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Rubén Blades Talks Salsa Dreams, Alter Egos & Staying Calm During 'Fear the Walking Dead'

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By [Leila Cobo](#) | August 28, 2015 6:04 PM EDT



Ruben Blades performs during the 15th Annual Latin Grammy Awards at the MGM Grand Garden Arena on Nov. 20, 2014 in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Ethan Miller/Getty Images

Blades Will Debut 'Fear' Role This Sunday

Fear the Walking Dead debuted last Sunday in to record ratings for a cable show.

This Sunday, *Fear*'s second episode will introduce Daniel Salazar, the Salvadoran barber played by Latin music icon Rubén Blades. "He is a man that has come from a different environment, different society to start a life elsewhere with his family," says Blades of his character. What happens during *Fear*, "forces him to revisit a past that he was trying to get away from."

[Try watching this video on www.youtube.com](#)

Blades -- who aside from being one of the most influential Latin musicians alive is also an actor, a Harvard-

graduated attorney, activist, Panamanian minister of tourism and current Panamanian presidential candidate -- knows all about adapting.

Ruben Blades Dishes on Playing a Zombie Killer in AMC's 'Fear the Walking Dead' and His Armageddon Anthem

In a break from filming, Blades spoke exclusively with him about music, his new album called *Son de Panamá*, acting, politics and, of course, zombies.

As an artist, you've been fully independent for some time now. What does that allow you to do?

I'm working on several albums. My plan is make all the recordings I can now and move in another direction. I have five or six recorded albums and I'm laying vocal tracks on some of them.

What kind of albums?

One is by Medoro Madera, my alter ego. The other is a new salsa recording of songs I had already recorded. I also have a big band recording that includes three trumpets and three trombones. And I'm working on a project I've titled "Mixtura" (Mixture), which is totally experimental. I also have an album with [Argentine vocal quartet] Boca en Boca, with my songs performed in four part harmony.

You are actually Medoro Madera. When a song says, "featuring Medoro Madera," it means Ruben Blades as Medoro Madera. Tell us about him?

Everyone has a black guy inside them. Mine is a Cuban *sonero* who is 80-something years old and sings better than I do. His name is Medoro Madera. Medoro has been recording since 1997. In my new album, *Son de Panamá*, which I recorded with Roberto Delgado's orchestra, we have two versions of [classic] "La Caína" -- one where I sing and another where Medoro sings. If you listen to both, you'll hear his has more swing.

I see you haven't lost your sense of humor..

If I had no sense of humor you think I would have survived five years in government?

Latin Music Legend Rubén Blades Turns Teacher For New York City High School Students

Talking about government, your role in *Fear The Walking Dead* does have some government connotations, doesn't it?

The question the series poses is, How would a person react before a catastrophe -- before the imploding of the entire moral system? What would we do? What would we be capable of doing? This is a question societies are forced to ask in times of war. And part of the show's success is that people see in it a way to mention their own response. I think the viewers' loyalty to the show is due to the fact that people identify with the characters and they project their own fears and vulnerabilities.

What can you tell us about Daniel Salazar. Is he a singing barber?

Daniel Salazar is someone who'll surprise you as the show progresses. And no, he's not a singing barber. He's not a barber who talks too much either [laughs].

How did you get the part?

I collected the *Walking Dead* comics. And one day, they called me and basically offered the part. I wasn't sure because I had my whole retirement plan going on. But after speaking with production, I realized the role had a series of challenges that weren't easy to find. And it's not easy to find this type of role at my age, either. And, this show will be seen by millions and millions of people. Maybe there will be many that don't know me as a musician and will now say, 'Hey, this guy also sings.'"

Fear the Walking Dead has a lot of Latin characters...

Well, but it's not a "Latin" version. It's not that this is a "Latin" show, but a show set in Los Angeles, which is a very diverse city. And within that diversity, there are Latinos. Suddenly, this ethnic diversity is getting a representation that's unavoidable, but that had been avoided every day by casting directors. AMC stands out for representing reality. But this is not a show about Latinos. It's a show about people.

You've had roles in over 35 films, including *Predator 2*. Is it easier to survive Predator or zombies?

Zombies. Predator, it's hard to locate the sucker.

What skill do you need to have to beat the zombies?

The best skill is keeping a cool head when it comes time to making decisions. Stay calm. In any emergency, the most harmful thing to a person, even people who are physically fit, is losing control in the face of an emergency. A vital skill is clarity of thought in order to react in an intelligent, immediate and practical way.

Tell us a little bit about *Son de Panamá*, which you just released?

It's an excellent album. There are two songs that deal with domestic violence. One is called "En Esta Casa" (In This House) and talks about what goes on inside the house. This is an international problem, and I'll allow any group that battles domestic violence to use the song as they please. The other is "Teresa Batista," who is actually one of the daughters from 'En Esta Casa' who decides she won't make the same mistakes and changes her life. There's a song by Omar Alfanno, titled "El Perdón." And Roberto Delgado's band is excellent. It's the only band I'll be working with on salsa moving forward.

You've said you won't do any more salsa in the future. Is that the case?

I'm planning to retire from salsa. I'm planning to do a farewell tour. I was going to stop by the end of 2016, but have moved it to 2017 because of the series. After that, anyone who wants to see me perform salsa has to go to Panama.