

# BEAT

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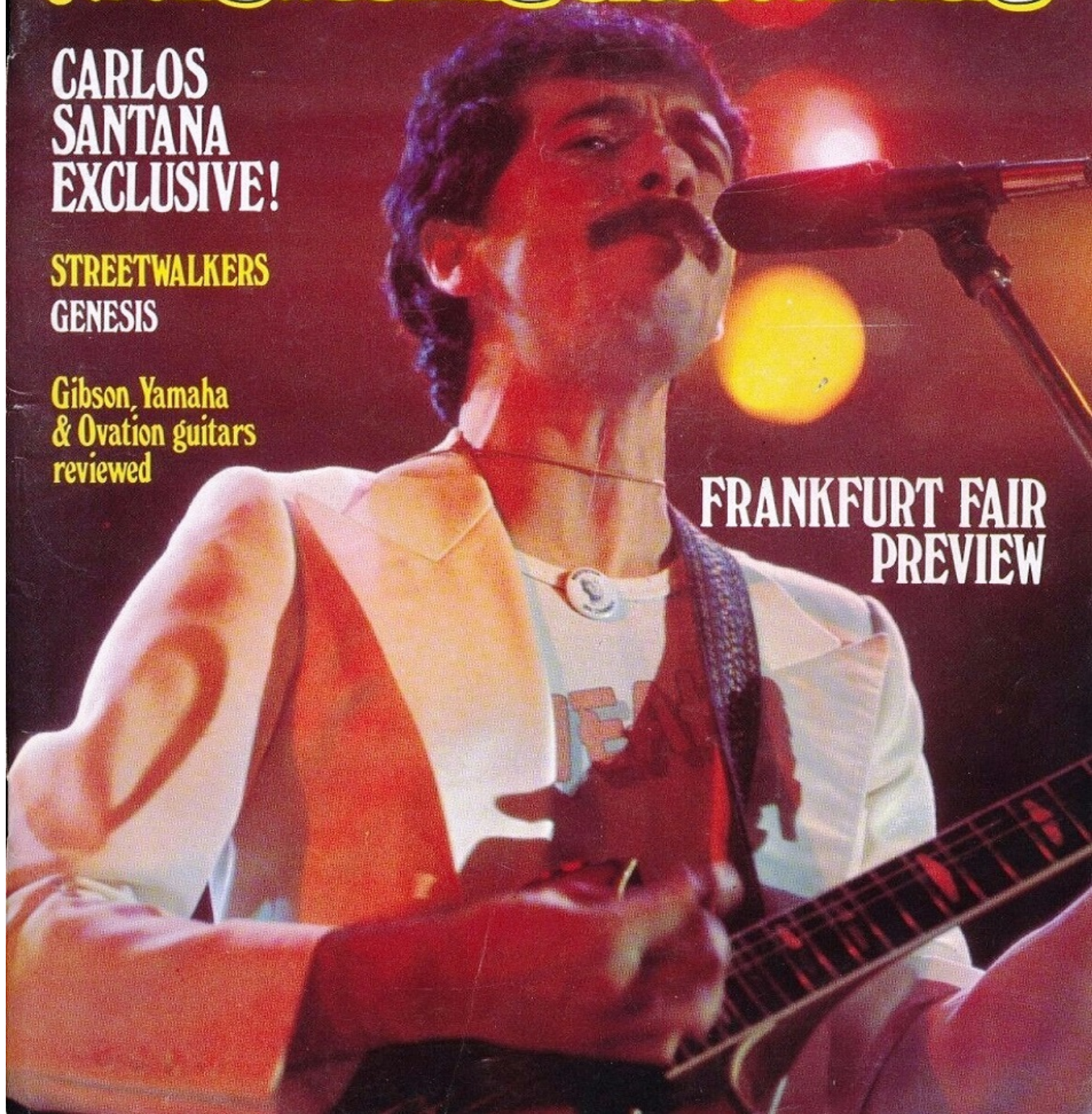
## INSTRUMENTAL Songwriting & Recording

**CARLOS  
SANTANA  
EXCLUSIVE!**

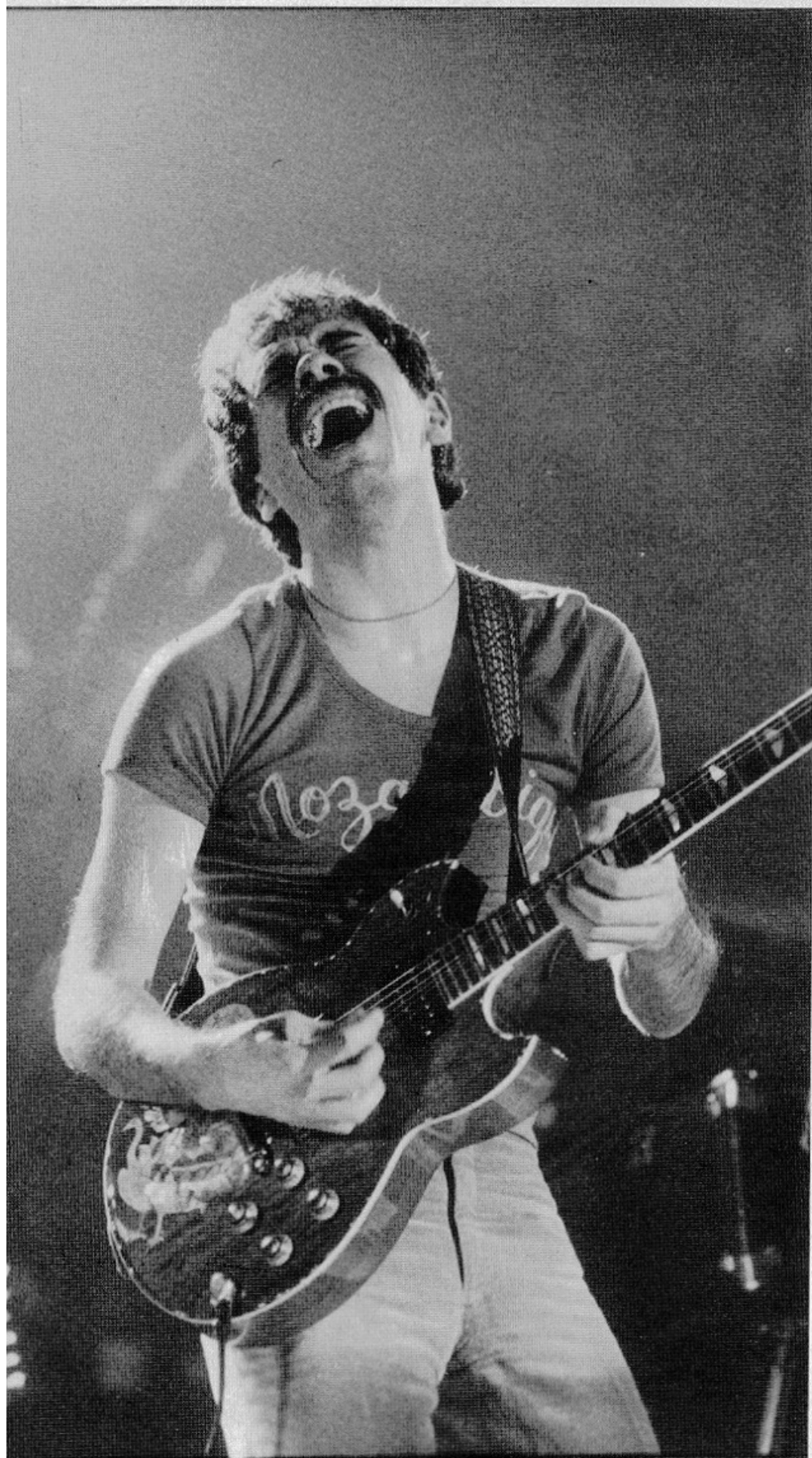
**STREETWALKERS  
GENESIS**

**Gibson, Yamaha  
& Ovation guitars  
reviewed**

**FRANKFURT FAIR  
PREVIEW**







It was too good to be true. There I was, just about to dash off and do an interview, when the 'phone rang. It was der Fuehrer at Beat telling me that Santana was, at that very moment, sitting on stage at the Hammersmith Odeon willing to talk. Would I go over and interview him? Too bloody right I would!

So, halfway there and nudging my mini in and out of the treacherous West London traffic, I began to think. What was with all the rumours about Carlos refusing to speak to the lions of the British Press because they'd mauled his new album, 'Festival'? If that was the case, how was I supposed to be able to get an interview? Was this the legendary Beat Instrumental red herring? I asked myself, narrowly missing a double decker bus.

Half an hour later and I was standing in the jobsworth's shelter at the back of the cinema waiting for the famed Ray Etzler, manager of said guitarist. Etzler showed up, full of true American hospitality (they smile while they knife you, or so I'm told,) and handed me a backstage pass. Would Santana talk? I asked. "Yeah," replied Etzler, "just walk up to him in the dressing room and sort of casually introduce yourself. Start asking questions about his guitars and he'll talk." The strong implication is that, to get anything out of Carlos, I've got to tread very carefully.

So I wait. The Stones Mobile is there recording the gig so I pass the time of day with Stu and the irrepressible Andy Munroe from Shure microphones. Still no Santana. Eventually I find the man from CBS Records. He too, looks worried. He knows the stories and reckons that Carlos might well *not* want to talk.

An hour later and the gent from the record company stalls Etzler as he tries to escape up a flight of stairs. After a few words of greeting, Etzler signals for me to follow him. I look at my watch, Santana is due on stage in twenty minutes. How the hell can I interview a guy who's on stage in twenty minutes?

So, I'm shown into a dressing room at the far end of which sits Santana, looking like a washing powder advert. He's tuning-up like crazy.

"Go on," says Etzler, "interview him."

I sit down and fumble with the tape recorder. Carlos eyes me rather suspiciously as I stutter the first question.

### Inlay

Actually, the question came simply because he's sitting there with the most beautiful guitar I've ever seen in my life. It's a Yamaha, obviously hand-made, with indescribable mother of pearl inlays around the body and, in the front of the guitar, there's a complete inlay depicting the Buddha. The Yamaha has a mahogany body with a maple strip set into the back, no doubt to carry the sustain right through it. The pickups and machine heads are gold plated and the richness of the wood and the superb quality of the construction are enough to take your breath away.

# CARLOS SANTANA

Yamaha, he tells me, made the guitar specially for him, although it's very similar to their top of the line model.

Another bright idea is the inclusion of a solid metal bar beneath the bridge. This too, Santana tells me, helps induce the sort of sustain he's made his trademark.

The guitar, as my ecstatic ramblings should tell you, is a peach. Carlos agrees.

"This guitar is like the difference between going for a meal at McDonald's and having a meal properly cooked for you by an expert. Somebody put a lot of effort into this guitar and you can tell that just by the feel of it."

The fact that Santana is now using Yamaha must have come as something of a blow to Gibson, who have made a point of featuring Santana in their adverts for the L6S since the instrument was released. How, I asked, did the two instruments compare?

"It sounds similar but there's no other comparison. It's far more comfortable, for example, because the Gibson puts a hole in your rib after a while! I asked Yamaha to shape this one for me so that it was comfortable to play and they did everything I asked."

"The L6S was really good, one of the best designs they came up with but even that, after a while, just feels cold, man. You know it feels like number 0021 or 27 whereas this Yamaha has a feel about it, a personality, the Gibsons are cold, it's like they have a reputation and aren't trying so hard any more. Yamaha are trying very hard and it shows."

With his current enthusiasm for Yamaha guitars, I asked Carlos whether he'd got around to trying their amplifiers yet.

"Yes, I have tried the amps but they're weak. Still, every time I go to Japan I leave one of my Boogie amps with them and they're constantly checking them out. I suppose that one day I'll go over there and they'll have gone one stage further. That's what they did with the guitars, you know. I mean I've seen some Yamaha acoustics that were better than Martins and their pianos too are really something."

Carlos' enthusiasm for Yamaha guitars is, of course, justified. Whereas the very words 'Japanese guitar' were a major insult ten years ago, the wily orientals have just about repeated in the instrument field what they did with cameras twenty years ago. Of course, Carlos is carrying things a bit far though, because he's comparing the hand-made Yamaha with a factory produced LS6. No doubt if you tried to buy a Yamaha like this it would set you back several thousand pounds on account of the sheer craftsmanship that has gone into the instrument. A fairer comparison would be between a standard model of each make, or two customs side by side. It must be said, however, that I've never

seen a modern American guitar as well made as his Yamaha.

Leaving the subject of guitars, I turn my attention to his Boogie amp. Not having seen one before (to the best of my knowledge I don't think that they're sold in the UK), I enquire about it. Carlos is lost once more in his tuning, so I talk to his guitar and amp man, a large gentleman who takes an obvious pride in his association with Santana and his knowledge of the man's gear.

"The amp is switchable between sixty and a hundred watts with two extra tubes (valves) to the output stage. They're really very good amps although we've had our share of problems with them. Previously, one of the causes of trouble was that they had a 7025 tube in the first pre-amp stage which used to get extremely microphonic and we'd end up trying maybe twenty or thirty different tubes before we'd find one that we could depend on. One of the ways we got round that was to have him made a head separate from the speakers and, on this tour, there's been an even greater improvement by using a thing called a fetron which is a solid state replacement that fits into the socket and replaces the 7025. It makes the sound a little hotter and a little cleaner but doesn't wreck the valve feel while it does improve reliability."

## Strobo

Another trick that Santana has at his disposal is a switch which enables him to run the Boogie head through two alternative speaker cabinets. One contains a single Altec 12" for a meaty warm sound, the other is a cabinet containing six 10" Altecs for a topky lead sound. On the effects side he uses a Maestro phase shifter, a Vox wah wah and an Echoplex.

"One thing I did mean to do while I was over here" Carlos asserts, "was to try out some of those Orange amplifiers because I've heard that they're really good."

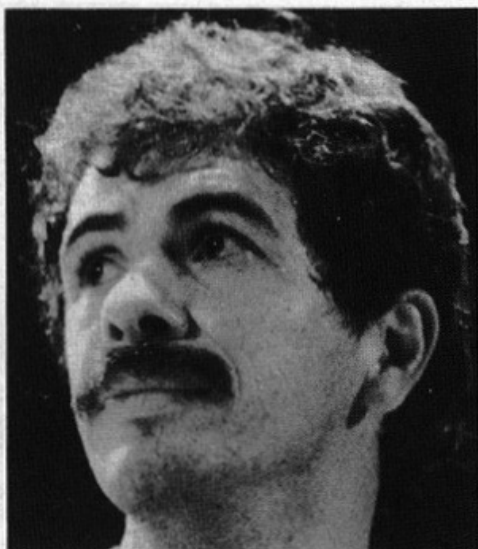
As I've already pointed out, the interview taking place while Carlos was busily tuning his guitars (he has a Les Paul as a spare). To aid the tuning he was using a strobo tuner. How much did that help?

"Oh man they're fantastic! We were touring with Eric Clapton who used one and I got the idea from him, they really are amazing — if you stretch the strings!"

As a demonstration, he plays a note and then pulls his string out like mad, counting to seven before releasing it.

"You really have to do this to each string three or four times to take all the tension out of them."

The strobo tuner is set to give exactly the same pitch as the pianos at the various gigs they play. From there, Santana gets the



tuning perfect, finding no tendency for the strings to out, providing, as he says, that they've been fully stretched.

All set to take the stage, his final action is to polish the guitars. "I don't like guitars when they're all sticky and messy. Before I became a disciple of Sri Chinmoy I was into being funky and smelling and I didn't care how things looked. But, after a while, you get a new frame of mind and now I keep my guitars clean because I know that, if I do, it'll play well and stay in tune. I know it's probably only psychological but it works and that's what matters."

The gig itself is that strange mixture that has always fascinated me about Carlos Santana's music. One minute you're standing there wondering what you ever saw in this Edmundo Ross soundalike, middle of the road outfit, the next he's hit a screaming sustained note that soars above the hypnotic Latin rhythms and you're in ecstasy. The gig carries on like that, MOR/Ecstasy/MOR/Ecstasy and, in the end, when it's all over, I'm left wondering whether I really like the band at all. What's not in doubt though, is Santana's guitar work — it's as brilliant as ever.

One last thing *does* puzzle me. The whole atmosphere with Carlos couldn't have been more affable. Despite the dire predictions of Etzler and the men from the record company, Carlos seemed more than happy to talk and, after all, few musicians will give an interview within minutes of going on stage — so where were the bad vibes? Why the big number about having to sidle up to him and 'just get chatting'? As far as I could tell, he seemed more than happy to talk, as well, that's show business...

by Gary Cooper