

JOAN ARMATRADING'S SONGWRITING SECRETS

# MUSICIAN

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## PHIL COLLINS

**A MUSICIAN  
BECOMES A STAR**  
BY J.D. CONSIDINE

**JOE ZAWINUL**  
**BEYOND WEATHER REPORT**

**RECORDING TIPS**

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# MUSICIAN

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*By Rob Tannenbaum*

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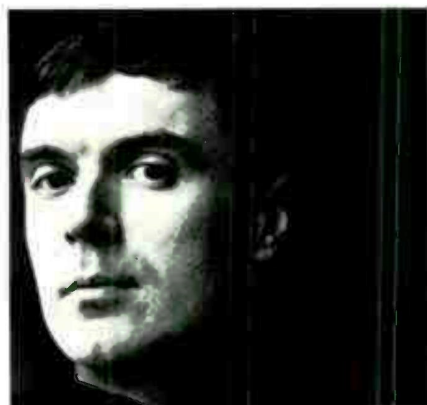
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Cover Photo by Maurice Bensimon/OUTLINE

JIMI STRATTON



## PHIL COLLINS

He revitalized Genesis, reinvented the sound of drums, and is rapidly moving toward world radio domination, most recently with his #1 LP *No Jacket Required*. From steamy, menacing grooves to comic interludes, a visit with Phil on tour in Australia.

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Dennis Callahan/PIX INT'L



## SANTANA'S SAILING SWITCHBLADE



Carlos on helium: "Get out of the way mindwise and execute what's in your heart."

JIMI STRATTON

## Fighting the "Oh Yeah, Another Santana Album" Syndrome

By Don Snowden

A brisk breeze cools the crisp San Francisco afternoon, but the glaring lights and cumulative body heat of fifty-odd crew members, band friends and label reps have transformed the SIR soundstage where Santana is shooting its "Say It Again" video into a fair approximation of a sauna. Directors bark commands, technicians scurry from task to task and dolly-mounted cameras slowly roll across the room while the band occupies itself with an extended jam. A white-capped Armando Peraza claims center stage to run through a series of dance moves, including a more than passable moonwalk, with a flair no *conguero* nearing

sixty should be able to muster.

The focal point of this midday madness, Carlos Santana, races from timbales to trap drums, only strapping on his guitar to drop a few crystalline single notes over ex-Weather Reporter Alphonso Johnson's speedy walking bass line. The heat has already prompted Santana to strip down to a sleeveless gold John Coltrane T-shirt over blue and green pinstripe pants.

The impromptu rehearsal has been specifically arranged to provide the video crew with performance shots of Carlos to be integrated into the clip of the first single from Santana's new *Beyond Appearances* album on Columbia. Later that afternoon, while the rest of the band endures repeated takes of "Say It Again" to cover all the requisite angles, Carlos Santana will be winging his way home to his wife and two small children. "I can't have one cat come over and tell me to pose and suck my cheeks and be unnatural," he says.

Carlos Santana approaches the media these days as gingerly as...well, a lot of people approach new Santana

records. Fifteen albums and sixteen years since that first eponymous LP electrified the rock world, Santana is an institution and, like most institutions, is experiencing great difficulty in re-capturing that initial revelatory jolt. It's hard to keep springing surprises when people basically know what to expect from you. Santana himself remains such a distinctive instrumental stylist that everyone from Eskimos to aborigines can probably identify one of his solos within eight bars.

The rub with Santana has been one of context. Depending on your perspective, the point of creative no return arrived in 1973 (when Santana went jazzy with *Caravanserai*), 1976 (when Carlos and company returned to clave city and commercial graces on *Amigos*) or 1979 (or whatever year you think signals the phasing out of Latin dance rhythms for the AOR rock foundation of the last few band outings).

The battle between art and commerce most musicians wrestle with has been a particularly violent struggle in Santana's case. Carlos did hit on a



method to reconcile those opposing forces in the mid-70s—solo albums became the vehicles for his jazzier, creative side while the band LPs afforded the chance to touch base with the masses and brought home the bacon. The schizoid set-up worked well enough on the latter score—the *Moonflower*, *Zebop!* and *Shangó* albums all spawned hit singles—but it reinforced the “Oh yeah, another Santana album” syndrome, too.

That’s the way it worked for me, anyway, until I slapped on the opening track of *Havana Moon* and “Watch Your Step” turned me right around to stare slack-jawed at the speakers in shock and...yep, surprise. I had forgotten Carlos Santana was capable of rocking out that furiously.

“Well, here in the 60s in San Francisco the song was ‘Satisfaction,’” reflected Santana during a break in the video shoot. “In the 50s in Tijuana, it was either ‘What’d I Say’ by Ray Charles or ‘Watch Your Step’ because they both have that switchblade kind of effect. Those two songs were the thing to play Saturday night so people will forget about the rent and dance.”

*Havana Moon* was a wildly inconsistent romp with a cavalcade of stars through Carlos’ roots, but its high points are among the best music Santana ever committed to vinyl. Take “Who Do You Love,” wherein Santana and the Fabulous Thunderbirds kiss off the expected piledriver Diddley beat in favor of a light, jaunty shuffle that completely transforms that venerable warhorse.

“I always wanted to blend the Fabulous Thunderbirds with the Afro-Cuban element,” he remarks. “Like with King Sunny Adé, you hear Willie Nelson and you hear Watts and everything is happening in there. That’s what I was trying to do with ‘Who Do You Love,’ create that kind of thing where it doesn’t matter whether it’s a shuffle or a 6/8 or disco. It’s just movin’, you know?”

The wide-open, genre-mixing concert bills of late-60s San Francisco undoubtedly cemented that preference for melding different styles together, but the seeds had already been sown in the streets of Tijuana where Carlos came of musical age in the late 50s. There were radio stations pumping an eclectic potpourri of different music into his ears: blues, gospel and early rock ‘n’ roll left the deepest imprint.

Ironically, what he *didn’t* absorb while growing up in that border town exerted the greatest influence on his future direction. The mariachi and *norteño* styles that were the obvious musical legacies of his Mexican heritage left Carlos cold. When the Santana band emerged as an international force, it embraced an entirely different Latin music tradition, the Afro-Cuban style

spotlighting his soaring guitar over the racing foundation provided by multiple percussionists.

“If you’re into sailing, you’ve already got the current with three percussionists and the drummer,” he says now. “Once you start, you can choose from styles like Gabor (Szabo) where he plays three strings and open strings to give it that raga sort of feeling, or you can play staccato like Wayne Shorter, really choppy. Once you’re there, it kind of tells you what to play.”

“The general rule is what Alphonso Johnson says, get out of the way mind-wise to execute what you feel in your heart. That’s a challenge right there because a sound is more than a string and a finger on it, a lot more than the design of the amplifier or guitar. You try to get rid of the licks you’re not really fond of and find the stuff that’s pure, that’s you and nobody else.”

As that reply might indicate, Carlos Santana is far more comfortable talking about music in abstract or metaphorical terms than engaging in nuts and bolts analysis. One question about the amount of rhythmic experimentation when the band hammers its material into shape yielded a reply which boiled down to “The rhythm is like shoes. You can wear any style as long as it’s the same color.”

Queries about specific elements and new wrinkles on *Beyond Appearances*—the flamenco-style acoustic guitar run on “Spirit,” the tripartite structure of “Who Loves You?,” the occasional use of drum machines or keyboards locked into the body of the arrangements—received little beyond the far-from-illuminating “We tried it and it worked” response.

The reason seems to be much less willful evasiveness than the fact that Carlos Santana is a team player who genuinely views music as a collaborative creative process and refuses to step out of character for the benefit of the tape recorder. There are good-natured flashes of individual ego—“(producer) Val Garay’s gonna be spoiled the next time he calls in a guitar or conga player. They’re gonna ask, ‘Where’s the switchblade?’”—but his basic musical outlook falls closest to the jazz ethic, more difficult to capture in words than on the bandstand.

“I do value and put more emphasis on spontaneity,” he maintains. “I was reading this interview with Cecil Taylor and they were asking him what does he practice with these days, harmony, theory or scales or chords. He says he just practices one note until that note plugs into the universe. Some people call it the Spaloosh feeling.”

“We call it helium and it’s those moments when everything is intertwined. You can play almost any key and almost

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any beat you want and it's just happening. That's the something that consciously or unconsciously we're trying to create as much as possible.

"I can claim inspiration and dynamism from just about anybody as long as they're sticking their neck out. I'm not into selling as much as I am expressing because I don't hear the cash register. A lot of people don't listen to music. All they can listen to is the cash register so I'm glad I'm on the other side."

The problem is reconciling those high-minded statements with the fact that *Beyond Appearances* is back to rock business as usual...and Carlos knows it. "The real departures are albums like *Caravanserai* where we spe-

cifically wanted to cool out of the norm. This one we wanted to cool into the norm and bring in some good thoughts."

*Beyond Appearances* cools so far into the norm that it doesn't sound much like a Santana album except for traces of extra percussion and, naturally, those tell-tale guitar tracks. The record does capture the variety of elements in Santana's music in tidy, programmable capsules—but how well you like it depends on your tolerance for slickly produced AOR fare.

"It's pretty easy for me to play 'Say It Again,'" he acknowledges. "I don't want to boast but I could play a solo to the whole song and get off. This album again confines me to playing a solo

when I'm supposed to and sharing with the singer, but I learned a lot. If I ever get an opportunity to work with Paul McCartney, the format in which they approach songs won't be so foreign to me."

That seems to be the solution Santana has hit on to resolve his creative/commercial dilemma—treat everything as a learning experience, a preparatory step toward the achievement of some long-range future goal. "I don't have any qualms any more about playing old or new songs because the reality is they're just plates," Santana admits. "What you put on 'em is what's important, right? If you put something good on top of 'Mary Had A Little Lamb,' you can make people get up and dance. I guess it's the essence that matters and being true to that end. Like Armando Peraza says, if you get intoxicated with what you're playing, no matter what it is, they're going to get intoxicated with what you play."

Santana may get more intoxicated in his next project, another 180° shift. It's a collaboration with Tony Williams that's currently brainstormed as a duo affair, perhaps augmented by guest vocals from the unlikely pair of Jimmy Cliff and John Lee Hooker. "I still want to feel like I just got out of high school and know next to nothing. I want to get next to other musicians so I can learn something because I love the way they express life. I'm always trying to get close to everybody so I can find another element of myself. I need catalysts and people to bounce off."

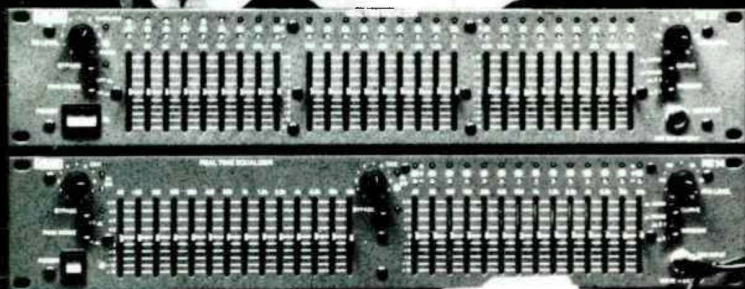
"I'm trying to get close to people I love like McCoy Tyner and John Lee Hooker so I can learn more, express more and make more people aware of other things besides Freddie & the Dreamers or whatever that is today. There's a lot of Freddie & the Dreamers kinds of bands today, you know. I just wanted to bring out more soulfulness and art so that people could choose to like it or not." □

## Abr-Axes

Carlos Santana's amps are MESA/Boogies and Marshalls; his main guitars a Paul Reed Smith and Yamaha SBG-3000. "The Paul Reed Smith is like a tenor—it has that crunch to it—and the Yamaha is a soprano, more for ballads." The pickups in the Yamaha are Seymour Duncans. Strings for both are Yamahas. His effects are by DOD, including a 565-A chorus and a couple of 585-A digital delays, and a Yamaha Octaver. He's also got an old Mutron wah-wah and a custom-built switching unit to go from Boogie to Marshall amps. Wireless is a Nady VHF-700. He's exploring synthesis by using a Roland GR-707 MIDI'd to a Yamaha DX7.

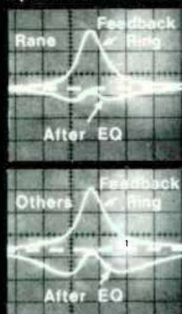
At home, Carlos uses an Ampex 1" 8-track and a PM-1000 24-input board with Orban reverb and eq equalizer and a Yamaha RE-15 reverb, but spends more time on his Fostex and Tascam Portastudio 4-track cassette decks. Tape of choice is TDK SA.

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