

Bad Bunny and the Perils of Wrestling Gatekeeping



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Photo Credit: WWE

The intersection of pop culture and wrestling isn't something new. It has been an integral relationship to both business models. Remember **WrestleMania 10** when **Burt Reynolds**, **Donnie Wahlberg**, **Jennie Garth**, and **Ronda Sheer** were the celebrity guests? **Little Richard** sang the National Anthem that year. Mr. T and Muhammad Ali were at the very first **Wrestlemania**. Athletes such as Lawrence Taylor, the late Kevin Greene, and Dennis Rodman were in actual matches. Arnold **Schwarzenegger** **close-lined** Triple H during Summerslam once. **Chuck Norris** was a guest enforcer during a casket match between Yokozuna and The Undertaker. **You get the point.**

The days of territories and wrestlers “living the gimmick” have been long gone. Wrestling has been in the entertainment business for a while now because, in a business, you want it to appeal to as many people as possible. That improves things like attendance and profits — you know, the things that keep your business going. When I was younger, I found that matches were planned and the results were pre-determined. That The Undertaker didn't really live in a place called Death Valley, and he didn't bury his opponents. One thing that I always remembered was that the crowds weren't so diverse. I didn't see many people of color as wrestling fans. Sure, there were wrestlers like **The Rock**, **Harlem Heat**, and **Farooq**, but not many wrestlers of color were elevated to the top. Flash forward to now, and that has changed considerably. There's still a ways to go, but we are a lot farther than we were before.

That even veers into the intersection of music which brings us to multi-platinum recording artist **Bad Bunny** — current 24/7 champion and top merch seller. Remember when **C-Murder** recorded the NWO Wolfpack theme song? Or the *WWE Aggression* album where rappers did their variations of wrestlers theme songs? Rap music has always leaked into wrestling lore. Both mediums are full of self-confidence where sometimes, you try to be the best somebody else. Wrestling has dipped its toe in trying to bridge the gap in different genres. Listen to the CFO theme songs or **John Cena's** My Time Is Now.' However, with that, there will always be pushback from the groups of people who look at wrestling as an exclusive club where certain things or cultures can get in.

Much of the backlash that's going towards Bad Bunny's inclusion into recent WWE television is that people “don't really know his music.” Despite him being a multi-time Latin Grammy, Billboard Music, and American Music Award winner. But, ok, that's fine if you don't listen to that type of music. Some have said that they want the rock music of the old days. As if they don't get a steady diet of that with Smackdown's opening from **AC/DC**. Sure, teen me loved the Limp Bizkit — ‘My Way’ video package leading up to Austin/Rock II in all my “nobody understands me” splendor. However, rock music has a problem that also overlaps with many older-minded wrestling fans. Some are averse to accepting any new type of ideas or appealing to different demographics. They just want to go back to the way things were.

Besides the music part, Bad Bunny has been a champion of LGBTQ rights. With wrestlers like **Sonya Deville**, **Tegan Nox**, and **Sonny Kiss**, the wrestling industry should be way more accepting of figures like this. Are we ready to deal with the fact that a good chunk of wrestling fans and some media aren't as much as they profess to be? They saw themselves in the Austin vs. McMahon feud where they fantasized about flipping off their boss and drinking beer. But, not ready for a Black or Latino person to say the same for themselves in their own way.

If anything, **Bad Bunny** is all of us when we were younger. Having fun hanging out with wrestlers and doing a dive off the top rope. What wrestling as a whole needs to change is who it allows realizing that dream. So, you don't listen to Latin music- but somebody else does. Then, if they get interested in wrestling, you can tell them what hooked you. Boom — maybe you'll become friends and perhaps, they'll keep watching. Every week, there's talk of ratings and how much they are down. Other than the obvious things pertaining to streaming, perhaps wrestling should take a look in the mirror and see why that is. The storylines may not be great all the time, but neither is choosing the people who get to experience them.

WWE

Bad Bunny

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