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Santanas honored for services in community

AWARD: UCLA ceremony is one in series of events to commemorate civil rights activist Cesar Chavez



MINDY ROSS/ Daily Bruin Senior Staff

Law professor and ex-State Supreme Court Justice **Cruz Reynoso** gives **Carlos** and **Deborah Santana** the Cesar Chavez Spirit award.

By **Marcelle Richards**
Daily Bruin Reporter

Rock and Roll Hall of Famer Carlos Santana will be making room on his shelf full of Grammy awards for the Cesar E. Chavez Spirit award he and his wife Deborah received Wednesday at UCLA's faculty center.

UCLA established the award in 2000 to commemorate the civil rights leader who fought for social justice and founded the United Farm Workers union.

"The Santanas have given selflessly," said co-Master of Ceremonies and former UCLA MEChA chair, Jo Anna Ley, a 2000 alumna in Chicana/o studies.

"I can't think of more deserving individuals," she added.

The ceremony, sponsored by Arista Records and Sony Pictures Entertainment, was only one in a series of events to commemorate the newly designated state holiday of Chavez's birthday, the first of which was held on Saturday.

The event drew roughly 350 guests, including mayoral candidates Antonio Villaraigosa and Xavier Becerra.

Ticket revenue will support the Cesar E. Chavez Spirit Scholarships that are awarded to Chicana/o studies students who contribute to the community both as scholars and activists.

The Santanas earned the award for the Milagro Foundation, which they founded in 1998, to aid at-risk, underrepresented and otherwise disadvantaged youth.

Carlos referred to the Milagro Foundation as "the head of God" – raising consciousness, healing and giving hope. Literally, it translates to "miracle."

Carlos Santana, who has outlasted musical fads of the past three decades and sold over 90 million records, has played benefits for San Francisco Earthquake Relief and Tijuana Orphans.

Much less visible to the public eye, by choice, is his wife, the other half of Milagro's success.

"I'm usually in the background and I prefer to do my work in the background," she said. "It's humbling to have our names spoken with Chavez's."

"Education is the key to our spiritual, social and economic progress," she continued. "I always tell my children they have to start by being smarter than the ones who try to hold them back."

Milagro uses funds from ticket sales and corporate contributions to increase educational opportunities and make health services available – by providing grants to organizations at all corners of the world.

The Dikelle Children's center in Sri Lanka, a refuge for homeless orphans who are war victims, and the

Organization for the Support of Albania's Abandoned Babies are some of the global groups who benefitted from the funds.

Within the U.S., the urgency to ensure opportunities for children strikes close to home for the Santanas, as they see the decline of students of color within universities and colleges.

"We have to continue with our courage. This is just the beginning. Like you, I'm witnessing this incredible nightmare that's happening to our children in schools," Carlos said.

Many of Milagro's national efforts are geared to provide tutoring and exposure to the arts.

Carlos said students must be given more support, mentioning the state spends only \$4,500 per student a year in California while state prisoners cost \$35,000 annually.

"We can put pressure on those who have the power," he said. "We constantly dream. It's better to dream than curse the darkness. Accentuate the light."

Blending music and tribute to dually honor Chavez and the Santanas, the evening commenced with a reception and dinner for the honorees and attendees, while Carlos Santana's recent hit "Smooth" appropriately fading in and out of the chatter and clink of wineglasses.

Poised humbly in the center of the crowd were the Santanas, quietly shaking hands of congratulatory fans who approached their table before dinner.

A singer and a quartet from the UCLA ethnomusicology graduate department performed traditional Mexican music. Slightly nodding and tapping his fingers to the beat of the music was the Latin music legend himself, who raised his hands and applauded after each number.

Both Villaraigosa and Becerra had the opportunity to speak and commend the Santanas, acknowledging that the ever-present student activism at campuses indeed shows solidarity among students, educators and community leaders like the Santanas.

"Deborah and Carlos, you'd be proud to know that almost two weeks ago, a number of students of color came together," said Becerra, in reference to the affirmative action protest last quarter.

"We came here to debate, the students decided it was time to debate affirmative action. They understood what you do for children."

Commemorative bike jerseys, UCLA apparel and a painting symbolizing the struggle of immigrant farm workers were also given to the Santanas, who smiled and stepped on stage again to accept these unanticipated gifts.

"We absolutely believe in a brighter future for our children," said Carlos as he stood at the podium in his acceptance speech. "I don't believe in flags, I don't believe in borders; I believe in eyes, I believe in hearts. This is an award for me that means the most, this award is not bought – it represents the best of my family."

His speech was punctuated by the instantaneous rumble of voices shouting, "Carlos!" "Viva!" as the man smiled, nodded and stepped off the stage, arm in arm with his wife.

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