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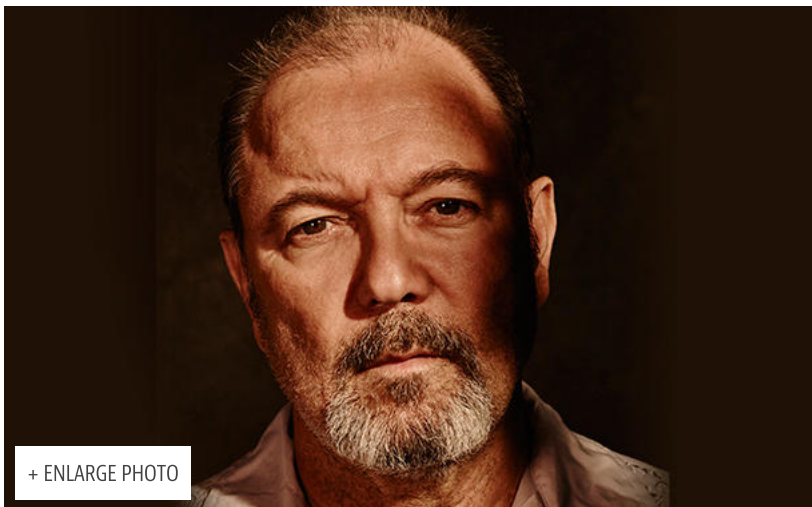
Ruben Blades says *Fear the Walking Dead* deals with 'very tough and important questions'

BY DALTON ROSS (/AUTHOR/DALTON-ROSS) · @DALTONROSS (HTTPS://TWITTER.COM/DALTONROSS)

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Rubén Blades is a big-time music star and once even ran for president of Panama. So why would the guy want to deal with zombies in his spare time? Because this fan of *The Walking Dead* comic book found the opportunity to appear in AMC's companion show, *Fear the Walking Dead* (debuting Sunday), too good to pass up. We chatted with the musician-actor on the Vancouver set of the show about his role on the new series, diversity on television, and his favorite *Walking Dead* comic book characters. (One may surprise you.)

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ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY: So, Rubén, start off by describing your character in your own words.

RUBÉN BLADES: I'm playing Daniel Salazar, a person who immigrated to the U.S. from Central America, and is a barber, and has a past that is exposed because of what happens in the context of this, I don't know what to call it, this "situation." Salazar has a lot of previous knowledge of chaos and mayhem and destruction collapse of order. The others don't have that because they have been pretty much a product of the United States under a certain level of order, and Salazar comes from a situation where he has seen it happen under different circumstances — political, but nevertheless bloody and violent. So he's a product of that, and he moves in a different way, and he understands these things clearer, faster than the others. So he has a certain advantage in that, but not that much.

How do you see this story you guys are telling?

It's an allegory. The big question as I understand it is one of importance, in the sense that it's entertainment, obviously, but it also poses very serious questions as to what would happen if everything that we take for granted that is a structure that supports our freedoms and our everyday routines would collapse? How would people react when not forced by law and by consequences to behave a certain way? What would we do? And that is a very important question. In this country, it doesn't have the urgency that it has right now in Syria, for instance, or Darfur, or anywhere in the world where people's lives have changed dramatically because of sudden change — in this case political change.

In this particular case, what is being asked is: What would we do in the collapse of civilization as we know it? And that's a question I thought was very, very interesting. It's a tough question. It's disguised by the fact that it's entertainment: "That's never gonna happen here." Well, that's probably what people thought before Columbus got in. You know, everybody talks about October 12, and nobody ever talks about October 11. October 11 was a day like any other day, and then people woke up the next day and they saw things they never could have imagined would exist, and their lives were changed forever. So behind this seemingly innocuous TV series, there are very tough and important questions.

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This is a show that clearly takes it upon itself to show diverse characters. How important is that in this day and age?

Obviously there's a change brewing on television in that reality demands more inclusion. AMC is very clear about not just the need to reflect the reality, but they're also very business-savvy, commercially speaking, because this show is being seen in 90 countries around the world. I imagine the show's going to have such a broad release, and it's important to show exactly the diversity which exists and will appear to audiences that will identify not just with the story, but the peoples and cultures that are represented. Personally, as a Latino, I think it's about time that that is a given, not a token.

You're a super-successful musician who likes to record and tour. Are you concerned about the time commitment of series television?

You can always get bit. [Laughs] This is one of the things that appeals to me also, and I think it appeals to everyone, and it is something that is happening. It doesn't play well all the time — like in *Game of Thrones* they just killed Jon Snow and it got a lot of people pissed, me included. So you just don't know what's gonna happen with the show. And it's great, because it also provides you with a way out.

How familiar were you with *The Walking Dead* when you got this role?

I was very familiar with it. I collect comic books so I have the books. Now the books are different than the show itself. I like the books. I found the comics to be more in tune with what the author envisioned.

How much of the show have you watched?

A couple of seasons. But I'm up to date on the comics.

So you know that even in the comics we don't really see this period of time during the actual outbreak,

so it must be exciting to create that story.

I don't know how much I can spoil or talk about certain things, but for people who pay attention, there are a lot of firsts here. I wish I could tell you some of the firsts. The thing is also, we don't understand what's happening. So we just are reacting to a situation that we don't understand completely. We don't know what's going on, really. We don't know whether this is just going on temporary or whether this is something that can be reversed. So it's very difficult to act when the total collapse does not occur. The collapse of authority has occurred, but not the apparent morality paradigms. You still have a problem shooting somebody who looks like you, but they look weird. You see these weird people following you — do you shoot them? Maybe they're just acting weird. You should defend yourself, but how far should you go?

Who is your favorite character from the comic?

Rick Grimes, because of his vulnerability obviously, Carl, because he's really ballsy, then Michonne. I really like her. You sort of discover things about each one. And this guy Jesus — I think of him as a samurai. Everybody has something ... well, except for some of the people who are not nice. Even this guy Negan is an interesting guy, kind of difficult to categorize. He's done horrible things, but then

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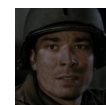
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again there are no rules, and then he didn't hurt others when he could've, like Carl. You don't know which way he's gonna go, and I don't believe anything he says. It's really interesting because you follow the group and then some of them are gone, as in real life people are gone. What I was surprised about is the amount of people who follow this. That surprised the heck out of me, that they have a talk show after the show that is bigger in terms of audience than regular shows. That's mind-boggling that so many people are watching it worldwide. That's amazing.

For more Fear the Walking Dead intel, follow Dalton on Twitter @DaltonRoss (<http://www.twitter.com/daltonross>).

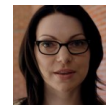
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