



Latino Leaders Luncheon Series / Eagle Leadership Award
Sheila E. Keynote Remarks
The California Club/ Los Angeles, CA
November 16, 2023

Sheila E.: Please sit down. Please sit down. Thank you so much. Usually when I'm coming to the podium, I like to play music. So -- salsa.

Okay. Let me just say this. I had to play that because I'm going to tell a quick story. But this is my first ever salsa record coming out in March next year. My first ever salsa record. Oh my God. And I have to say that because the first person that I wanted on that record was Rubén Blades and that's him singing that song.

Amazing. I grew up as a Latin jazz artist. As Antonio introduced my amazing, incredible dad, as I called the legendary Mr. Pete Escovedo. Hi, daddy. It's just amazing. My mom, my parents are still married and in love, and they just celebrated 67 years of marriage. That right there is why I am who I am. Because my family, my friends. God has given me a gift of music, and what growing up really early, when I was young - my

dad, he always took us to facilities, you know, for kids who didn't have much. And put his percussion in the car, and we would go in the car, drive to the facility and play for the kids. And we were like nine, ten, twelve years old. We've been giving to the community most of our lives and continuing to do so.

I grew up in a neighborhood called the community, which is basically another word for the ghetto. Same thing. But that's who I am. I love the community. I love the people. We love people. And growing up, we were around Latin people, of course, because of my dad, on my dad's side, my mom being Creole. The mixture of people were there. However, my dad didn't speak Spanish to us. My grandfather was born in Saltillo, Mexico. He spoke Spanish but we were shunned for not speaking Spanish. Yeah.

So it's hard because not speaking Spanish and not learning Spanish for me, being shunned by our own people. When my dad and I would walk down the aisle to the events, to the Grammys, to the Latin Grammys, they knew we didn't speak Spanish, and they turned their lights off and turned their backs to us. It was very hurtful. It still is. And at the time, I talked to the president of the Latin Grammys, I said, we don't feel welcomed. We just don't. We don't feel like we're a part of the community. We don't.

Because we don't speak the language doesn't mean our hearts are empty. We are full with the gift of Latin music, and it's our life. It's our love. It's our gift. And all we want to do is share it through music. So God gave us the gift. We can't speak it through word, but we speak it through the music.

I am an incredible musician. I can say that because my parents told me so. They say it to me all the time. You are an incredible musician. They never said to me because I was a young girl that I couldn't play a so-called man's instrument. That was never taught in the home. They never spoke those words. Until I left the house did I hear of these things. They say to me all the time, you're an incredible musician. But your gift is you still happen to be an incredible woman.

How can I not give back to the community no matter what rocks are thrown at me? Because love is music, music is God, and God is love. So, if you look at it like that, and if we really do love each other, then all of those rocks being thrown in the hate and the misunderstanding goes away because we love what we do so much, and it's a gift. It's worth the fight.

So now we feel even through walking through fires, we can walk through the fire and not get burned anymore. That's very hard to get to that point. We have so much work to do as a people in supporting each other. This room is one of the most

incredible rooms I've stood in, in my life, in a community of people where I feel welcome.

We, my dad and I, our family, we don't do what we do for the accolades. We do it because we love it so much, and I don't apologize for the emotion because, man, being in my shoes, we all have our stories. We all have our stories. We all have a movie. We all have a book. Where I was born and where I was raised doesn't make me that person. We got out and we continue -- even though we were on welfare, it was a moment with food stamps. It was a moment. But my parents kept pushing that support and that drive to keep moving and making something of ourselves.

There are things that happened to me when I was young. I was raped at five. That didn't designate who I was and who I was to become. I'm going to be strong, and I'm going to help those that have been abused. So part of that journey, again, when you find what your purpose is, I started a foundation with our friends called Elevate Oakland. We give back. We started here in L.A. with the foster care kids because we wanted to feel like we were their voice through music and the arts. It was part of their healing, and it helped them. Now we are in the schools in Oakland. Because all of the budget cuts, we have to help these kids. They want music. They want the arts. They want to learn. They just need the opportunity.

So thank you for welcoming me in this community. Thank
you.

Daddy, thank you so much for raising me. And Mickey, thank
you.