

# RELIX

music for the mind

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# SANTANA

## PARAMOUNT PERFORMER

BY JYM FAHEY

Few things in life can be counted on like a Santana concert. There's never a mere perfunctory performance of hits. Sure as sunrise, Santana puts on an electric, exciting performance full of wonder and experimentation. Where the show will go from one moment to the next cannot be predicted; just strap in and get ready for a thrilling ride. The show at the Paramount, beneath Madison Square Garden in New York City, provided more of the consistent brilliance Carlos and his bands have offered for years.

Third World opened the evening with their rockin' reggae. If Santana's rhythmic propulsion machine needed a kick start, Third World provided it. They put the crowd in a dancing mood, getting down with jams like the title track from their *Committed* album (Mercury).

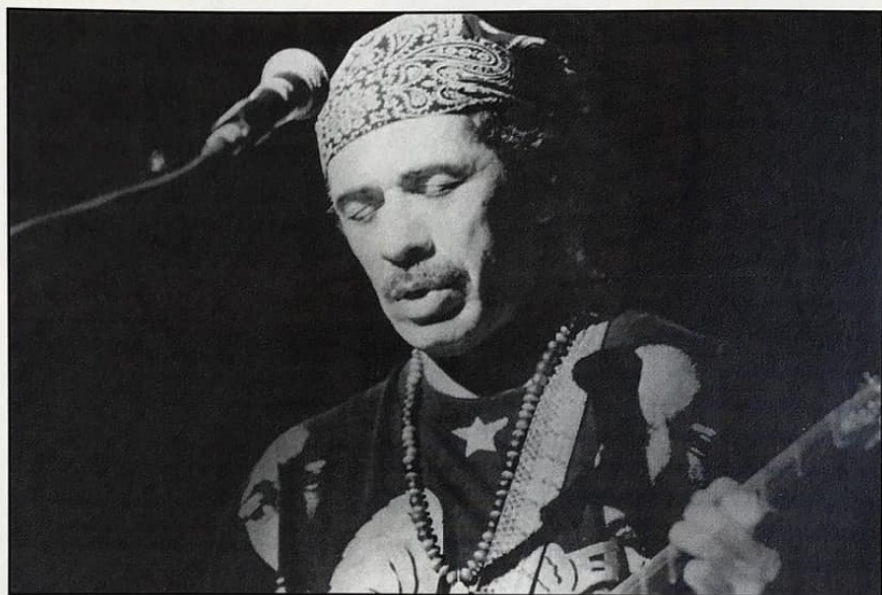
After a short break for a stage change, it was Santana's turn. Carlos told all to look around "for there are angels all around us" and then broke into "Spirits Dancing In The Flesh." What an appropriately brilliant way to begin. That title concisely defines Santana's sound. Carlos dedicated the next song to Stevie Ray Vaughan and the group floated into "Somewhere In Heaven," the killer voice of Alex Ligertwood soaring to the heavens. And there was no turning back.

With Carlos at the helm, spaceship Santana soared through the galaxy of uncharted musical planets without fear. At one point, Third World returned to the stage along with Vernon Reid and Lenny Kravitz for an extended jam-out on the Bob Marley/Peter Tosh composition "Get Up Stand Up." Carlos, always a gracious host in these situations, showed no mercy to his guests. Carlos and his cohorts smoke and expect no less from their visitors. This night the interplay provided a great highlight. It's just another of the calculated risks during Santana shows which makes them so exciting.

Santana sprinkled the show with old favorites, more recent recordings and current songs from his *Milagro* album (Polydor), but there is a point in the show which everyone awaits. When the opening chords of the "Black Magic Woman/Gypsy Queen" medley begins, the electricity shoots up a few more kilowatts. No matter how many times Carlos has played this song over the years, he keeps it fresh and full of vitality.

Carlos has said, "A song to me is like a cup or a dish. What you

*"A song to me is like a cup or a dish. What you put inside that dish or that cup is what makes it fresh"*



Bob Bromberg

put inside that dish or that cup, the wine or the food, is what makes it fresh. Every day. So, you know, you as a person have to learn that even though you may be playing 'Black Magic Woman' for a long time or whatever, it's what you put inside every day that makes it new and fresh."

Carlos' songs are vehicles for his creativity and that of the musicians with whom he surrounds himself. Carlos improvised like a man possessed. Few musicians can get so much out of one note. The whirling guitar, percussion, bass and keyboards carried the Santana hovercraft off to the outer reaches of the musical cosmos. Just when it seemed that a safe, soft landing might take place after a thorough torching of "Gypsy Queen," the retro-rockets fired once again, fueled this time by "Oye Como Va." Chester Thompson ripped into a monster organ solo and soon the stage was devoid of all personnel but Carlos and C.T., a duet which surrounded the audience. They were reinforced by Vernon Reid, who, after a

tentative first approach, went right for the jugular.

Soon, the rest of the band joined the fiery trio and it was the percussionists' turn to shine, along with extraordinary bassist Ronny Dove. Raul Rico (congas), Karl Perazzo (timbales) and Walfredo Reyes (trap set) kicked and slapped and beat the drums savagely, but neither drums nor drummers would submit. Things got so hot for awhile that Karl watered down the timbales, the resulting rhythmic geysers a dramatic effect. Just as dramatically, Carlos followed up by directing Vernon, Chester and himself through a series of solo exchanges that seemed a strange hybrid of cooperation and competition. And then it was over. But not quite.

Suddenly the Paramount was transformed into a muddy field and transported a little ways upstate as the encore began. The performance of "Soul Sacrifice," which so electrified the audience at Woodstock 23 years earlier and has continued as a staple of the Santana show, began anew. The cheering, dancing audience, drained physically and emotionally by the performance thus far, found the energy to get up once again, cheering, chanting and dancing. "Soul Sacrifice" became "A Love Supreme," and after Carlos worked out a bit on an acoustic guitar on a stand, it became a taste of "Samba Pa Ti" and a pinch of George Benson's "Breezin'." Soon the audience found itself in the middle of "Jingo-Lo-Ba." Carlos introduced the band and Alex introduced Carlos. As cheers subsided some, Carlos offered a blessing to the audience and their families and exited. Those in attendance were therefore twice blessed and left musically sated.