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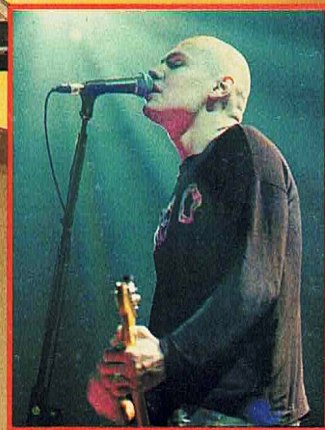
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SANTANA'S "BLACK MAGIC WOMAN"

by Blair Jackson

Few guitarists in rock have an immediately recognizable sound, a musical signature so unique that when you hear it, you know it must be them—or an imitator of them. Carlos Santana certainly fits in that category. For three decades now he's traveled the globe, playing every imaginable size of venue, thrilling literally millions of people with his distinctive and always expressive guitar work, which spans a range from ethereal ballads to the fiery Latin rock that is his most famous trademark. His idols, some of whom he honors by wearing beautiful hand-painted shirts bearing their images, are people like John Coltrane, Miles Davis and Bob Marley, musical searchers all. And that's what Carlos Santana has been since his days fronting the Santana Blues Band in San Francisco in the late '60s—a tireless explorer in search of the right note or combination of notes or riff that ele-

vates both the music and those listening to it. "People everywhere are beautifully uncomplicated," he told me in an interview in January 1978. "They all want to be moved. All I can do is go deeper in my heart and simplify my life and simplify my music so that it makes more sense to me and others...America wants something more than Marilyn Monroe and red Cadillacs and Platinum albums. America is crying to reach something, become something, *offer* something. America wants the flame to grow, just as you and I want the flame to grow. The more the flame grows, the more your values grow and the more your music becomes haunting and, above all, *universal*."

The Mexican-born guitarist grew up in San Francisco's heavily Chicano Mission district, mainly playing blues because "they reflect sweet feelings of simplicity and honesty and pain and reality that always pervades in the streets," he said. "It's so simple. That's why I started with Jimmy Reed and B.B. King and Bobby Blue Band." Carlos was further influenced by the great Butterfield Blues Band axe slinger



Michael Bloomfield; by the Hungarian jazz guitarist Gabor Szabo, who was already fusing rock and Latin music elements in his sound in the mid-'60s; and to a lesser degree, by the first generation of San Francisco's improvisational rock guitarists, like Jerry Garcia, Barry Melton, Gary Duncan, James Gurley, et al. But Carlos' basic style—the way he mixed rapid-fire guitar bursts with piercing notes that he'd sustain for long periods—was already fairly well in place by the time the group Santana cut their



PHOTO: JIM MARSHALL

first album at Pacific Recording in San Mateo (half an hour south of San Francisco) in 1969. So was the group's basic sound, which mixed standard rock instrumentation—guitar, bass, drums, keyboards—with Latin percussion.

Although musicians like Joe Cuba and Hector Rivera were already playing what became known as "Latin rock" well before the first Santana record came out, Carlos Santana and the band unquestionably popularized the idiom. The group was already building some momentum on the strength of its live performances when it landed a slot on the bill at Woodstock in August of '69. Though virtually unknown, Santana

practically stole the show at Woodstock, which led to their being signed by Columbia Records. Then, when their incendiary performance of "Soul Sacrifice" was included in the hugely popular Woodstock film and album, both released in 1970, sales of the first Santana record skyrocketed. The first album spawned two hit songs, "Jingo" and the Top 5 "Evil Ways."

So the band was riding high at the time they went into the studio to record their second album, *Abraxis*. This time around, the band chose to work at Wally Heider's San Francisco studios, which had become the "in" place for top local bands to record—the Airplane

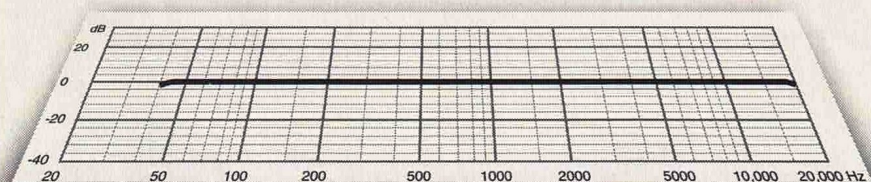
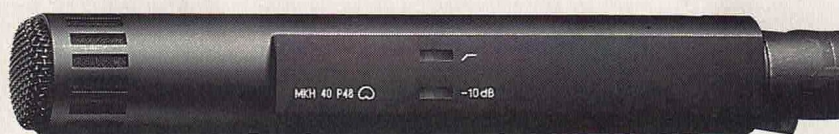
cut *Volunteers* there, the Dead made *American Beauty* at Heider's, Crosby Stills & Nash worked on *Deja Vu*, and there was lots of other action at the studio with bands coming in from near and far. Fred Catero, a top Bay Area engineer who had met Santana during the sessions for their first record at Pacific Recording, was asked to co-produce *Abraxis* with the band, and he supervised the sonic aspects of the record, though the actual engineering credits on the album went to John Fiore and the group's bassist, Dave Brown.

"My approach has always been that in any creative endeavor, mutual respect is what's most important," Catero says. "When you get people who do something well, you let them do it. You don't sit there and tell them how you want to do it. You try to figure out what they're trying to do and encourage them and do whatever you can so that talent is showcased to the max. I don't have a dictatorial approach at all. My main production involvement on that record was in the sound of it, because that's what I do. I have opinions about creative things—I have good ears—but I'm not a producer who's going to write out charts or anything. They knew that going in, and they didn't really need a producer to tell them how to play or what to play."

Indeed, this is a band that had honed its chops through incessant gigging, and the bulk of the tunes on *Abraxis* were songs that had already been worked out onstage, so recording them was more a question of capturing performances than developing arrangements in the studio. This approach also matched Catero's philosophy: "I try to record everything live and then fix what we have to. Bands that are used to playing live play best in the studio that way. You don't want to break everything apart and make them put it down a couple of tracks at a time." Although Catero says he usually recorded solos separately, as overdubs, "with Carlos it was different because he could give you a great solo live in the studio."

In keeping with his normal recording practice, Catero says he found the best spot in the studio to capture Michael Shrieve's drums and then let the band set up around the drummer however they were most comfortable. No iso booths were used—just baffles—so the players were all in the same room together and had good visual contact with each other. The control room at Heider's Studio C was equipped with a Frank De Medeo-designed 24-channel,

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8-bus console, Altec 604 monitors and a 3M 16-track recorder. The studio had a couple of EMT plate reverbs, and Catero believes he also used some tape delay throughout the record.

Catero says he doesn't remember specific microphones he used on the Santana sessions, and notes, "I'm not a person who's big on equipment, even though I'm an engineer. It's not like I go into the studio and insist that I have every effect and every gate and every microphone, and if I don't have this mic I can't get this drum sound, and all that. I walk in and say 'What have you got?' I'm into bare bones, basic engineering." That said, he adds, "I probably used the standard Telefunks—U47s and 251s—and things like [Shure] SM55s and 56s." Speaking generally about how he recorded the drums, Catero says he usually used four or five mics: "I like condensers for the cymbals, and dynamics for the skins. I don't mike the cymbals close, and if you put condensers that have a dynamic range of 110 or 120 dB right near a tom, you're going to overdrive the preamps in the board. So a dynamic can't take it; it saturates before it even gets to the board. Most of what I used for the drum sound came from two overheads—condensers. They'd pick up the whole kit, but were more for the highs. Then the dynamics were for touch-ups and I'd feature those when I wanted to get a spread for fills, when they go across the drum kit." Jose Chepito Areas' timbales and Mike Carabello's congas were miked with dynamics. Gregg Rolie's organ used three mics on the Leslie cabinet—two at the top for stereo, and one at the bottom to capture the low end. Carlos' Les Paul was probably miked at the amp with a 56, and Dave Brown's bass a mixture of direct and a single mic on his amp.

Though people commonly refer to this Santana Classic Track simply as "Black Magic Woman," it is actually two different songs by two different writers. "Black Magic Woman" was a mid-tempo blues written by Fleetwood Mac's late-'60s lead guitarist Peter Green, and recorded originally on the Mac's *English Rose* album, released in 1969. It was a minor hit in Britain but did not chart in America. What sounds like a long instrumental coda after Santana's "Black Magic Woman" is actually a fairly faithful version of Gabor Szabo's instrumental tune "Gypsy Queen," which appeared on the guitarist's Latin-flavored 1966 Impulse album called *Spellbinder*. Szabo, a Hungarian

refugee who was educated in part at the Berklee School of Music, said he came up with the tune during the *Spellbinder* sessions in May of '66: "I used it [the song] to warm up before we started recording. That is, I showed [the group] a little rhythmic figure, and we went on from there. Fortunately, [producer] Bob Thiele had the tape machines on. The title came afterwards because [the song] reminded me of a girl dancing around a gypsy campfire." The Szabo version features Latin percussion by Willie Bobo and Victor Pantoja, and though Carlos' rendering of the tune has more distortion on the guitar, it's not that far removed from Szabo's original.

This was a period of relative stability in the Santana band, though Catero says, "They had the problems that everyone had with the drugs in that period. The bass player had problems in that area and problems with tuning and things like that. But the talent was there in that band, and the freedom was there, too, at that time: They weren't smothered by corporate rules. They were allowed to come and go as they wanted. They were allowed to smoke what they wanted, drink what they wanted; whatever it was. In some cases it was beneficial, in some cases it was detrimental, but the point is they felt free. And since Carlos is such a creative person, I think everyone really enjoyed playing with him so much."

"Black Magic Woman/Gypsy Queen" became the biggest hit of Santana's career when it came out in the fall of '70, reaching Number 4 on the pop charts. The song is still a staple of so-called "classic rock" radio formats, and a concert stand-out as well. (A live version appeared on the superb 1977 record, *Moonflower*.) The *Abraxis* album, with its stunning, sensual cover collage by an artist named MATI, was even more successful than the single, hitting Number One and staying there for six weeks. Asked how he feels about how the record sounds today, Fred Catero, who now works primarily on commercials, says, "It sounds like records of that day. Musically, it's still really strong, but I'm not that happy with how it sounds. Records of that period had a deadness to them that today I wouldn't allow. We were a little bit afraid of reverb, so the drums sound a little dead. Some of the drums back then sound like they were recorded in a clothes closet. Also, I was just a co-producer on that record, so not everything that's on there was my choice."

Santana, the group, has been through a million incarnations since then—some jazzy, some even more overtly commercial—but at its core it remains a vehicle for the passions of its tireless leader, Carlos Santana. More than a rock survivor, he has become an institution, a musician who can always be counted on to give 100%, who has been extremely generous with his time in the aid of different causes, and whose spirit and optimism touches everyone who hears his music. ■

—FROM PAGE 155, OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

freeform "space" segments from 1987 until the group disbanded after Jerry Garcia's death in 1995. Henry Kaiser is known far and wide for his genre-bending gung-ho guitar explorations and his uncompromising dedication to the avant-garde and truly weird. Vince Welnick was a keyboard player for The Tubes and the Grateful Dead. Sax player Bobby Strickland, drummer Paul Van Wageningen and his bassist brother Marc are all skilled veterans of numerous pop and jazz outfits. So it's not too surprising that when you put all these guys together in an instrumental band you get a group that is equally comfortable playing ethereal space music, beat-heavy jazz-funk or *In a Silent Way*-era Miles Davis. All the songs on *Second Sight*, save for an incredible deconstruction of Sly Stone's "Dance to the Music," were composed by the entire group (although a few tracks predate Vince Welnick's joining the band), and as a result no single instrumental voice dominates. There's a tremendous variety of timbres and tempos, as the band moves assuredly through all sorts of intriguing landscapes, playing danceable grooves one second, drifting dreamily into the ether the next, then heading into territory that sounds like something Miles' *Bitches Brew* band might have played if they'd stuck around for a few years. Jerry Garcia, in some of his last studio appearances, adds his daring and inimitable distorted guitar to two of the album's wildest tracks, "Rosetta Rock" and the cinematic soundscape "Dangerous Dreams," and Garcia's bandmate Bob Weir helps out on another tune, a blues called "Sin City Circumstance." But this is a group that doesn't need heavy hitters to achieve liftoff; these players have plenty to offer by themselves.

The disc, which was recorded by

the Dead's longtime studio ace John Cutler at that group's famous San Rafael, Calif., studio Club Front (since relocated to Novato), is a sonic marvel, filled with a head-spinning array of cool textures—great stereo effects, deep and spacious reverbs, bizarre, efflorescent electronica. Yet the music doesn't sound labored over; clearly these are true performances and not products of studio wizardry.

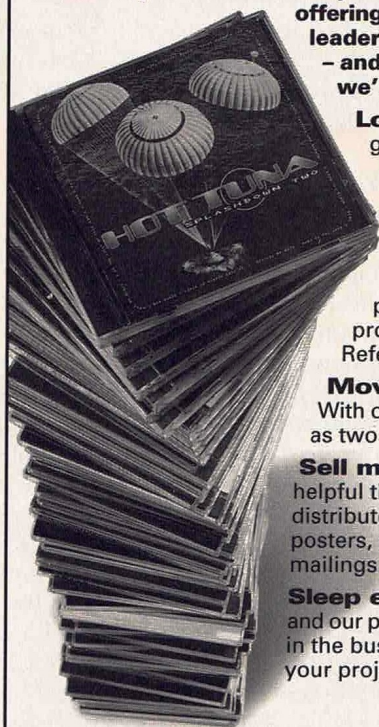
"We did most of the record in two major sessions," says Cutler, who continues to work for the Dead, tweaking archival material from the group's tape vault. "The basics were completely live—we had everyone set up in the

room together—and not much got redone; it was more a matter of adding things onto the basics. There was a fair amount of overdubbing later. But actually, a lot of the electronics were live, too. For instance, the drummer played the electronic tablas during the basics and some of the sax effects were live, too. We'd put two mics on Bobby [Strickland]—an M49 for the sax itself, and a 421 feeding his effects."

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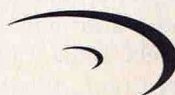
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