In 1972, while visiting the island of Puerto Rico, Richie Ray and Bobby Cruz, two top Latin musicians from the island, brought Ruben’s talents to the attention of Fania Records. Ruben was offered a contract and there was no immediate opportunity for him to record. In 1974, with a law degree and all his legal cases taken care of, Ruben decided to come to New York in order to find out once and for all if he could make it in the music business. Nobody knew him musically so his services weren’t required by the established bands in New York and Fania Records wasn’t yet prepared to record him. But he remained confident of his possibilities and decided to hang around. He took the only thing that Fania Records could offer him at the time: a job in the mailroom of the biggest salsa recording company in New York.

Some of the artists in the company that were aware of Ruben’s talents felt he shouldn’t be doing this kind of job. But Ruben felt it was necessary to do this in order to stay in touch with what was happening at Fania. He recalls: “Young kids who are listening should realize that a lot of the things you have to spend time doing things you don’t want to do in order to get the things you want.”

And what Ruben wanted came at Fania’s mailroom door one day in the person of Ray Barretto. Ray was looking for a new singer for his band and asked Ruben to audition for him. Ruben was hired right away. He recorded four songs on Barretto’s new album, two of them his own compositions “Canto Niche,” and a slow bolero, “Eso Es Amor.”

In 1976, Ruben saw his opportunity to team up with Willie Colon, whom he had known since 1969. Their first LP “Metiendo Mano,” was the beginning of a mutually satisfying and successful partnership. That LP was recently awarded a #1 award in the trade publications.

Ruben’s desire to upgrade the material that he is being written for the Latin music field led him to pursue a composing career on his own. Consequently, many recent Latin hits have been written by Ruben Blades. He is highly admired by his own peers, who are anxious to record Ruben’s tunes. Ricardo Montalban recorded “Guapito El Riendo,” Isabel Miranda recorded “Amor Profundo.” Celso Piña, Salsa Armero, “Amar Pe” and “Raphael” have compositions like “Salsa a la Cubana” and “Bobby Rodríguez Y La Guarnición.” Ruben has been signed by WEA to a recording deal with Warner Bros.

No Formal Training

Never leaving his roots, Ruben Blades is without a formal training in music. Ruben’s understanding of the musical process is amazing. He views the total picture, in the context of cultural development, and as such he tackles the difficult task of writing lyrics. And his lyrics are truly inspirational. Ruben himself is still surprised at the public’s reactions to the words of his songs. But he knows that through his lyrics a salsa can become a truly folkloric expression of the people and their times. His contention is that you can also make it educational and reflect the realities of the time and place. “Our music has always been applied to the problems of the day,” he says. “My contention is that you can also make it educational and reflect the realities of the times.”

A very private man, Ruben Blades is not given to the flashy stage costumes that characterize other performers. Especially The All-Star, Ruben is simplistic about the fact that he is going on stage to sing, not to put on a fancy show. The enthusiastic reception by his fans proves that right on down the line, people are appreciative of melodies and flexible sonics are existing; his understanding of the rhythmic phrase, how to play around with it, how to make it more interesting, makes him a giant in the Latin field. And despite all his courageous costuming and glitter on the stage, Ruben’s vocal glitter should show the people...

BMI Opens In P.R.

NEW YORK — BMI has opened up a licensing department branch in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The office will be run by Carlitos Vazquez who has direct operations of the office, whose prime territory also includes the Virgin Islands.

BMI-San Juan is located in Suite 105, Plan Am Building, 225 Ponce De Leon Ave., Hato Rey, Puerto Rico.

LATIN BEATS

Keep your eye on Ruben Blades because he is going to transform salsa. This comment was made by one of the best discoverers of new talents in the Latin music field, Chico Feliciano. And his words again prove to be true — Ruben Blades is turning salsa around.

Ruben was born in Pueblo Nuevo, Panama. His father was a fisherman and he has a brother, displayed an interest in music since he was a child. His parents stressed that he follow other directions. It was to please his parents that he...