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Rubén Blades receives 2011 ASCAP Harry Chapin Humanitarian Award



Jim Bessman

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Rubén Blades at last night's WhyHunger Awards ceremony
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Video: Rubén Blades sings "Amor Y Control"

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Legendary New York salsa star [Rubén Blades](#) received the 2011 ASCAP Harry Chapin Humanitarian Award at last night's 2011 [WhyHunger](#) Chapin Awards ceremony at the Lighthouse at Chelsea Piers.

Journalist/cookbook author/TV host and healthy food system advocate Mark Bittman was the other individual award winner, and 10 community-based organizations leading the way in combating hunger and poverty were cited with the 2010 Harry Chapin Self Reliance Awards.

Prior to receiving his award from his friend Christopher Walken, Blades, who turns 63 next month, noted how he had changed his views on many things, including award presentations like WhyHunger's.

"If an award is the reason to recognize the work of a grassroots organization, and make it possible for these people to feel they're not alone in what they're doing and encourage other people to consider becoming involved and informed, than these ceremonies are worth the time and effort, and should be supported," said Blades, also an actor, lawyer and political leader/activist who is back in New York after serving five years as minister of tourism in his home country of Panama.

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"It's not about getting the award myself--and I'm not sure I deserve it," he added. He then saluted WhyHunger's late co-founder Harry Chapin's "best tradition" of employing "sarcasm without being cynical" and "talking about dark but also light" as characteristic of both his songs and worldview.

Chapin founded WhyHunger in 1975 with the organization's executive director Bill Ayres, whose opening remarks voiced "a message of hope in the middle of the worst economic climate since the Great Depression." He pointed to the power being manifested by the 8,500 anti-hunger and poverty community organizations that make up WhyHunger's Grassroots Action Network, that are "doing better than ever," he said.

WhyHunger board member Tom Chapin--Harry's brother--hosted the event and performed with his band. The board's secretary Jen Chapin--Harry's daughter--also sang.

The evening ended with an exciting salsa set from Blades and his band, capped by a lovely solo performance of "Skylark" by his wife, jazz singer [Luba Mason](#).

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By Jim Bessman

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