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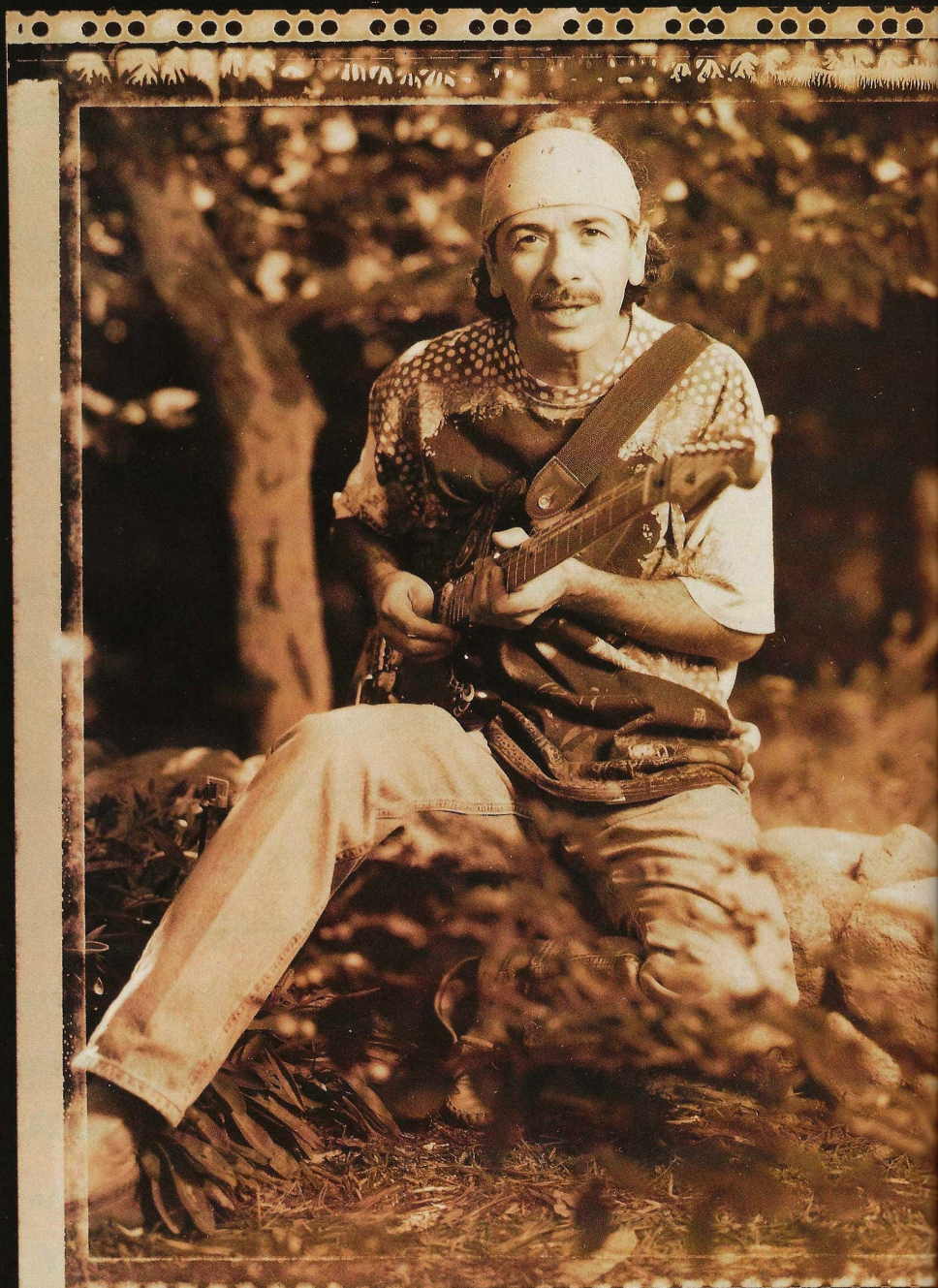
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Stone Gossard and Mike McCready by Lance Mercer/LGI

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Stone Gossard by Lance Mercer/LGI





# THE UNFORGETTABLE FIRE

BY ALAN DIPERNA

Twenty five years ago, CARLOS SANTANA smoked the rock world at Woodstock. Today, with a new live album and his own brand new label, his flame still burns brightly.

COME ON, CHECK THIS OUT...." GRINNING LIKE SOME PRANKSTER GENIE, CARLOS SANTANA SCURRIES UP A WOODEN LADDER AND DISAPPEARS INTO A SMALL, RECTANGULAR HOLE IN THE CEILING. FILLED WITH CURIOSITY, I CLIMB AFTER HIM INTO THE ATTIC OF HIS INCENSE-SCENTED GUEST HOUSE. AS MY HEAD CLEARS THE OPENING, I FEEL LIKE AN ARCHAEOLOGIST WHO'S EMERGED FROM A DARK TUNNEL AND COME UP IN THE SPLENDOR OF SOME MAYAN TREASURE ROOM OR EGYPTIAN TOMB. BEFORE ME IS A SMALL, TRIANGULAR CHAMBER THAT IS ALIVE WITH VIBRANT COLOR. EVERY SURFACE IS COVERED WITH DAY-GLO SILK-SCREENED CLOTH—WALL HANGINGS AND T-SHIRTS CREATED BY TWO ARTISTS WHOM CARLOS HAS TAKEN UNDER HIS WING, AS THE GUITARIST

EXPLAINS. THE ROOM POSITIVELY SHIMMERS WITH IMAGES FROM AFRICA, INDIA, SOUTH AMERICA AND POINTS BEYOND: GODDESSES, DRAGONS, ANGELS, BIRDS, BEASTS AND PHANTASMS.

"GOD FORBID I SHOULD EVER GO DEAF," SAYS CARLOS SANTANA. "BUT IF I EVER DO, I'LL STILL HAVE ALL THIS...."

AMONG THE OPALESCENT IMAGES, SIX FAMILIAR FACES RECUR LIKE A HEARTBEAT RHYTHM: JIMI HENDRIX, BOB MARLEY, JOHN COLTRANE, MILES DAVIS, MARVIN GAYE AND STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN. SANTANA'S DEARLY DEPARTED MENTORS. A BIT OF ALL OF THEM LIVE ON IN CARLOS' OWN CELESTIAL GUITAR WORK. THERE'S A BREATH OF MARLEY'S SPIRITUALITY, BUT ALSO GAYE'S SENSUALITY. SANTANA'S VAST RECORDED CATALOG SHOWS HIM TO BE A MILES-LIKE MUSICAL CHAMELEON AND, LIKE 'TRANE, ENDLESSLY IN PURSUIT OF TOTAL IMPROVISATIONAL FREEDOM. YET HE'S TAPPED INTO THE SAME EARTHY BLUES ROOTS AS STEVIE RAY.

Photograph by  
Michael Sexton



Santana pays tribute to these “sacred sources,” as he calls them, on *Live Forever*—the first album to be released by his new Guts & Grace record label. The disc is a collection of previously unreleased live performances by Hendrix, Vaughan, Marley, Coltrane and Gaye. (Carlos says he wanted to include Miles on the disc, but couldn’t obtain the necessary permission.) “Basically, I wanted to celebrate their spirit,” he says, “and put more attention where it belongs—on them. Nothing gives me more joy than sharing music with others.”

Of course, Santana has a much more direct way of sharing music with others. When he picks up a guitar, he speaks an impassioned language that cuts across all national or cultural boundaries and flies straight to the heart. He’s probably the only man on earth who can successfully sit in with John Lee Hooker, Vernon Reid and African kora virtuoso Mory Kante. But for all his sponge-like absorption of musical influences, Carlos Santana has always been a stunningly original guitar stylist. When he bends a note, it’s like a spirit yearning toward the sky. His blinding double-picked tremolo runs and flame-like riffs are all part of an unmistakable sonic signature.

That same signature is boldly emblazoned across Santana’s newest record, *Sacred Fire*. Recorded last year in South America, the disc is Carlos’ first live album since 1977, and offers an inspired restatement of some classic Santana hits and some newer material, rendered with *cajones* by Carlos and his extremely limber band. The guitarist had several reasons for wanting to record in South America:

“We played in Chile in December of ’92 and the reaction was incredible. We played a day or two after Guns N’ Roses. They drew 35,000-40,000 people. We drew between 80,000-90,000. The interaction between the audience and the musicians was so strong that we said, ‘We gotta come back here and record with this consciousness. We have to capture this on a CD and video and show this kind of “spiritual orgasm,”’ as Miles would put it.”

That part of the world holds a special resonance for Santana, who was born in the small town of Autlan, Mexico, and moved to Tijuana when he was just eight. But, for all that, he says didn’t really regard the *Sacred Fire* dates as a homecoming:

“I can be anywhere in the world at this point and it feels like my home. To me, my home is my heart. But I’m very grateful that the people from Mexico all the way down to Brazil claim me in a special way.”

Long before the term “world beat” was even a gleam in some journalist’s eye, Carlos Santana was gamely mixing musical

styles from around the globe. Growing up, he was naturally immersed in traditional Mexican music. The son of a mariachi violinist, he started on that instrument at age five, switching to guitar a few years later.

down to get more notes into your phrases.”

From B.B., says Carlos, he learned to value each individual note—an appreciation that’s pivotal to Santana’s profoundly rich tone: “A note is like a rose. It can be

## “NOTHING GIVES ME MORE JOY THAN



## SHARING MUSIC WITH OTHERS.”

But his deepest passion was reserved for American blues, particularly for the work of B.B. King, T-Bone Walker and Bobby Parker. The big band jazz stylings of Charlie Christian caught his ear too. “For the first part of the Sixties I only did down-picking, like B.B.,” Carlos recalls. “But later on, when I started buying old Charlie Christian records, I noticed that you had to go up and

closed or halfway open or all the way in bloom. You have to know when to hit that note the right way—choose how each note is going to be. It’s like being a gardener. You want to present the best possible bouquet.”

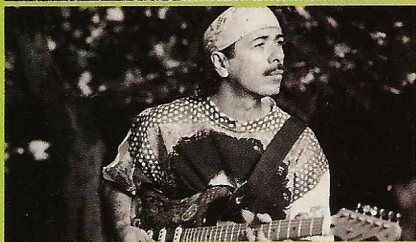
The guitarist speaks of receiving “the note” first hand the first time he saw B.B. King play at the Fillmore in San Francisco, around 1966: “It was B.B.’s first time at



## SANTANA

the Fillmore and he got a standing ovation before he even began playing. He was so moved that he started crying. And I remember, because of the way the light was hitting him, all you could see was the glitter of the tears in his eyes and the diamonds on his rings when he put his hand up to his face. And when you were a kid who'd just come up from Tijuana and felt like you didn't know anything, that kind of thing really hit you. B.B. King hit the note and it changed everything for me. I said, 'That's it; there's

## FAXOLOGY



Michael Sexton

### CARLOS SANTANA

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the sound I've been searching for.' I felt like a kid chasing the circus."

That chase led to the formation of the Santana Blues Band. This would eventually become just plain Santana, much as the Steve Miller Blues Band mutated into the Steve Miller Band. Practically every group was the Something-Or-Other Blues Band back then—a sort of homage to the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, whose influential first album opened up the blues to a new, young, multiracial audience. Blues bands were a dime a dozen in the mid-to-late Sixties, it took something special to make Santana stand out. That something was Carlos' own Latino roots. Strangely enough, he rediscovered them through that largely white, middle-class youth culture upheaval which was just about to sweep the world: San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury hippie scene.

"Our band," he recalls, "started going to Aquatic Park here in San Francisco—to the 'Hippie Hill.' They always had like 15 or 20 conga players, one flute player and some wine. They'd play all day and watch peo-

Past Performers include: Anton Fig, Will Lee, Jennifer Batten, Adrian Legg, Stanley Jordan, Roger McGuinn, Les Dudek, Warren Haynes, Brad Gillis, Jeff Watson, Lonnie Mack,

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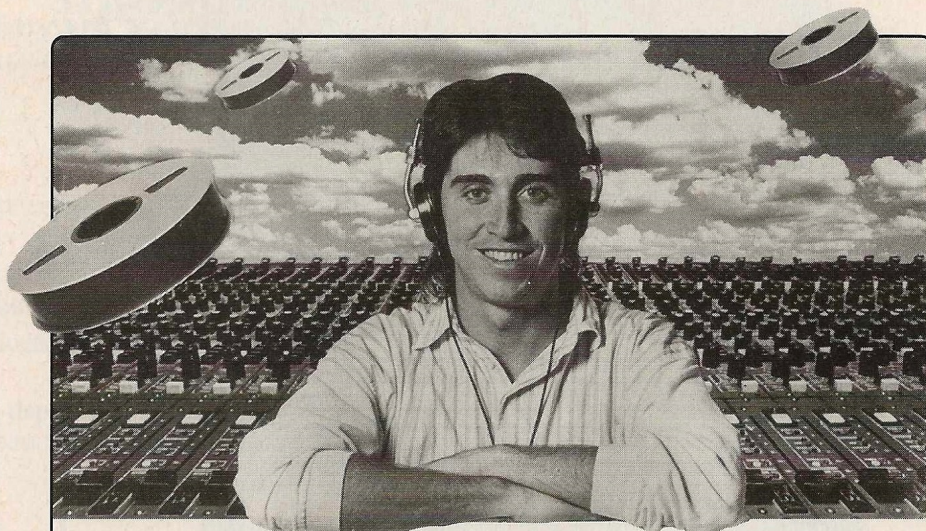
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ple go by. And I said, 'Man, this is great!' We started combining blues and congas in a way so that even the ladies could participate. Because blues—even though women like it—most of the time is a guys' thing. But once we added the congas, all of a sudden the women would say to the guys, 'Hey you wanna dance with me? While you listen to your favorite kind of music, let's dance!' So that brought a different dimension—the rhythm, the blues and then the influence of people like Gabor Szabo [*composer of "Gypsy Queen," covered by Santana on Abraxas*], who was playing more than just three chords. And 'Trane, John

Handy, Horace Silver... all these things were presented to us when we were kids, so we didn't know what we could or couldn't do. We just ventured to combine it all."

Soon Santana was recognized as one of the hottest young guitarists on the San Francisco scene. He was befriended and encouraged by entrepreneur Bill Graham and blues guitar ace Mike Bloomfield. The Santana band recorded an album called *Freeway Jam* in Los Angeles, with producer David Robinson, which Carlos says has never been released—not even as a bootleg. Instead, he wound up making his recording debut as a guest guitarist on *The Live Adventures Of Mike Bloomfield And Al Kooper*. Santana's own self-titled debut album came out in 1969—just in time

for the Woodstock festival.

Along with all the late-Sixties superstars who played at Woodstock were three then-unknown bands: Santana, Mountain and Quill. Being a shade younger, Santana came up a little later than the first big wave of hippie bands from San Francisco and elsewhere—the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, Big Brother and the Holding Company, the Doors and the Jimi Hendrix Experience. For artists like Hendrix, playing Woodstock was a confirmation of superstar status. (The word superstar had only just been coined to describe rock performers like Hendrix and Janis Joplin.) But for Santana, it was a first huge break. Woodstock launched the band's career. Carlos has fairly positive memories of those three rain-soaked days of music, mud and mushrooms in upstate New York:

"At the time, I was much more territorial than I am now. I was very proud that [*the Frisco-based*] Sly And The Family Stone took the whole show. I mean, out of the whole three days, they were the best I saw. Sly Stone was extremely on and professional and kickin'. All the bands were trying to make it happen, regardless of the mud and the other difficult circumstances. The audience was very flexible and compassionate, kind of like a Grateful Dead show today. You gotta understand that over three days, the elements went like waves. Some groups would hit it just right and others wouldn't. A lot of different elements came into play because of the psychedelics and mescaline, you know. So some groups fared very well and others were just wiped out. I think we were a little of both. We fared the best on "Soul Sacrifice" [*featured on the Woodstock album and film*]. Because by that point in the set I had just come back from a very intense journey, you know what I mean? I've yet to see the rest of our set; I'm trying to get the footage to see if there's anything salvageable. 'Cause I know that I was really in a liquid state."

That same year, Carlos met Jimi Hendrix for the first time: "I remember I arrived in New York, and when I got to my hotel, Jimi's woman, Devon [*Wilson*], was there. She said, 'Go upstairs man, drop off your stuff and take a shower. Hurry up! We're invited to this party for Jimi. He's recording in the studio.' And I said 'What? How can there be a party if he's gonna be recording?' She said, 'Man, don't be such a square. Just take a shower and come on.' So we get in a cab and we're driving up the Avenue Of The Americas, going to the Record Plant. We'd gone maybe two blocks when, all of a sudden, there was another cab right next to us. And it's Jimi with this blonde chick. So I started to sink down in the cab seat, thinking, 'Oh great, I'm with Jimi's woman and he's with another woman. The first time I'm meeting Jimi and there's gonna be a big fight. Just what I

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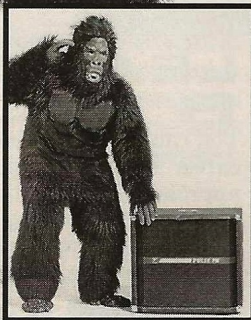
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## SANTANA

need.' But it was all right with both of them. I guess they had some kind of hippie arrangement or something. Jimi paid for both cabs. Our album had just been out for about a week, I think. And Jimi said, 'I really like your album, man. I know about you and I like your choice of notes.' Coming from him, that really blew me away. What could I say? 'Thanks man.'

"So we went inside. They were continuing with what they had been recording the night before. It was like take 49 or some ridiculous number, and the song was 'Room Full Of Mirrors.' The amplifiers were set up facing the control room glass and Jimi was facing the amps, 'cause he didn't like anyone to see him playing. So they rolled the tape and he gets on it—for the first 10 or 12 bars he was right with it. I thought, 'This is brilliant!' But all of a sudden he just started going wild. It was like Screamin' Jay Hawkins, Sun Ra and Sonny Sharrock, all in one. The track had nothing to do with what he was playing anymore. You could see the engineer and producer look at one another and say, 'Yeah, go in and get him.' So two roadies went in the studio. One guy grabbed him by the arm and the other guy grabbed him by the other arm and they pulled him away from the guitar and amp. They brought him into the control room, and his eyes were all bloodshot and he was foaming at the mouth. It was like being in a room where someone was having an epileptic attack. That's how it hit me. It really shook me up."

The second and final time Santana spoke to Hendrix was at the Berkeley Community Theatre. It was at the time of the concerts documented in the *Jimi At Berkeley* film—the same shows that provided the three Hendrix tracks on *Live Forever*. The meeting wasn't entirely a happy one for Carlos, who could clearly see that Jimi was starting to succumb to the excesses of life as a late-Sixties rock icon:

"I had a longing to tell him the same thing I told [jazz bass great] Jaco Pastorius. 'Wouldn't you like to take the long road, like Louis Armstrong or somebody?' But I could see by his eyes that by that point he was too deeply married into whatever flow he was into. At that time, Jimi was looking for a new direction. He'd done the first three albums with the Experience and the New Year's Eve concert album with Buddy Miles. He was trying to find something new. He mentioned to our conga player, Michael Carabello, that he was thinking of joining our band. I said, 'Great, I guess I'll have to become a roadie!' But he did mention joining us. At the time our band was starting to become big. And I guess Jimi thought, 'Okay, this has some potential. The marriage of rock with the congas.'"

*continued on page 112*



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## NAVARRO

stage. I had a [Roland] GP-8 once. I fucked with that thing for about an hour then I threw my hands up in the air and said, "I hate this."

**GW:** Are you still doing a lot of wah stuff?

**NAVARRO:** Yeah. I love wah. But I'm not using echo as much as I have in the past. My setup right now is still really simple. I'm just running a Marshall JCM 900 and I also have a Bogner Ecstasy. I have a Boss chorus, a wah wah and an echo box, and that's about it.

**GW:** What kind of wah wah pedal do you use?

**NAVARRO:** I have three different ones: a Hendrix Crybaby, a regular Crybaby and a modified Crybaby that a guitar tech tweaked to make the envelope wider. I just go back and forth between those. It's not like I'm so technical that I know which one I need for which song. I like the Hendrix one a lot; it's got a little more low end to it.

**GW:** Does this thing with the Chili Peppers feel permanent?

**NAVARRO:** It's like I said to MTV: It's permanent today. But I'm not one to project or to decide what the future's going to hold. I'm a fully fledged member today. I'm not going to worry about what will happen tomorrow. I'm trying to do what's in front of me.

**GW:** It's an interesting slot to be in. There have been an awful lot of Red Hot Chili Peppers guitarists.

**NAVARRO:** Yeah, but that's not why I

have this philosophy about it. It's not like I feel something horrible is looming in my future because I joined this band.

**GW:** So you don't fear the Curse of the Chili Peppers?

**NAVARRO:** No. Definitely not. ●

## SANTANA

*continued from page 54*

Like Jeff Beck and many other players at the time, Santana took the fusion route during the early Seventies. He caught John McLaughlin playing with Tony Williams and Larry Young in a tiny New York club and became fascinated by the British guitarist's approach. Santana's 1972 album *Caravanserai* reflects Carlos' fusion influence. And in '73, he recorded *Love, Devotion And Surrender* with John McLaughlin.

"It was really intimidating," he says of the first time he played with McLaughlin. "It was like a turtle playing with a hummingbird. But by the third concert on the tour that John and I did together, I realized that if I got my tone together, my phrasing and whatever musical vocabulary I do have, that I'd be all right. Harmonically speaking, I don't have the knowledge John has. But I understand drama. And I understand how a cat moves his tail when he wants to lure a bird down from a tree."

Santana never got caught up in the "clever-clever" excesses that marred so

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much fusion as the Seventies wore on—the gymnastic time signatures and “rubber band” riffing. His rhythms have always come more from the heart than the multiplication tables. Maybe it’s because he’s always had an affinity for African music, where tempos that trip up Westerners are felt as naturally as breathing.

“Whether the time signature is in 5, 7 or 9, there’s always a certain heartbeat to it,” Carlos observes. “There’s very few Western musicians who can make odd times seem natural. Usually it sounds like a cat with a prosthetic leg. Apart from African and Indian musicians, there are very few cats like Billy Cobham or Tony Williams who can play odd times and you don’t even know they’re odd times. I approach it the same way. I try to create some melodies that go beyond counting.”

Santana has drawn from African music since the early days of his career. On *Santana*, his band’s very first album, they covered “Ji-Go-Lo-Ba,” by African drumming patriarch Babatunde Olatunji. This is one of the Santana classics that the guitarist revisits on *Sacred Fire*, infusing new life into the rhythms that have by now sunk deep into the collective memory of Classic Rock fans. Carlos’ African connection strengthened throughout the Seventies and Eighties, especially after he journeyed to the continent to

play the historic Soul To Soul Festival in 1971. Around 1975 he made another discovery that was to have a profound impact on his life and music: the reggae message of Bob Marley. Santana says he got into reggae, “pretty much through Eric Clapton,” who had a big hit covering Marley’s “I Shot The Sheriff” in September of 1974.

“We started touring with Eric in ’75. His guitar player turned him on to reggae and he turned me on to it. I mean, I already knew ‘The Harder They Come’ by Jimmy Cliff and the movie [*of the same name*]. But Bob Marley had something totally different. He was dipped into a deeper kind of spiritual source.”

Carlos offers a sample of what he can say in a reggae context with his composition “Esperando,” from *Sacred Fire*. “You can’t play something unless you truly claim it,” he says. “Otherwise you can maybe ape it—sound like a parrot. But if you really claim it, people will stop and they will listen to you.”

His band plays many styles, but the unifying factor—the sonic glue—is provided by Carlos’ unmistakable tonal, harmonic and rhythmic sense. He attributes much of his style to the fact that he has always worked with a lot of percussionists:

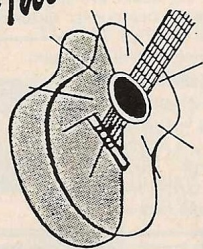
“Congas are very melodic in themselves. To some people it may just sound like whacking a table, but to me it’s more like a bass pattern. I can play longer or shorter cycles over them, or play right in sync with them. There

are so many options. It’s like when [jazz drummer] Elvin Jones or Tony Williams plays the bell of the cymbal. There’s a lot of melodies in there that a guy like Allan Holdsworth always takes off on. I’m sure he’s teaching many young people to listen to those melodies. A lot of times it’s not the pianist who states the theme. It’s the drummer.”

On a more technical level, the big triangular guitar picks that Carlos uses facilitate his spicy, double-picking, as well as his tone. “Something happened to me around 1959,” he notes. “I started out playing with small picks and a Strat, but it really felt uncomfortable to me. It was easy to go to the Les Paul and a big pick. I wanted to get a bigger sound. But most of all, I always relate my tone to a woman’s voice. Can I make it sound as soft as Dionne Warwick, as sassy as Aretha Franklin and as mean as Patti Labelle? That sassiness is real important. Even B.B. King plays differently when he starts doing the ‘Lucille’ rap, putting his hand on his hip and all. A lot of dudes can’t do that. It’s a different kind of attitude. But if you can play with that attitude, you’ll start sounding like Albert King. He had it. In fact, if you listen to Eric Clapton or Jeff Beck, that’s where they got that sassiness from. It all comes from women, you know—yo’ mama.

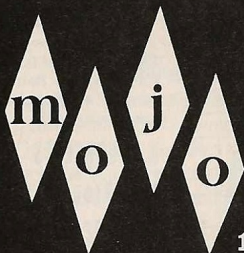
“That’s one thing I really love about the Stevie Ray Vaughan track that I put on the *Live Forever* album—the way he gets you with ‘Riviera Paradise,’ Carlos continues. “As

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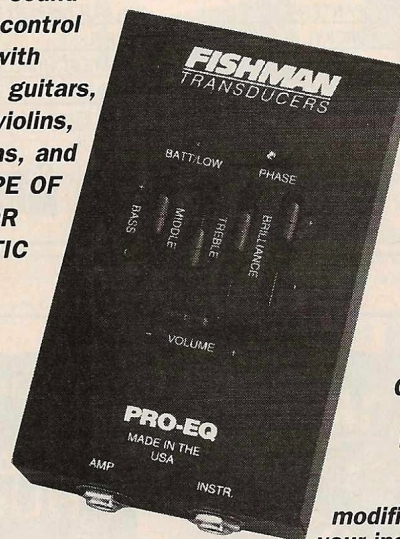


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you know, we're all connected to our mother's umbilical cord. They cut it when you come out, but there's also a cord that cannot be cut. And Stevie Ray, he hits that cord with those notes. Your whole body just responds. Man, I miss him. I was supposed to do a tour with him. He left me."

As two guitarists who took the blues to another dimension, Santana and Vaughan shared a lot of common ground. "I was really savoring the idea of touring with him," Carlos laments. "Because I wanted to learn from him and show him things. For example, different ways to subdivide a 6/8 shuffle, which was something he played a lot. I think it would have been beyond Texas, you know? World Shuffle."

As it is, Carlos and Stevie Ray did have three or four opportunities to trade riffs onstage. "I've got videos of it," Carlos proudly asserts. "The best one was when we played in Costa Mesa, in California. It was the Fabulous Thunderbirds, Stevie Ray Vaughan and Santana. They booked the show as 'The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly.' It was Stevie's birthday. We closed the show and he came up and jammed with us. I put him in a different setting. Total funk, you know? And you should hear him play! It was this song called 'Deeper.'"

There's always something interesting playing in the guest house of Carlos' San

Francisco home, where, along with his instruments and artwork, he keeps the thousands of tapes sent to him by fans from around the world. He's planning to release some of his treasure trove on his Guts & Grace Label. There's talk of a *Live Forever*-style set featuring legendary female artists like Dinah Washington, Mahalia Jackson and Billie Holiday, and also some rare blues recordings from the likes of Magic Sam, Otis Rush and Albert King. For the moment though, Carlos is focusing on a new record he's making with his brother Jorge, that was inspired, in part, by Stevie Ray and Jimmie Vaughan's duet record. Carlos figured it was high time he cut something with his guitar-playing sibling.

"It's coming together nicely," Carlos announces. "My nephew [Carlos Hernandez] is also on the record. He plays a lot like the younger players today—like Metallica or Steve Vai or Yngwie. So you'll have that in combination with my brother's way of playing. I'm just trying to weave it all together in a way that sounds natural—the same way I put together a combination of styles for John Lee Hooker's 'The Healer.' That's what I like doing..."

Santana struggles, trying to find a way of summing up his vibrantly multi-colored musical world. Finally, he smiles: "I love cross-pollinating things." ●

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