

Carlos Santana: Using Music to Unite Communities

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Abstract

Carlos Santana, a musician born in Mexico and raised in America, has spent his entire career creating music for the masses. In 1966, he formed the Santana Blues Band whom, over the next several decades, would become internationally known for their music and charitable nature. Using his fame to promote the good in the world, Santana has become an international icon for the Latino community in America. Utilizing several scholarly and newspaper sources, I will explore in more detail Santana's influence on the Chicano community in America. I analyze the way Carlos Santana has used his music and fame to raise funds for charities that help people who have been affected by poverty, natural disasters, and other problems. I examine the ways in which Santana has been able to raise awareness of the issues that many Chicano's face in American society, such immigration. Finally, I delve further into how Santana, through his music, has helped create a better acceptance of the Chicano culture in today's mainstream American community.

Keywords: Carlos Santana, Music, Chicano/a, Charity, Uniting Communities.

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Throughout his career, Carlos Santana has been very influential in the Chicano community. His guitar playing is legendary in the music world (Gulla, 2009); however his endless community outreach programs and concerts have also become a large part of what he is known for. To see how music can be used to unite two culturally different communities Carlos Santana's influence should be studied. This paper examines how using his music has allowed Santana to effectively unite the Chicano and Anglo American cultures.

Literature Review

To find my sources, I first began by searching the databases JSTOR, Google Scholar, and The Latino American Experience for information pertaining to Santana's music, influence on Chicano culture and charity works. I then looked into Santana's charity the Milagro Foundation and how it supports many underprivileged youth in America and gives them some amazing opportunities. Next I researched Santana's fan base, which revealed some interesting trends about both age and culture groups. Finally, I took a closer look at Santana's music which showed me that he has been able to meld together many different genres to create a unique sound all his own.

In "Santana" (2014) the authors of The Latino American Experience give a brief overview of how Santana has risen to fame and the ways his music has influenced the Chicano/a community. They demonstrate that during the Chicano movement, musicians played a large part in helping the movement gain support. Along with groups like Los Lobos, Carlos Santana was one of the first Chicano artists to gain popularity in the United States in the 1960's and 1970's.

“Carlos Santana” is a source from the California Museum that gives a brief overview of the impact Carlos Santana has had on the communities of California and a history of his family. This information helps to put a time line together for Santana’s road to fame.

Glier (2011) gives a recap of the events that took place at the Atlanta Braves Civil Rights Game on May 15, 2011. The article shows how outspoken Carlos Santana is about topics that affect the Chicano community, such as immigration. After the SB 1070 law was passed in Georgia and Arizona, Santana spoke out about how unlawful and degrading these laws are to towards Chicano/as.

Gulla (2009) gives a synopsis of Santana’s musical career and ranks him as one of the top 25 guitar players in history. By ranking Carlos Santana among other great guitarists, this helped to show the Anglo community there is no real difference between Chicanos and Anglos.

Maxwell (1988) discusses the Chicano Movement in the 1980’s and the impact Carlos Santana had on powering the movement further. By becoming a major icon for both the Chicano and Anglo communities Santana opened the door for other Chicano/a artists, like Selena and Jennifer Lopez to gain popularity more easily.

The Milagro Foundation website (2012) gives an overview of the charities running and where the funds are used. This is a foundation that Carlos Santana and his family founded to help underprivileged youth in communities around the world gain access to the education and healthcare they need.

Shelokhonov (2014) is a biography about Carlos Santana on the IMBd website. This gives information about the music Santana has produced throughout his career. Knowing more about his music is helpful for understanding how he is uniting communities.

Slavicek (2006) is a biographical book written about Carlos Santana. This biography details Santana's life including his charity events and his views on topics that affect Chicano/a's.

Tatum (2001) is a textbook that covers all issues relating to Chicanos. The music section of this book talked about how music played a large role in the Chicano Movement. Tatum demonstrates that Santana was one of the first Chicano musicians to succeed in America and be popular with the Anglo culture.

Weinstein (2009) is a biography written about Carlos Santana. This biography shows more about Santana's charity work and the influence his music has had on Chicano/a's and Anglos.

William Ruhlmann (2014) shows the hits that Santana has had on the Billboard Top 100 over the past several decades. This helps to see the popularity Santana has had in mainstream America.

Discussion

Carlos Santana has been an influential Chicano musician in America since the 1960s. Born in Jalisco, Mexico on July 20, 1947, Santana was always influence by music, learning to play the violin at the age of 5 with help from his father (Shelokhonov). In 1955, the Santana family moved to Tijuana, California where Carlos would learn to play the guitar and eventually preform with various bands in bars and clubs on the Tijuana strip. In 1961, Santana moved to San Francisco and formed the Santana Blues Band in 1966. The band would skyrocket to fame after their legendary performance at Woodstock three years later. After touring for several years and releasing several more albums, Santana would participate in the first ever music collaboration concert between the United States and the Soviet Union in 1987 at the "Rock'n

Roll Summit.” Later on in his career, Santana performed at several other benefit concerts including ones to aid both the San Francisco Earthquake Relief fund and the Hispanic Media & Education Group. With the help of his former wife Deborah, Santana would found the Milagro Foundation in 1998 which donated 1.8 million dollars to help underprivileged youths get access to healthcare, better education, and creative activities. He would even donate the funds generated by his 2003 tour to help fight AIDS.

With all of his musical successes and charity works Santana has become one of the most well-known and well-respected guitarists in the world. His style of infusing the mainstream Anglo form of rock’n roll with Latin Pop vibes and his influences from old-school blues, R&B, and Afro-Cuban artists like BB King have lead Santana to a unique style all his own (Tatum). He would also influence the Chicano culture in America by creating a more positive view of Chicanos in the media.

Through this results section of this paper I will delve into the impacts that Carlos Santana’s music has had on both the Chicano and Anglo populations in America. I will also demonstrate how Santana has used his fame to benefit many charities and groups across the globe. Also showing how Santana has been able to bring to light the issues that many Chicanos face in America. Finally, I will show how through music Santana has been able to unite two different cultures.

Results

Through this research, I discovered several key things that have allowed Santana to help unite the dominant and Chicano groups in America through his music. First, by infusing mainstream rock’n roll music with Latin Pop, blues, and Afro-Cuban vibes Santana has been

able to create his own style of music (“Santana”). This new style that Santana created has endured and evolved over the past several decades, remaining popular in modern cultures. By incorporating his Mexican heritage into his style of music Santana has helped open a door for future Chicano artists to enter the American music industry and bridge the gap between Anglo and Chicano cultures (Maxwell).

After his performance at Woodstock Santana’s fame took off and his fan base expanded rapidly. While most artists would have let this go to their heads (just take a look at some of today’s music superstars!) Santana stayed grounded and in touch with his roots. He stayed true to the vision he had for his music and did not let other people’s opinions influence what kinds of songs he produced.

With many chart topping songs such as, “Black Magic Woman”, “Smooth”, “Oye Como Va”, and “Maria Maria” (William Ruhlmann), Santana has earned many music related awards. He has sold over 90 million records during his fifty year career and performed for over 100 million fans at concerts worldwide (California Museum). Over his career, Santana has had a top ten hit every decade since the 1960’s and won several Grammys, nine for his album *Supernatural* (Weinstein). His long and prosperous career has landed him in the Rock’n Roll Hall of Fame in 1998 and a spot on Rolling Stone Magazines “100 Greatest Guitarists of All Time” article twice in the past 20 years. In 1996 he was given Billboard’s Century Award and then in 2009 he was given the Billboard Latin Music Awards’ Lifetime Achievement honor for all the success he has had in the music industry (Gulla). These awards are some of the music industries most coveted and to have all of them demonstrates how influential Carlos Santana has been over the past fifty years.

Through The Milagro Foundation, Santana has been able to help hundreds of thousands of underprivileged children all over the world. This foundation was established in 1998 by Carlos and his former wife Deborah to help children gain access to healthcare, a better education, and even learn about more creative activities like music or art. The foundation began in the San Francisco Bay area and has since expanded to help children in need in countries all over the world. They are a non-profit public organization that gains funds through concert ticket donations and donations from both individuals and corporations. By establishing The Milagro Foundation, Santana has been able to help many children succeed in life when all odds were against them (Milagro).

Carlos Santana has also contributed to other charity organizations throughout the world. In 1987, he participated in the first ever joint concert between the US and the Soviet Union “Rock’n Roll Summit”, which took place in Moscow, Russia to help aid the peace effort between these two countries (Slavicek). In 2003, Santana donated all of the proceeds from his ‘Shaman’ tour to help in the fight against AIDS (Milagro). Throughout his career, Santana has performed at many benefit concerts that aid both minorities and those affected by natural disasters. In 2012 he performed in Guanajuato, Mexico to help raise funds for the cities needy children. With all of the charity work that Santana has done, he has always kept a very humble nature and not used these works as a form of self-promotion.

Another issue that Santana has been a big supporter of is the issue of immigration into the United States by minorities, especially those minorities emigrating from Mexico. At an Atlanta Braves game in May of 2011, Santana was being honored with baseball’s Beacon of Change Award when he spoke out about recent bills that had been passed in Arizona and

Georgia regarding immigration. He urged Chicanos to take a stand against these bills saying, “...there should be a boycott in Georgia by Latin workers” (Glier). This speaking out on issues related to Chicano rights created controversy in the dominant Anglo culture, but also gave some insight into the problems that many Chicanos face when they immigrate to America.

Santana’s fan-base was an interesting mix of young and old, male and female, Chicano and Anglo. His music speaks to those of all ages, genders, and races, which allows him to bridge the gaps between cultures. By collaborating with musicians from such as Rob Thomas, Pitbull, Eric Clapton, Dave Matthews, Steven Tyler, Gloria Estefan, and Chris Daughtry, Santana has been able to reach audiences from all genres of music across the world (William Ruhlmann). This mixing of genres is what he has become known for and has allowed him continued success over the past several decades.

Further Study

To conclude, Carlos Santana has been a large contributor to the uniting of two communities, the dominant Anglos and the Chicano minorities. By speaking out about immigration reform, he has given the dominant group insight into Chicano life after immigrating to America. The charity work he has done throughout his career, the funds he has donated, and the foundation he established have all created a better life for those suffering from poverty or natural disasters. By his continued success in the music industry, Santana has shown Chicanos and Anglos alike that anything is possible. It also allows the two groups to see how similar they are and to share one common culture. This uniting of two communities is important because it allows for one global community to come together in a better educated fashion and avoiding the issue of racism that has plagued the world for thousands of years. Therefore, if Santana can

bridge the gap between Chicanos and Anglos, then the rest of the world can do the same with other minority groups as well forming one global community bonded through peace.

More studies should be done on how Santana and other Chicano/a celebrities are fighting for equality. Seeing how the Chicano community is becoming more integrated with the more dominant Anglo culture is eye opening.

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