



José Angel Santana

DRAMATIC COACH



José Santana was a New York-based stage, television, and movie actor, working on an episode of *Miami Vice* on St. Croix in the Virgin Islands, when he noticed how the exuberant island teenagers around the set resorted to using and dealing drugs on street corners at night "because they had nothing else to do."

After talking of this to Jane Fonda on the set of *The Morning After*, he came to Santa Barbara to work at her performing arts summer camp for kids. "My whole professional career changed the moment I started working with young people," said Santana, remembering back to 1984.

Unwilling to continue portraying negative stereotypes, he stayed in Santa Barbara, first cab-driving and then teaching acting and directing youth theater. He founded the BugEye Theatre group to provide thorough training for seriously motivated young actors, and co-founded City@Peace, with Nancy Davis and Rich McLaughlin, for at-risk teens. Born in Havana, Cuba, Santana, 46, grew up on some mean streets in New Jersey and knows firsthand the challenges kids can face.

"I shy away from talking about City@Peace," said Santana, "because it's really emotional for me. I focus on doing it, not reflecting on it, but when I do, I get choked up about it. The aim is to create a safe place for young people to express their innermost conflicts, and to make art out of it—and thereby give them the experience of making a positive contribution to their community with the substance of their lives." And the deeper impact of City@Peace? "Every single kid who comes through gets to experience a positive alternative. It's all about giving young people a strong foundation for a healthy life."