

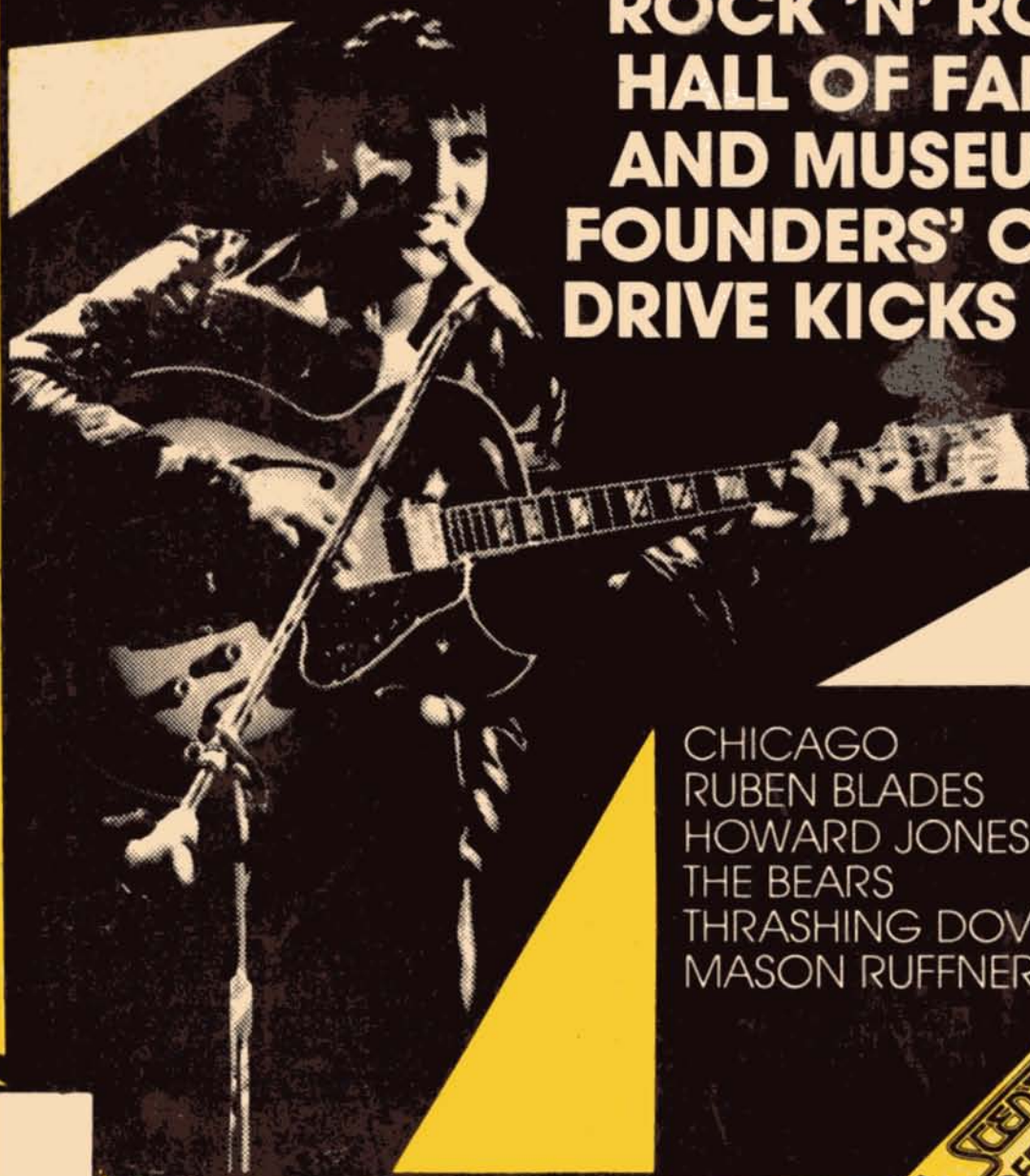
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Ruben Blades:

American original

by Marc Holan

Agua De Luna, Ruben Blades' latest album, marks a new plateau in the career of Blades the distinguished Panamanian singer-songwriter-actor.

Translated as "Moon Water," the album consists of eight songs inspired by the early short stories of the noted Colombian author Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

"In the beginning of 1981," Blades told SCENE from his manager's office in Manhattan, "I was reading a short story by Gabriel Garcia Marquez called 'Bitterness For Three Sleepwalkers,' and when I finished reading it, I wrote a song. It kind of surprised me that I did it, and then I started to think, Well, maybe I can do this seven more times. It would be interesting to write an album based on a work of literature.

"So I called Marquez and said, 'What do you think? And he said, 'Go ahead. I think it's a wonderful idea.' But I'll never forget he told me, 'Do it yourself. Don't wait for me because I'm a writer, too, and you'll never finish.'

"Then from 1981 on, I started reading and

writing, reading and writing, and then I would leave it alone for a while. Then later on, it all resulted in this record five years later."

But Blades didn't set out to put Marquez' words to music. "I didn't want to write adaptations," he explained. "I wanted to write inspired by them. And, of course, I was being affected by all of the political, economical and social occurrences in Latin America and the world, for that matter, in that period."

Eventually, however, *Agua De Luna* is an album of hope, and Blades who, two years ago, earned his master's degree in International Law from the Harvard Law School is considering running for public office in his native country. He remains optimistic about the future of Latin America.

"What this album is actually saying," Blades said, "is that we can re-invent ourselves. We can re-invent ourselves in spite of all the anger. We can re-invent ourselves in spite of all the pain. We can re-invent ourselves in spite of our disappointments, and by re-



inventing ourselves, we can re-define our lives and our roles by getting rid of the legacies of the spiritual vices which were given to us by our colonial background.

"America," Blades continued, "can re-invent itself and really go forward, push towards the consolidation of the idea, an idea that continues to be an idea which, in a way, was expressed in *Buscando America* (Blades' previous album, *Search For America*). We have the continent, but the idea itself has not materialized. If we re-invent ourselves, we can, in fact, do it."

Having just completed filming "The Milagro Beanfield War" with Robert Redford directing, Blades has just embarked

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on a rare American Tour.
He and his seven-piece
band, *Seis del Solar*, will be
making their first Clevel-
and appearance at the
Hanna Theatre this Friday,
June 5.

About the prospects of a
United Nations of Ameri-
ca, Blades again expressed
optimism. "I don't know if
that would happen,
politically speaking," he
said, "but I do think that
there will come a time in
America when we will
understand that in order
to survive, we must help
each other and respect
each other.

"In that sense then, if

not a political form of
government, there will be
a heart beating. There will
be an American heartbeat,
one that will not only
move the interests of the
North but one that will
move the interests of
America."

In addition to starring
opposite Whoopi Gold-
berg in the film "Fatal
Beauty," Blades has
another Spanish album
coming out in 1988 and his
first English album, a
project that he hopes to
start recording in July.

"I tell you," Blades
enthused, "this album is
going to surprise many
people. I worked with Lou
Reed and Elvis Costello,
and we wrote some great
songs together. As a result
of the collaboration, I
realized that I could, in
fact, write in English and
not be afraid of coming
across as some Latin trying
to write in English and also
not to compromise my
own views in terms of the
integrity and character of
my work. I wanted to
achieve the same degree
of truth that I achieve so
easily in Spanish.

"At the time," Blades
concluded, I was really
concerned with people
mistaking it for some sort
of token contribution or
some sort of mad dash for
the big bucks. But, in time,
I realized why I was doing
it.

"This is really the first
time an Afro-Cuban
musician has collaborated
with rock musicians, but
the bottom line is that
we're both playing street
music. It also would help
to show that talent really
has no nationality and no
boundaries. Art is art."

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THE REGGAE SUNSPASH Front Row May 27

People often say, "All reggae music sounds the same." But the diversified audience that filled half the Front Row last Wednesday for the Reggae Sunsplash would disagree. Sounds of pop, rap, roots, rhythm and blues, jazz—it was all there, but it was all reggae. The five featured artists—Carlene Davis, Peter Metro, Mutubaruka, Chalice and Freddie MacGregor with his Studio One Band—provided the lively crowd with a sense of reggae's culture, Jamaica's history and Rastafarian's mystical beliefs. They were celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Sunsplash tour, the 25th anniversary of Jamaica's independence and the 100th anniversary of the country's first national hero, Marcus Mosiah Garvey. And celebrate is just what they did, in the tradition of reggae messiah Bob Marley, whose influential memory is obviously still alive in the hearts of these rebel musicians.

Opening the show was the only female performer on the tour, Carlene Davis. They call her "Da Mover," known for taking her reggae music around the world since she left Jamaica in 1967. With her energetic voice, she sang a medley of her hit songs, which added today's pop sound to the reggae beat. "Oh Brother Bob," her latest single, showed her admiration for "the man who sang for freedom." The crowd cheered for the Sunsplash anti-apartheid stand when she sang a tribute to South African Winnie Mandela.

Peter Metro's variety of music showed his flexible talent, as the tall, skinny Jamaican moved about the stage in his red and black leather sneakers, bermuda shorts and matching shirt. The "D.J. (Jamaican for rapper) of the Year" got the attentive crowd going with his rap reggae, which

Metro's high speed, witty rap was difficult to understand at times, as he jumped from one issue to another. He added a touch of Eddie Murphy style comedy to the issues, as he rapped about apartheid, AIDS, sex, cocaine and the herbs.

The same six-man band stayed on stage for the first three acts, as they thoroughly enjoyed providing Jamaica's own unhurried sound, which puts accent on the bass-heavy upbeat. But they provided a unique atmosphere for each performer, especially Mutubaruka—the powerful dub poet.

He began his performance in the darkness of the audience, and walked barefoot to the stage dressed in white with red, green and gold trim. Mutubaruka is a very serious singer with a powerfully echoing voice that makes his Rasta message clear as he swings his dreadlocks back and forth. He preached about politics, for freedom in South Africa and about the Rastafarian way of life. He preached about the evils of cocaine in a song about a young Johnny in Brooklyn. It was a captivating moment when he recited "Dis Poem" without music, because "when dey dance, dey don't hear da words."

The climax of the show was a very entertaining performance by Chalice. The Kingston, Jamaica natives played a variety of reggae, from roots to rhythm and blues to Americanized reggae. The reggae beat was dismissed as singer/guitarist Wayne Armond successfully sounded like The Boss, scratchy voice and all, as he sang "Trapped," a song written by reggae great Jimmy Cliff and performed by "Brother Bruce Springsteen" on the *We Are the World* album. The band put down their guitars and lined up for a 1950s dance hall style version of a reggae hit, "Boom She Boom," complete with sliding feet, snapping fingers, doo-ops

doing that contagious reggae dance, and if they weren't standing, they weren't sitting still.

As were all the Sunsplash performers, Freddie MacGregor was a winner of a JAMI (Jamaican Music Industry) award for 1986-87. "Out of many, One people" is the motto of Jamaica, which MacGregor brought to life. He sang "All In The Same Boat," emphasizing their philosophy of uniting all people. He had the least variety in the show, but the horn section of his Studio One Band added a touch of jazz to his performance.

Emcee Tommy Cowen did a professional job of keeping the Sunsplash flowing from one act to the next. Wearing a suit, swinging his dreadlocks and moving his hands rapidly, he provided an interesting history of the music, the musicians and the country. As the Studio One Band set up, Cowen spontaneously recited classic Marley lyrics, such as "Redemption Song" and the crowd voluntarily joined him in singing. When a white man ran up to the stage to shake his hand he proudly said, "Rastafari is for everyone."

It was disappointing that the two and a half hour show did not end with a song by all the performers

together. But the crowd left "feeling irie."

Liz Manning

BUDDY HACKETT, SANDY HACKETT Front Row May 28

When that unseen resonant voice which announces the introduction of the acts (and intermissions) said, "Ladies and gentlemen... please welcome Sandy Hackett," my mind, like everyone else's, drew a blank. "On no," I thought, "this guy is going to have his daughter come out and sing songs." But to a lukewarm response Buddy Hackett's son, Sandy, bounded onto the stage and quickly broke into a cover version of Billy Joel's "Easy Money." His stylishly snappy apparel and his showbiz mannerisms created impressions of Frank Sinatra when he was young, which, at first, made the younger Hackett seem like one of those hokey lounge singers that comedians love to parody.

Without missing a beat he started into another song when suddenly down the aisle came his dad, comedian Buddy Hackett, dressed in only a pink bathrobe and blue socks, to interrupt the proceedings. Centerstage, the father/son duo exchanged

a bit of banter themselves, the son played man, the senior walked around greeting people, shooting-off one about five minutes


Appearing on the senior Hackett stage to let his son to his portion of. As it turned out, Hackett has a great act with his own monologues, comical song medley impersonations, with Kermit the medley of rainbows in which he supplies voices and his show stopping rendition of Blues Brother Blues, doing comical playing harmonica singing "Hey Baby" truly delight audience.

The gentle hum of blue lights that lit the stage in anticipation of Buddy Hackett's appropriate arrival have been an indication as to the show he would perform you have seen and "specials" on HBO you already know Hackett is an old

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