

Andy Palacio's WOMEX Award acceptance speech

October 28 2007, Seville, Spain

I humbly thank the World Music Expo for honouring my producer, Ivan Duran and me today, in the presence of our friends and colleagues of the World Music Community. I see this award not so much as a personal endorsement but in fact as an extraordinary and sincere validation of a concept in which artists such as myself take up the challenge to make music with a higher purpose that goes beyond simple entertainment. I accept this award on behalf of my fellow artists from all over the world with the hope that it will serve to reinforce those sentiments that fuel cultures of resistance and pride in one's own.

The true heroes behind my music are really those first Garifuna fighters who, in the 18th Century, on the island of Yurumei (St. Vincent) stood up against slavery, colonization and cultural domination, choosing to keep their identity and remain the Garifuna Nation. Many, including Paramount Chief Joseph Chattoyer, paid the ultimate price.

Then came those who survived that genocide and were forcibly relocated to the Caribbean coast of Central America. This award honours those mothers and fathers who have passed on this legacy (including our language, music, dance, folklore and spirituality) to their children, that we today may add to the richness and diversity that makes our world a better place for all. Left to the formal educational systems, this may never have happened.

Generations of Garifuna composers and musicians such as the inspiring and legendary Belizean parandero, Paul Nabor have kept Garifuna music alive, purely as a means of expressing our deepest emotions. In today's world, however, Garifuna music has taken on the additional role of contributing to the socio-economic development not only of its practitioners, but indeed to the very nations of which we are citizens, making our contributions in just about every field, including Education, Governance, Commerce, Entertainment and Tourism.

As I stand here, I feel a deep sense of gratitude for all those who have supported my ambitions along the way. Reuben Palacio, my father, inspired me with the love of music from a very early age. I wish he were here today. Cleofa Avilez, my mother, along with all the people of the Village of Barranco have given me love and the gift of Garifuneness of which I am so proud and for that I am also grateful.

Along the way, I have been blessed to meet and work with the many talented composers and musicians who make up the Garifuna Collective. Today, I thank all of them for their numerous contributions that have resulted in the release of Watina, which, I have been told, is believed to be a work of excellence.

I too pay tribute to Ivan Duran who spent years perfecting the sound on Watina. And to the hard working crew Stonetree Records (along with Jacob Edgar and our friends at Cumbancha) for making this all happen.

I may not have been standing here were it not for the vision that has resulted in a cultural renaissance in Belize under the leadership of the National Institute of Culture and History (NICH) and for the unwavering support afforded me by Prime Minister Said Musa and his Government, I will be eternally grateful as I also am to the governments and people of Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala and Belize.

Above all, rutina seremei (I give thanks) luagu houbadina sun garinagu (on behalf of all Garinagu) houn hahari wayunagu luma Bungiu Baba (to our ancestors and the Almighty Father) luagu hadeiweihan woun (for the many gifts and blessings) le agudahabaliwa luagu sun dan le (that has sustained us through the ages. Seremei nia hun. Thank you.