

The salsa sizzles with Ruben Blades and the Roberto Delgado Orchestra at New Orleans Jazz Fest



Ruben Blades & Roberto Delgado Orchestra performing at the Acura stage during the New Orleans Jazz Fest at the Fair Grounds in New Orleans Friday, April 25, 2014.

By [Andrew Adler](#)
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Ruben Blades is a generous soul. How do we know this? Perhaps because his performance Friday (April 25) afternoon at [2014 New Orleans Jazz Fest](#) was as much about his backing band -- the Roberto Delgado Orchestra -- as it was about himself.

Opportunities when Blades, an acknowledged superstar of Latin music who crosses boundaries as easily as borders, might have demanded attention became quite the opposite. He was content, eager, even, to allow his instrumental colleagues considerable expressive space.

"They all have visas," he quipped, alluding to the ensemble's Panamanian origins. Visas that might as well be stamped, "*magnifico*."

Blades claims a wide, ardent listenership, as evidenced by the legions of fans who stood up to the mid-afternoon sun bearing down on the [Acura Stage](#) field. Few people sat still, or stood still. This wasn't so much to catch an elusive breeze as to sway to the vivid rhythms of the musicians in front of them. Knock down a cold beer while giving yourself over to the moment, and you could fully acknowledge the satisfactions at hand.

"It's a pleasure to be here in the land of my ancestors," Blades told the crowd, explaining that his grandfather was born in New Orleans, and that it had been almost two decades since the grandson last performed here. He celebrated "people like myself, who come from a family of dreamers, working class."

For nearly 90 minutes he'd embrace the notion of "one America, *un America*," in which the only distinctions that matter are those rooted in musical truth.

As a singer, Blades is fundamentally refined, just angular enough at selected junctures to punctuate a phrase with appropriate grit. He dedicated songs to Jos  Feliciano, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and a Peruvian poet, declaring that "death only begins with forgetfulness."

Reflecting his eclectic stylistic perspective, one number even explored "a child's point of view on a divorce."

Of course there was "Mack the Knife," Blades transitioning neatly from English into Spanish, prompting squeals of delight from listeners in full sympathy with his music and his method. Almost before you realized how much time had passed, he was gone, leaving undiminished heat and, for more than a few, unrequited please for more, more, more.

Earlier in the day, Blades was [interviewed in the Allison Miner Music Heritage Stage](#).



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