

MUSICAL

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The sound is unmistakable. Soaring above the throbbing bass and pulsating percussion, Devadip Carlos Santana's guitar resonates through Washington's D.A.R. Constitution Hall, a familiar voice.

As with the best guitarists, Santana has a sound all his own. With his crisp, clean attack and fluid tone, Santana's guitar style holds a middle ground between the note-conscious accuracy of a jazz technician and the expansive expressionism of a rock and roll maniac. That synthesis of styles should come as no surprise, because Santana's reputation cuts across both disciplines.

But tonight, as Santana leads his band through a two and a half hour celebration of their new album, *Zebop!*, the most striking aspect of his guitar playing is its vocal quality. The phrases Santana pulls from his guitar are not so much played as sung, cried and chanted. As the set progresses, Santana's guitar becomes increasingly eloquent, feeding off the chattering rhythms of the four percussionists, elaborating on phrases delivered by the keyboards or vocals.

To what does Santana attribute that singing quality? To studying records by his idol, John Coltrane? To trading licks with guitarists ranging from Mike Bloomfield to Mahavishnu John McLaughlin? To the lyrical tradition of his Mexican heritage?

Nope. Sitting backstage after the show, Santana admits that the vocal qualities of his playing were inspired by Dionne Warwick.

"I first started with B.B. King," he says, "because that's the most natural thing for a guitar player to start. Because you want to bend notes, you want to be able to express joy, attitude, anger, to cry..."

"But for those people who really want to begin to sing, I suggest getting a lot of Dionne Warwick records — the old ones — and instead of playing the chords or the trumpet things, try to match her vocal, note for note. Because there was one time where she had that beautiful balance between black and white, you know? Not too black and not too white; right in the middle. The Burt Bacharach, beautiful stuff. I learned to sing, like that, through her."

That unexpected, idiosyncratic approach to guitar style is typical of Santana's attitude toward guitar playing. Although his technique is substantial, it's the musicality of his playing, not his abilities as a guitarist, that makes his best work worth paying attention to. Santana himself is well aware of this; to his credit, it was a lesson learned early.

He recounts an anecdote involving his brother, Jorge. "My brother one time was really feeling down, and said, 'Do you know how many guitar players are outside. I mean just outside this door, who can burn you and me to death?' I said, 'Well, that may be true, but there's a



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CARLOS SANTANA

Unable to slake his thirst for new music, Santana swings from jazzy solo outings to rock-based group projects.

By J.D. Considine

lot of them who just sound the same."

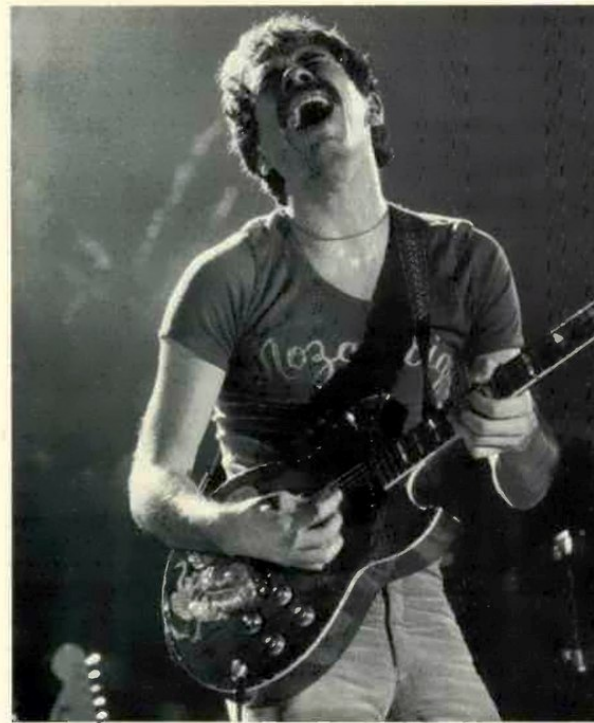
Santana continues with a smile. "I can name you thirty, out of maybe a million guitar players, who sound like individuals," he says. "The rest of them just sound the same to me. It's like Les Paul said, when you put 'em on the radio, even their mamas won't be able to tell you who they are."

"I mean, that's a cold thing, but it's a fact."

One of the fortunate thirty, Santana's

early taste was for blues. "Since I can remember," he says, "I was listening to Bobby Bland, Jimmy Reed, people like that. It was frustrating when I was a kid, because the people I wanted to hang out with were into the Beach Boys."

Naturally enough, considering Santana's predilection for blues and the preponderance of blues-rock bands in San Francisco at the time, the first edition Santana was the Santana Blues Band, which emerged in late 1966.



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Santana acquired his singing guitar tone from old Dionne Warwick records, matching her vocals note for note.

The next step was somewhat unexpected. The Santana Blues Band was booked at the Fillmore with Howling Wolf and Steve Miller. But Carlos Santana never made it to that gig. "They took me to the hospital for tuberculosis," he says. "I was there for three and a half months, and I couldn't get out. They just put me in this ward, like 'Cuckoo's Nest' or something."

In the interim, his bandmates kept the group together, rehearsing in his absence. One day, one of them came to the hospital to report that the band had added a conga player. Recalls Santana, "I thought, 'A conga player? That's different.'"

"As a matter of fact," he adds, "Harvey Mandel was the first one to use congas that I can remember. And I liked that concept. I liked it more when I heard Gabor Szabo with congas."

Conga player Marcus Malone was the decisive factor in the band's transformation of the blues. "He's the one who brought in 'Jingo' and all those other songs," reports Santana, "which of course belonged to Olatunji."

"But it wasn't quite natural yet. See, at the time, the Jazz Crusaders, Horace Silver, Donald Byrd and a couple of other

guys — Duke Pearson — were beginning to experiment with the congas and stuff like that, mixing jazz, blues and latin... We started to really just work on that and that alone, and all of a sudden we had something where we were able to headline at the Fillmore without selling any albums. So it was great."

Needless to say, that bit about "not selling any albums" changed quickly enough. In 1969, Malone left the band, and with two new percussionists, Michael Carabello (who had been in and out of the band since its early days) and Chepito Areas, the third edition of Santana was catapulted to mass recognition after playing a festival in upstate New York, called Woodstock. The band's first album, *Santana*, leapt into the charts; its successor, *Abraxas*, did even better. Latin-rock became rock and roll's newest and most successful hyphenated form.

All of which did little to alter Carlos Santana's thirst for new music. The next big change for him came one evening when drummer Michael Shrieve showed up at his house with a stack of albums, one of which was *In a Silent Way*.

"To tell you the truth," confesses Santana, "the first time I heard Miles, I

thought it was cocktail music. Being a straight blues player, I wanted that rock and roll blues. And when I heard that kind of music, you know — I don't like bars. (Laughs) I hate bars."

"But when he brought in *a Silent Way*, that made me listen from a different point of view. The thing about *In a Silent Way* is that it had that bassline" (he hums the Dave Holland figure from "It's About That Time") "and that had blues... For some reason, I related to it like 'You Gotta Help Me' or 'Green Onions,' anything like that. Just a cycle. And what he was playing, and what Tony Williams was playing, it just opened a door for me. Then I wasn't so close-minded to jazz."

Then Shrieve played Santana some Coltrane. "I started listening to early Coltrane," he says, "before he went into the stratosphere, and the sense of melody turned me around. I stopped listening to B.B. and Gabor... I became obsessed with Miles and Coltrane, to the point where when I found out Miles was available for us to play with, I just went crazy."

Along with Miles Davis, Carlos Santana was introduced to a young English guitarist working with Davis and Tony Williams, John McLaughlin. Initially, little came of the association between Santana and McLaughlin, aside from Santana expressing his admiration for McLaughlin's work. Then, out of the blue, a phone call came.

"One time I was in the house," Santana remembers, "and the band was just starting to break up. Mahavishnu called and wanted to know what I thought about doing an album... I said, 'Sure.'"

The album that resulted was *Love, Devotion, Surrender*, hailed by many as the apotheosis of jazz/rock fusion. But to Santana, the most valuable aspect of those sessions was that Mahavishnu John McLaughlin introduced him to Sri Chinmoy, who was to become Santana's guru. "He saw in my eyes that I was searching for a spiritual discipline," Santana explains. "So he invited me. It wasn't an imposition, it wasn't like one of those things where you're going through an airport and somebody puts a flower on you, then they want something."

Hence, Santana's spiritual name, Devadip, the most obvious aspect of his association with Chinmoy. More important, though, is that having an understanding of both his spiritual and corporeal natures has helped Santana sort out his ambitions. As he puts it, "I have two hands, Devadip and Santana."

That realization has cleared up the confusion in the band's direction. For a couple of years, between *Caravanserai* and *Borboletta*, it wasn't clear whether Santana wanted to be a jazz band or a rock band. Now, Santana pursues both separately, alternating jazz-oriented solo albums with rock-based group efforts.

For example, there was *The Swing of*

Delight, of which Santana bubbles. "I'm still elated from having played with people I admire, like Wayne Shorter, Tony Williams, Ron Carter, Herbie Hancock. When I do an album like that, as soon as I do it, I immediately want to play rock and roll. As soon as I'm doing rock and roll, I want to go back and someday record with McCoy Tyner or Elvin Jones. And as soon as I do *that*, I want to go back and maybe play with Jimmy Page or somebody."

Santana will tour Japan with his band plus Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter and Tony Williams. Also, he's working on a recording session with the Fabulous Thunderbirds and members of Third World, "like a reggae/blues album," he says.

And always, he credits his spirituality for his growth. "I'm very grateful for this grace," he concludes, "that I can do an

album like this and then like that. Two extremes, almost."

Carlos' Equipment

Because he is more concerned with the what of music than the how, his attitude toward guitars is almost lackadaisical. Asked what he looks for in a guitar, Santana says simply, "Well, I just want it to stay in tune. The rest, it'll surprise me."

Still, his guitars aren't exactly a casual collection. Tonight's performance found him breaking in a new guitar, custom built by Paul Reed Smith, of Annapolis, Maryland. It's his second Smith custom, and Santana seems to be a satisfied customer. "I used it through a lot of the set," he says, cradling it in his lap. "It's something, man... he must have a Japanese soul to keep going for quality."

Santana stumbled onto the Smith custom guitars after having borrowed

one from Heart's Howard Leese. Now, the Smith guitars seem destined to eclipse Santana's beloved pre-production model Yamaha guitars. Nonetheless, the Yamahas and a sunburst-finish Les Paul remain as part of his stage set-up.

"I play a Stratocaster at home," he adds. He did, however, take the Stratocaster into the studio recently, using it to record Russ Ballard's "Winning" for Zebop!

"It sounded good," he enthused. "It felt good because I immediately got into that nice candy sound that Mark Knopfler from Dire Straits and Eric Clapton get. Just like that. Just plug it in, and no overdubs or anything."


While Santana is able to rattle off string weights by memory (.008, .011, .014, .024, .036, .042, all Yamaha), as well as the settings for his MESA/Boogie amps ("I usually put about 2 on bass, 7 on treble, the main master is on about 5, and the other two are on 7; a little reverb and that's it"), he's less specific about his effect boxes.

"I like to use a chorus now, since I saw Metheny a couple of years ago," he says. What kind? He turns to a crew member busily packing guitars and asks, "What's the name of that chorus, is it a 6-something?" The crew member doesn't know either, and Santana embarrassedly holds up his hands and says, "It's a blue box about *this* big..."

Aside from the chorus, which turns out to be DOD-690, Santana uses an echo-plex — "very little" — and a wah-wah. Yet for a guitarist of such electronic restraint, Santana is quick to express admiration for Andy Summers of the Police, whose use of effect boxes is as extravagant as Santana's is limited.

"He uses a lot of stuff, three echo-plexes," raves Santana, "but he sounds fantastic. To me, he's the Joe Zawinul of the guitar." Which is no small compliment. "Joe Zawinul is the ultimate, supreme best as far as Moog synthesizer. Everybody else sounds cheesy to me. I do like Herbie Hancock a lot, but I especially like Joe Zawinul. Because I believe that he takes a long time to get a sound. You can tell."

No less a factor in Santana's admiration for Summers and Zawinul is the fact that both the Police and Weather Report have managed to synthesize a sound out of jazz, rock and various Third World musics that captures what Santana calls "real primitive innocence."

Another band Santana admires, curiously enough, is Talking Heads. "Jim Morrison, Miles Davis in *On the Corner* — they got those things down," he says of the Heads. "It's great, and it sounds new. The Police sound is supremely unique, totally unique, and I give them a lot more credit. Nevertheless, I do adore and love the Talking Heads. They inspire me to get into some different cookie jars, you know?" 

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