Rock Bill

Difford & Tillbrook Remodel
Rubén Blades' America
Princely Ambitions

GENERAL PUBLIC
Inside RockBill

July 1984

LIP SERVICE
Offhand remarks, new releases, rumours, lies, scandalous stories.

DIFFORD AND TILBROOK
“It never entered our minds that one day it might not be as good as it once was.”

THE THE
“It’s nice to caress people’s ears while they listen to music so they get drawn into it.”

COVER STORY
The beat bops into the General Public, uh-huh-uh-huh-uh-huh.

RUBÉN BLADES
“Music has rescued the popular voice.”

THE JAMAICA DIARIES, II
I realize that the music is the escape and the escape is the music and the soul is in the struggle and the struggle is in the people and none could survive without the interdependency.

GRACE JONES
“If I don’t have variety, I get bored.”

THE BRONX BREAKS
“Sometimes you need that underdog music that gets you really rocking.”

A FAN’S NOTES
Long may Prince reign!

MTV PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS
What’s coming on MTV music television.

THE GAME
The Eyes have it.

More with Less

Volume 3, Number 7, Issue 25. RockBill Magazine is a Rove Communications publication. All contents are copyright © 1984 by Rove Communications Inc. All rights reserved. Nothing may be reproduced in any manner whole or part, without written permission from the publisher. RockBill is a registered trademark of RockBill, Inc. Jay Coleman, President, Joshua Simons, Executive V.P., and a exclusively licensed to Rove Communications Inc. RockBill Magazine is published monthly, twelve times a year. Subscription rates are $15.00 for one year. Unsolicited materials are welcome but we cannot guarantee return. RockBill Magazine, 850 Seventh Avenue, N.Y., N.Y. 10019. (212) 977-7745. Done by no other.

Publisher
JAY COLEMAN

Associate Publisher
JOSHUA C. SIMONS

Editor
STUART MATRANGA

Art Director
CLIFF SOGAN

Executive Editor
ROBERT O’BRIAN

Senior Editor
ROBERT BLAU

Managing Editor
ROBERT EDLESTON

Editorial Assistant
MIRIAM EPSTEIN

Advertising Consultant
AYE M. KOBIN

Eastern Advertising Manager
DANA NEMNY

A.E. Special Projects
ALISON WOODS

Marketing/ Circulation Director
SHERIEN FIALKOFF

Marketing/ Promotion Director
ZACHARIAH BLOOM

Administrative Assistant
PAM J. DOHERTY

Associate Editors
ROBERT ANDERSON
RAY NAPOLITANO

Correspondents
MADU GAMA
MIKE HAMMER
KAPER HAUSER
ADAM KADMON
DOUGLAS MATRANGA
KID MILLIONS
LOU O’NEILL JR.
STEVE OSTER
ART PHILLIPS
FORTY SEVEN

18
26
22
24
26
29
30

10

8

10

12

$1.25

Volume 3, Number 7, Issue 25.
Rubén Blades

BY STUART MATRANGA

To speak of Rubén Blades is to tell the story of six thousand years of solitude. The life beat of his songs reverberate in prison cells from San Salvador to Johannesburg. But, it is a tale told everyday on the streetscorners of the city to which we all belong. Roy George may pine about being a man with no convictions in "Karma Chameleon," but tell him not to sing it in Spanish in Latin America, where "you live and breathe politics because it affects your everyday life." No, Rubén Blades says. "If that line means we'll have a large portion of the youth without any convictions, then we're fucked."

People are disappearing south of the tropic of cancer. They're falling off the face of the Earth and nobody talks of it in the daylight. But Rubén Blades is singing about people waking up under a dictatorship, and he's waiting for the world's youth to free themselves from the bonds of physical, spiritual and mental slavery.

A Panamanian of West Indian heritage, Blades began his career in a rock band back home. He moved over into "salsa" dance music becoming world-renowned working with his band Seis del Solar (Six from the Tene-ment) and South Bronx trombonist Willie Colon. Somewhere in there he achieved a law degree, and after ten years living in New York, he's commuting to Cambridge in the fall to work on a doctorate in International Law at Harvard. One day he could become president of Panama, but for now he's expanding his audience beyond the Latin clubs. Though his latest LP Bus- cando America (Looking for America) is sung in Spanish, there is at times a radical break from "the confinements of structure set by the Afro-Cuban music of the '30s and '40s" and he's included translated lyrics. His goal is to touch the youth of the world—but he's moving at his own pace, careful to bring his loyal and growing audience with him by increments.

It will be on his next album, probably to be produced by his friend and fan, Joe Jackson, and sung in English, that Rubén Blades will draw the ears and hearts of most Norteamericanos. Comparisons to Bruce Springsteen, Tom Waits and Laurie Anderson as other urban story-singers come easily. "We don't take the intelligence of our audience for granted," says Blades.

"We address (our subjects) from a fresh point of view; with respect, and we're careful about the honesty and quality of what we're doing...We're not thinking in terms of how we are going to please people. We do something because it is in our guts. The nature of our sincerity and whatever inherent talent our presentation has makes people react to it. For me, it's the valid measure of touching someone."

Beyond the doctorate and a summer tour and working with Joe Jackson, the inexhaustible Blades is at work on an album inspired by the early short stories of Nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez. "He asked me 'What exactly are you going to do to them, Rubén?' I said 'I'm not going to interpret you. Forget that! I'm going to write what I feel after I read them. You may not even be in accordance.' He was puzzled and wrote in a column that he didn't know what in the hell would come of it."

For Blades, a man with many convictions and wise enough to see the folly of political parties, it is always an issue of humanity above all else.

"What happened in Argentina (for example) is as horrible a discovery as what happened to the Jews in World War Two, because in Argentina the degree of cruelty and the sophistication in the administration of torture is unparalleled in South American history. Mothers whose children were killed inside of them! These (killers) were people who had mothers, fathers, sisters, friends. Then you ask how could these people do that? What is that nerve that prevents me from doing that? I don't know. It is very easy to say 'I would never do it', but I don't think it's acceptable or wise to just wash away the possibility of us becoming like that. The idea is to say I could become that way and face it and watch it, so you don't end up being like that. Part of the reason for this album is to present, especially to the Latin American youth, these urban songs in the hopes that they'll be aware of the power of music as a social communicator. Music can work on behalf of those who do not have the facility of utilizing the media, television or print, because of censorship. Music has rescued the popular voice. Youth all over Latin America are going to prevent (dictatorships) in the future. It doesn't matter how many they ban us. We must ban forgetfulness. We can't forget...."

"This album is not going to go away. It's not a newspaper that hits you with 'Thirty people disappeared. President Reagan went to China and it's gone—if it even appears at all. The song survives all that and stays. That's why it is especially important in countries where history is still being written. Sing it and it stays."