

# Rollin' Stone

The  
**HOT**  
Issue

Starring  
**Lisa  
Bonet**

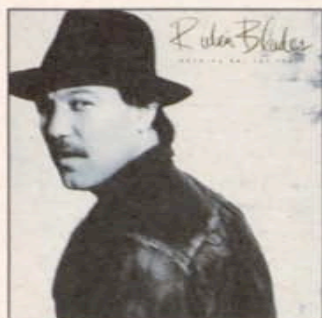
*1988's  
Hottest People,  
Places &  
Things*



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raphobia. "Out of Touch" is funky beatnik fun with an edge of doom: what at first seems to be simply a goofy fashion statement about "just a regular guy with a regular dress problem" ends up as a warning ("Your neighbors could be murderers/For all that you know"). Then it scoots away with a wailing sax and pounding drums, leaving you both humming and provoked. In an age of musical headcheese, the Jazz Butcher has delivered a hefty serving you can chew on. —David Handelman



★★★½

**NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH**  
Rubén Blades

ELEKTRA

AT ONCE FASCINATING AND FRUSTRATING, *Nothing but the Truth* is Rubén

Blades's real-life crossover dream. His first English-language album in a career that spans two decades, it features songs written with or by Elvis Costello, Lou Reed and Sting, mostly set to state-of-the-art synth-heavy arrangements. Such are the ingredients for your typical radio-ready Eighties pop album, but Blades — the Harvard-educated lawyer, actor and salsa star who preaches against injustice in the Americas — is more ambitious than that. He now wants to educate as well as entertain, a tricky task that makes earlier Blades efforts like his two-volume 1980 salsa "opera" *Maestra Vida* or last year's *Agua de Luna* (based on the stories of Gabriel García Márquez) seem like cakewalks.

Much of the album finds Blades exploring familiar territory — a graphically sketched barrio murder ("The Hit"), death squads ("In Salvador") and the general theme of loss of control over one's life that has pervaded his work. He's also tossed in up-to-the-minute topics like Oliver North (who's parodied in the sarcastic "Ollie's Doo-Wop") and AIDS ("The Letter," one of the regrettably few pop songs to deal with the disease). Throughout, Blades's singing is relentlessly earnest and sturdy, if at times overly enunciated.

Coproducers Tommy LiPuma and

Carlos Rios too often resort to sleek cosmopolitan funk. (Blades's longtime band, Seis del Solar, appears on only one track.) "The Letter" resembles an innocuous TV theme song, and Sting's languorous "I Can't Say" is flattened by a banal guitar solo from Rios.

Not surprisingly, it is the work with Costello and Reed that is the heart and soul — if not the most commercially viable part — of *Nothing but the Truth*. "The Miranda Syndrome," Blades's collaboration with Costello, is a driven piece of salsa to which Costello supplies acoustic guitar and the usual jumbled metaphors and images ("He's holding up a bank, like Harpo Marx"). The Reed-Blades songs are even more arresting. Reed's fuzz-edged, grinding guitar adds an urban tension to "The Calm Before the Storm," a sort of contemporary "Bad Moon Rising," and "Hopes on Hold" manages to strike a balance between Blades's idealism and Reed's cynicism.

It is the third Reed collaboration, "Letters to the Vatican," that bears out the full promise of *Nothing but the Truth*. It tells the story of a disconsolate bar patron who relies on Sixties songs for hope and who "doesn't look a day over sixty-five, although she's really twenty-nine." The result is not only Blades's most impassioned singing on the record

but also the true salsa-rock merger the album keeps promising. "We just hold her, until the shaking stops," Blades sings, "because her heart says what only the heart knows." Judging from the best moments on *Nothing but the Truth*, the same could be said of Rubén Blades himself.

—David Browne



★★★½

**TREAT HER RIGHT**

RCA/BMG

IN "I GOT A GUN," DAVID CHAMPAGNE sneers, "Models, critics, wimpy art-school punks . . . they're killing all the fun in rock & roll. . . I got a gun/And I know how to use it." Now that may be a way of getting good reviews, but veiled threats are not really necessary — this is a humdinger of a debut.

Although the suggests just a band (it's taken sic by soul singer combines smol to the urban blue Waters, John healthy dose of r

The instrum there's no bass, playing root lin lead, while Jim blows out spectr melodies. Bill C thing called a " sounds like an e This group's sou never suspect th are former Yalies

The lyrics a and thoroughly when they addre themes as low- "Need Money" ("An Honest J "Trail of Tears," perialistic impu sis Everyday," an of a born-again Think She Likes gy-dog story abo in a bar. Mark S tic yowl takes cer

