

Larry Hagman's wry view of *Dallas*' 1st decade

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People PICKS & PANS



Rubén Blades

Trying to see if his music is still as communicative in English as it is in Spanish

Song

▲ NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

Rubén Blades

Blades has been thinking about making an album in English for years. The problem for the Panamanian-born singer-songwriter, whose perceptive, biting Spanish lyrics and hot band have modernized salsa and won him a worldwide following, was finding a comfortable musical idiom in which English would not be incongruous. For a while he thought of drawing on his West Indian heritage (Blades's paternal grandfather came from Saint Lucia) and creating an English-speaking, calypso-playing character, Panama Blades. What he has done on *Nothing but the Truth* may find a wider audience than Panama Blades could have. It's also more ambitious. But it lacks the focus a Panama Blades album might have had—and that Blades's salsa LPs on Elektra have had in spades. The idiom Blades has found is basically American mainstream rock with a Latin flavor, a difficult hybrid that might have worked better played by one band rather than a shifting cast of studio musicians and guest stars, including members of his own group, Seis del Solar. Blades collaborated on three songs with Lou Reed and on two with Elvis Costello. *Shamed Into Love* is a ballad heavily stamped with Costello's brand of throat-catching romantic angst, and Blades sings it very much in the Costello style. Interesting but not as compelling as Blades or Costello on their own. Some gritty guitar work by Reed and Mike Rathke flavors *Letters to the Vatican*, with Reed and Blades's fondness for nar-

ratives and street characters meshing to produce a wry tale of a barfly named Rosie who writes in a letter: "Dear Pope, Send me some hope or a rope to do me in." Cute and catchy, with some punch, but you expect more from Blades. A couple of his own songs, such as *Salvador*, sound like his regular material only sung in English. It's hard to tell if lines like "Judges that condemn you have no names / Could it be the gentleman that lives next door / Or the guy who goes with you to work?" might sound better in Spanish. But for an English-speaking listener, Blades's Spanish lyrics always made a sparkling music in themselves, and these English lyrics don't. Maybe next time. (Elektra)—**Eric Levin**

▲ BLOW UP YOUR VIDEO

AC/DC

"Get ready to rock / Get ready to roll." Those are the first words of the first song on this album. Okay, it's a simple, even simplistic sentiment, but it expresses a promise (or maybe a threat) on which this raunchy Aussie quintet always delivers. *Blow Up Your Video*, however, isn't one of the group's better outings by any means (just listen to the track *Two's Up—yecch*). Subtleties aren't important, though, because Angus Young and his lads have the hard, fast and loud formula down so pat. You could cryogenically freeze AC/DC, thaw them out in 400 years, and they'd probably roll out of their pods, plug in their instruments and pin back your ears with diesel-powered rock like *Go Zone* (one of the album's better



The Milagro Beanfield War
Eloy Vigil, Alberto Morin and Natividad Vacio, coming to the aid of a compadre

Screen

▲ THE MILAGRO BEANFIELD WAR

You can choke on the hard-sell integrity of Robert Redford's second film as a director (he won an Oscar for his first, 1980's *Ordinary People*). He didn't just make the movie; he fought to make it. Redford has said people told him: "Ah, who cares about Mexicans in the mountains, fighting about water?" But he persevered. Redford loves the West (he lives in Utah) and cares about the threat of cultural extinction when you put dollars for land development in contest with tradition. John Nichols' rambling, 200-character 1974 novel about the Spanish, Mexican and Indian world of northern New Mexico touched him deeply. So Redford hired a largely Hispanic cast and crew and went to work. Give the man an A in civics. But forgive audiences for thinking they might be in for an endurance test. Surprise, they're not. *Milagro* is a robust, comic and openhearted film of disarming simplicity. Full of flaws, mind you, but the film is not quite the kind of ponderous *Beans of Wrath* saga you may have feared. Redford goes easy on the novel's politics, polemics and allegorical allusions to Vietnam. Co-screenwriter David (The Sting) Ward has helped Nichols pare down his book. Center screen is Joe Mondragon, a Chicano handyman who illegally irrigates his late father's abandoned bean field with water belonging to a commercial developer. The Hispanic locals cheer, seeing the bean field as a symbol of their past risen from the dust. The revolution is on. Redford gets good, unforced performances from Chick (Yanks) Vennera as Mondragon, salsa singer-songwriter Rubén Blades as Milagro's shrewd sheriff and Sonia (Kiss of the Spider Woman) Braga as the rabble-rousing owner of the town's auto repair shop. He fares less well with some of the Anglo actors in the cast. Richard Bradford as the venal developer,

Christopher Walken as an undercover agent for the state police and John Heard as a disillusioned liberal lawyer are rarely able to sidestep their stereotypical roles. Redford leaves no doubt about which side he's on. The shots of the undeveloped landscape in sunlight or storm are breathtaking enough to make the blot of condos and tennis courts appear unbearable. But Redford is realist enough to know that so-called progress cannot be long held at bay. So he has turned his film into a fable in which even the bad guys eventually come to their senses. An angel of the past (Robert Carricart) in sombrero and poncho hovers protectively over Milagro, talking to an old man (Carlos Riquelme) who represents the dignity of a people under siege. Riquelme, a 74-year-old Mexican comic actor, is the film's glory. Whether he is chatting with his pet pig, contemplating the folly of his children or thanking God for granting him the gift of another day, Riquelme takes full measure of what is lost when tradition is trampled. His is a beautiful, haunting performance. Redford



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can be easily pardoned for giving the old man a sentimental last walk into the sunset. *Milagro* may fall somewhere short of being a dream film, but Redford can take justifiable pride in having made the film of his dreams. (R)—Peter Travers

▲ D.O.A.

Take away the silliness and most of the killings, and this would be a snappy, absorbing suspense film. Of course, it would also be about a three-minute suspense film, since silliness and killing is practically all that goes on. For instance: Dennis Quaid, as an English professor at a Texas college, has been poisoned, there is no antidote, and he has only a few hours to live. He has witnessed four deaths and is on the run from the police. They have not thought to look for him in his office, where he is hiding with Meg (Top Gun) Ryan, the coed whose wrist he glued to his own so she couldn't turn him in. That was before the crazed killer with the nail-shooting gun came after them, needless to say. So here they are, sweaty, exhausted, bloody, dirty, terrified, confused, and what does Quaid say to Ryan? "So where's home?" Rocky Morton and Anabel Jankel, who were the creators of Max Headroom, co-directed in a style that would hardly seem to justify their reputation for innovation. The film begins and ends with black-and-white footage, but in between there's nothing to write term papers about. Charles Edward (The Fly) Pogue wrote the largely lame script, a reworking of the far superior 1949 *D.O.A.* that starred Edmond O'Brien. While nobody has ever done overwrought better than the brow-furrowing O'Brien, Quaid manages to maintain more tension than the dialogue deserves. Ryan, Quaid's real-life companion, is fresh-faced and appealing, and Jane (The Heavenly Kid) Kaczmarek, as the wife who wants to divorce Quaid, extracts feeling from a part that constantly requires her to look stricken. Charlotte Rampling, who probably hasn't smiled on-screen since 1973, doesn't seem to know how to act—but then who would?—as a rich widow whose ward is the son of the man who murdered her husband. (Her daughter hates her and loves the ward, and her chauffeur happens to be a neo-Nazi brute too.) The ending is easy to predict. For one thing, just about every major character but the murderer and Quaid have been killed off. The motive offered for all the bloodshed is also foolish in the extreme. By the way, the 1949 version is available on tape. Popcorn is about \$8,000 a pound cheaper in your kitchen than at a theater. That old sofa is looking pretty comfortable, isn't it? Nothing more need be said. (R)—Ralph Novak

D.O.A.

Meg Ryan and Dennis Quaid, facing implausibility