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Ricky's renaissance

The superstar finds a new life in *La Banda*, along with Alejandro Sanz and Laura Pausini

Story by: Judi Jordan | Photos by: Courtesy of Univision

RICKY MARTIN'S massive 32-year musical career has been an auspicious series of 'waves'; building success upon success, with well-timed breaks to parent, travel, write an autobiography, and do humanitarian work with his Ricky Martin Foundation.

After launching the Latin pop crossover 'wave' in '99, and setting sales records with his monster single CD *Living' La Vida Loca* [8 million copies sold], and album Ricky Martin [22 million copies sold], he went on to release seven more albums, including 2015's #1 Latin Billboard and Latin American Music Award-winning album, *A quien quiera escuchar*.

Ricky's successful Broadway run of "*Evita*" was followed by a stint on "*Glee*" as the Spanish teacher, and a quiet time as he settled down to raise his twin boys, Valentino and Matteo. He was *living' la vida tranquilo*, it seemed. Things began to take a new turn as he took on high-profile TV gigs coaching singers for *The Voice Australia*, and *The Voice Mexico*.

A call from American Idol's tough judge Simon Cowell brought on the next big wave with an idea for a talent show that would discover the next great boy band a la Latino. Ricky would star, executive produce it and even manage the winners' band. Univision jumped on board and "La Banda" was born.

The show launches live Nov 1, 2015 in Miami, and the details are what make it unique; an intimate panel of three supportive superstar judges, Alejandro Sanz, Laura Pausini and El Martin; a runway-like stage; and a large, live, all-girl audience with voting power, with results that show up on a massive screen, via a smart-phone pre-screening popularity contest. To move on to the next step, contestants need a score of 75% or higher; the results are instantaneous.

The bonus for the band members is being managed by Ricky himself. Having come up in the boy band world, Martin knows the pitfalls and dangers for boys on the road. As a devoted dad, he's embraced the nurturing like a natural.

"I'm not a 'tough-love' judge, I don't believe in tearing down talent." In a protective and experienced role as mentor-manager, he will oversee the band's career. Some lucky kids are going to have the chance of a lifetime, discovered by La Banda, and coached by the original crossover king of Latin pop.

LATINO LEADERS: What is going to be different about this band?

RICKY MARTIN: This band is going to be based on every kid to be able to determine their own identity. When I started out with Menudo, thirty some years ago, we had no say. We were told exactly what to do, who to be, how to act. Audiences now want an artist comfortable with their own identity. This will be the ultimate boy band, of adolescents from 12 to 20, of unique, talented young artists.

LL: There are so many competition shows. Why do you think this will succeed?

RM: The concept is new. It has never been seen before. And while there are plenty of shows for the American audience, there's a gap for the Latin American market. And it's different. The audience is asking for transparency. We invited 700 girls. The audience watches this runway and the contestant has one minute to convince them how to vote, yes or no, for them to walk away or continue down the runway to sing for the judges. And there is so much talent. We had 10,000 kids show up to audition. We could put together three bands from all the talent we found.

LL: Is your managing the band a musical extension of the outreach you do with your youth foundation, being more helpful, more connected, more protective?

RM: It came at the right moment in my life. My being the manager comes from wanting these kids to have a long career. I can contribute towards



The judges of La Banda from left to right: Alejandro Sanz, Laura Pausini and Ricky Martin.



The judges of La Banda at work. From left to right: Alejandro Sanz, Laura Pausini and Ricky Martin.

the longevity of this band. If I can provide that guidance, that's my role. It feels right ... it's a generation of artists so hungry for information, for feedback. These kids have that distinction and helping them turn their music into art is a joy. Look, it is very hard for new artists to break through and stay there. I've been wanting to manage artists for a long time, but it didn't come together. I always said it will come organically, it will come to me. And that's what's happened. In terms of management, I will be available to them when it comes to the emotional process. I've been doing this for 30 years and I'm just as insecure. I doubt myself, I doubt my decisions. That is something that we musicians have to deal with and accept. That's why we go onstage. We need the reassurance from others. If I can help young musicians feel strong in their choices, that's valuable. ●