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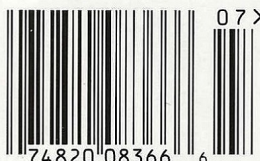
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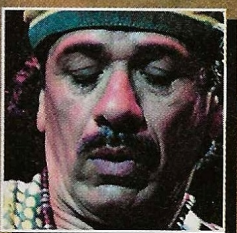
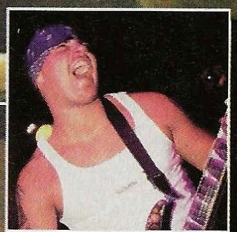
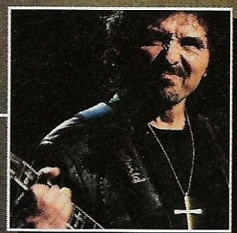
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# The Inner Vision

The star-studded *Mumbo Jumbo* marks the spectacular return of guitar visionary Carlos Santana

by James Sullivan

Carlos Santana has some simple advice for young guitarists. "Make it a point to grab one note the way a bear grabs a salmon," he says, miming the motion. "Bam!"

"Scoop it right out and hold that note, no matter what's happening around you. And people start feeling it, like a little orgasm. That's the note everybody's gonna remember."

The great guitarist grabbed one of those notes at the first of three summer tour warm-up shows his band played in April at San Francisco's hallowed Fillmore Auditorium. On the exquisite Santana classic "Europa," he bent one of the song's signature blue notes, squeezed it to within an inch of its life, and then watched its soul rise, floating in a high arc through the hall.

For Santana, making deeply soulful music is his life's work. To ensure some continuity among the various contributions that make up his new album, *Mumbo Jumbo*—from Dave Matthews, Lauryn Hill, Wyclef Jean and others—he told each collaborator the same thing: "God gave us this gift to rearrange the molecular structure."

"That's a technical way of saying (listeners) get the chills," he explains. "They get goosebumps. They cry and laugh at the same time; they feel spiritual and horny at the same time."

"When you hear a solo by Ry Cooder or Eric Clapton, your skin changes. Your hair stands up. Literally,

it rearranges your molecular structure."

Santana does a little rearranging of his own on *Mumbo Jumbo* (title tentative), an album that marks the guitarist's return to the rock and roll Afro-Cuban soul responsible for some of the biggest hits of his lengthy career. That unmistakable style recently landed Santana and his original lineup in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

The album, Santana's first with Arista after an unproductive stint with Polydor, features a guestbook with a potent power index: Lauryn Hill, Wyclef Jean, Dave Matthews, Eric Clapton, rising star Eagle Eye Cherry, and brawny rapper Everlast. Santana and his new label agree that there are a half-dozen radio-friendly songs on the record.

His return to the spotlight is already well under way. Hill, who says she taught herself to sing as a child by making up lyrics to Santana instrumentals, invited the guitarist to contribute to her highly touted solo debut, *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*. The collaboration included an appearance at the Grammy Awards show; incredibly, it was his first time on the program. Clearly, the 52-year-old Santana is reconfirming his status as one of rock's wisest and most passionate elders.

New ideas and approaches are once again energizing Carlos Santana. Brand new guitar tech Rene Martinez, for

instance, convinced Carlos to modify his setup upon his arrival in the Santana camp.

"I have never used pedals to sustain. I always mark the floors," Santana says, holding beatific court in an armchair in the middle of his vast, peach-carpeted rehearsal space just north of San Francisco. The building, located in a nondescript warehouse district just off the highway, also houses the tidy, professional offices of Santana Management. The walls are lined with framed photos and posters; male visitors to the office bathroom gaze upon an image of original Woodstock tickets while taking care of business.

When Martinez told Carlos that Stevie Ray had used pedals, he refused to believe it. "I thought all people who used pedals sounded like beer commercials," he laughs. Thanks to Martinez, he says, he now swears by his Tube Screamer.

Such rejuvenation makes this summer's Santana album and tour feel like a comeback. In fact, Carlos' career has crested at increasingly predictable intervals, every 10 years or so: in 1969 with his then-unknown band's extraordinary appearance at Woodstock; in 1981 with the pop-chart success of *Zebop!*; in 1989 with the powerful title-track contribution to John Lee Hooker's Grammy-winning comeback, *The Healer*; and now, if all goes well, in 1999 with *Mumbo Jumbo*.



The rehearsal space is mostly empty, save for a boombox set up so Carlos can play tracks from the forthcoming album for visitors. High on the walls hang colorful tapestries with multiple images of Santana's peers and mentors: Jimi Hendrix, Miles Davis, Bob Marley. He leaps up to pull out a poster version of the mural-style backdrop that the band will unveil two weeks later, during an April weekend of "public rehearsals" at the Fillmore. The vivid artwork features dozens of symbolic characters representing love, family, friendship, and other universal themes. "Everything in here is turning up on the album," Santana says proudly.

The death of Carlos' father a little over a year ago led to some extended reflection, and a particularly serendipitous musical experience. "When my father passed," Santana says, "I didn't listen to music for about three or four days." When he felt ready to listen again, he turned on

the radio, "which I usually never do."

It was tuned to a classical station, which was playing a selection that moved Carlos to tears. Though he couldn't identify the piece, it stayed with him. So he went to a local record store and hummed the melancholy melody to a pair of clerks. They quickly determined it was Brahms' *Concerto No. 2*. "They pulled it out and played it, and they were right. I said, 'Damn, you guys are good!'"

At home, Santana reworked the Brahms melody as a guitar part and recorded it. That night, lyrics began to come to him and he jotted them down: "You're the love of my life, you're the breath of my prayers/Take my hand, lead me on."

Not long afterward, Santana presented the package to Dave Matthews as a song idea for *Mumbo Jumbo*. "I said, 'Dave, I've got this thing haunting me,' and I played it for him. He looked over my shoulder and said, 'That's the direction you want to

go? That's lovely, man. That's beautiful.'"

The song was recorded as "Love of My Life," a moody, funky blues-guitar ballad that puts Matthews' trademark vocal blend of ecstasy and agony to good use. "Working with Dave Matthews was a real joy," says Santana. "Part of him is old, I mean wise, like an Aborigine. You're not gonna find anybody more comfortable in his own skin than him. It was refreshing."

Less relaxed these days, according to Santana, is Eric Clapton. At the suggestion of Arista boss Clive Davis, Santana let the label approach his old friend about contributing to the new album. But Clapton "apparently has been going through some changes," says Carlos. "I saw him at the Grammys rehearsal, and he looked like he was spent—not tired, but almost cranky." Not wishing to impose on him, he left Clapton alone.

About a week later, however, Clapton left word with Santana's office that he wanted to speak with Carlos. When the

"When my father passed," Santana says, "I didn't listen to music for about three or four days." When he felt ready to listen again, he turned on the radio,

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two got on the phone, Clapton said, "I want to apologize for taking so long to get back to you. I think I've found a little window now, and I want to know if you have room for me." Clapton suggested simply stopping by to record a guitar track for an existing song, but Carlos countered with an offer to spend an afternoon together and compose a song from scratch. "And that's exactly what we did."

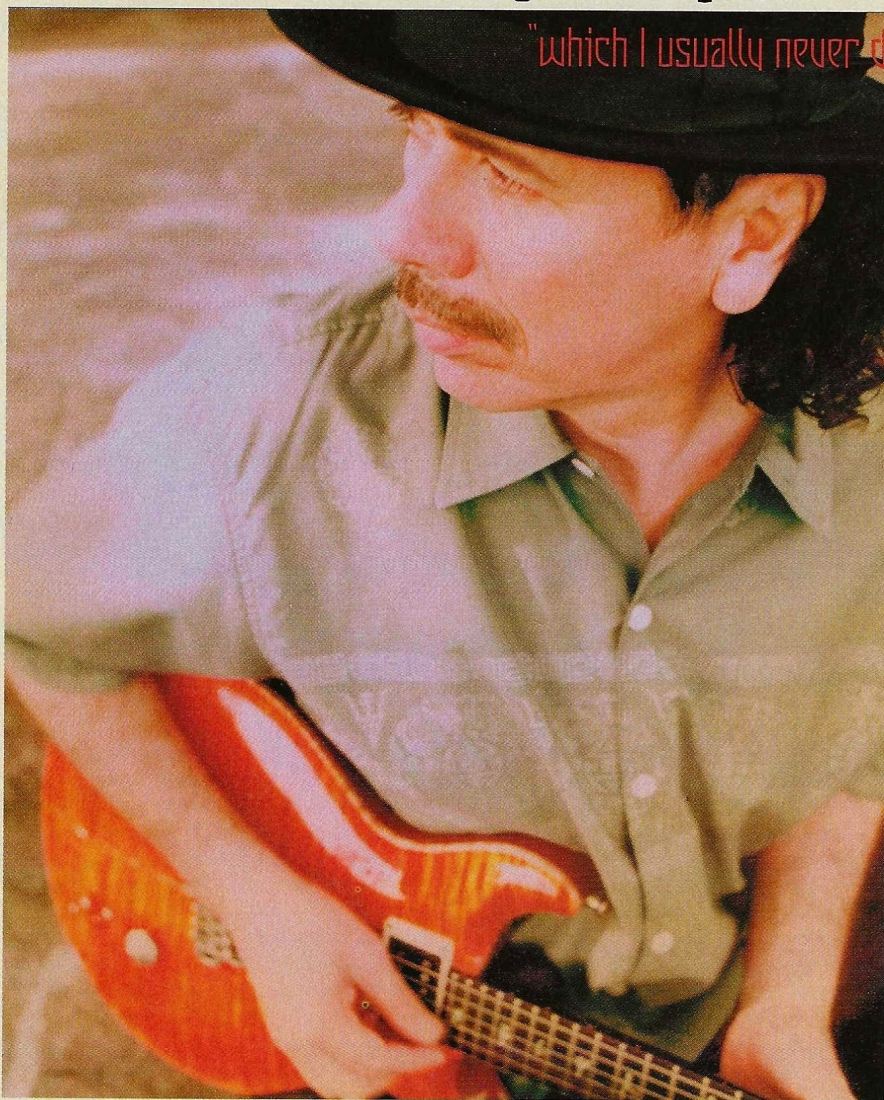
Such experiences have made *Mumbo Jumbo* much more rewarding than the cynical title implies. "It's been a great album to put together," he says. "Nothing by hook or by crook, nothing desperate or frantic."

"I tell you, it's the most incidental I ever felt on an album," he adds, and he means that as high praise for his colleagues. "You walk in and it's like you're a chef, the water's boiling, the garlic's sizzling, the onions are in. And you just cook, you know?"

And cook is what Santana does best. To him, playing guitar is much more a feeling than a technical feat. When he changes guitar strings, he says, he yanks them seven times, holding each pull for a slow seven-count, until "that sucker is like a horse. It knows who's in charge. Then you can bend the strings as much as you want and they still go back in tune."

Once a collector, Santana says he has given most of his guitars away. He kept the ones he still plays—two Strats, a couple of Paul Reed Smiths, three nylon-string acoustics. He also has a pair of guitars once owned by an idol, Bola Sete, whom he refers to as "the Brazilian Segovia."

"I'm not really into collecting anymore," he says. "Too much babysitting. Guitars need to be played."



JAY BLAKESBERG



Up-and-coming guitar heroes such as Jonny Lang and Kenny Wayne Shepherd, Carlos says, need to understand that mastering the guitar means mastering your inner visions. "I try to let people know there's something beyond the wood, wire, and string. And that's knowing there are friends outside and inside your eyeballs. Those friends inside your eyeballs are what made Jimi who he was. They made Eric who he is, and Stevie. Listen to those friends and they provide you with a certain feeling, a passion, a note before you play it."

One of the things Santana's inner "friends" have taught him is to study a wide variety of music. For him, jazz and world-music greats such as Bola Sete, Gabor Szabo, and Wes Montgomery have always been as important as Hendrix or B.B. King.

"I don't want to be stuck on one way of performing," he says. "I don't let anybody put me into a slot. When our first album came out, *Rolling Stone* said, 'This band is really weird, like psychedelic mariachi rock.' Well, what the hell is that?" he asks, laughing.

Despite some confusion among early rock critics about how to classify Santana, the bandleader says he knew right away they were onto something. "I didn't hesitate to mix the blues with Africa, with Horace Silver, Olatunji, the Grateful Dead. And *voila!* The next thing you know, the Rolling Stones and Chicago, Miles Davis and Jimi are all using timbales and congas."

Often singled out as the first Latin rock group, Santana is really part of a continuum, says Carlos.

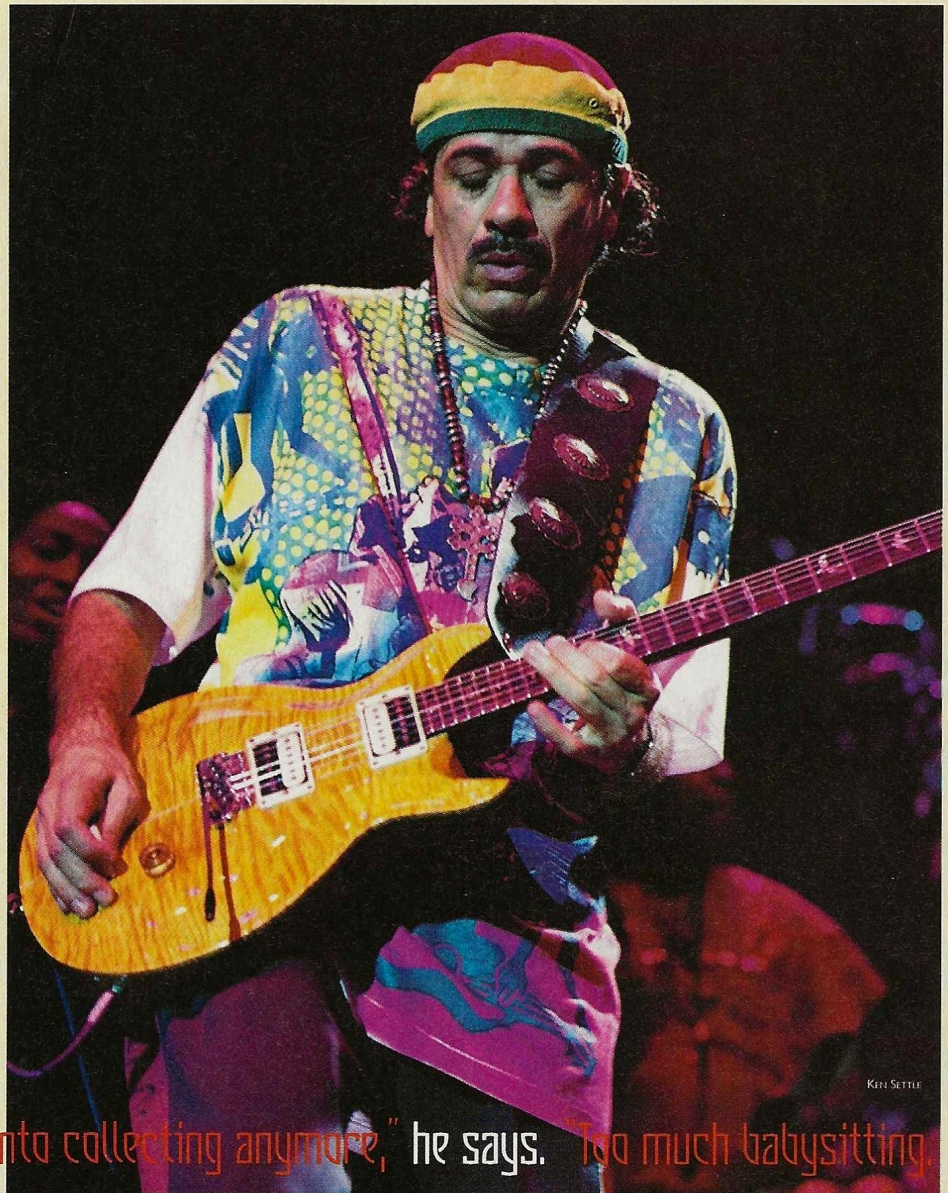
"Perez Prado, Mongo Santamaria, Ray

Barreto, Ritchie Valens all had hits in Spanish before they knew to call it anything, 'Latin,' 'world,' anything." As an aspiring guitarist in the early 1960s, knocking around San Francisco's vibrant Mission district, Santana "played them all on guitar, right along with 'Louie, Louie,' 'Gloria,' and 'Satisfaction.' To me, Number One was Number One, whether it was Elvis or Mongo Santamaria."

At the Fillmore in April, Santana and his six-piece band rolled out several new songs from *Mumbo Jumbo*. "Several of them, including the rumbling call-to-arms 'Put Your Lights On' and the lovely Spanish Harlem serenade 'Maria Maria,' refer back to the '50s and '60s even as they urge Santana's music forward into the next century.

In rose-colored aviator glasses and a felt black hat, Santana addressed his hometown crowd with gratitude. "This is a sacred place," he said, waving a hand at the Fillmore's famed chandeliers.

"If it wasn't for Bill Graham, I'd still be washing dishes," Santana joked, thanking the late San Francisco concert promoter,



"I'm not really into collecting anymore," he says. "Too much babysitting."

whose insistence led to the unknown band's Woodstock appearance. Weeks after that legendary event, Santana's self-titled debut album sat atop the pop charts, courtesy of a word-of-mouth wildfire.

During the Fillmore's hippie heyday, the Santana band played regularly, fine-tuning the percolating, percussion-heavy sound that would astound the audience at Woodstock. A two-disc recording of *Santana Live at the Fillmore '68* was officially released for the first time two years ago; it's essential.

Later in the three-hour April set, the band played staple songs from that early incarnation: "Jingo," "Oye Como Va." "We're having a very soulful experience here tonight," said the bandleader, leading the audience in one of his familiar meditative chants: "Peace, light, love, joy."

The band seemed well-greased for its summer tour, when it will share bills with two of rock-en-Espanol's brightest contemporary lights, the big-beat band Mana and the delirious, rap-salsa hybrid Ozomatli, who are "scrambling African music," Carlos marvels.

## Guitars need to be played."

But no matter how ready you feel to play, he says, you can never rest easy. "Nothing's automatic. You can meditate, read your Bible and everything, and still sound like dog doo. And other days it might be hectic, you hardly have time to brush your teeth, and you go onstage and it's perfect for two hours.

"Miles said if you play 50 concerts, 10 are gonna be unbelievable. Out of 10, three will be extremely unbelievable, and one will be *fucking* unbelievable. Coming from Miles, that's saying a lot. It shows you it's not automatic."

Like Miles, Santana often likens music to sex. "The main goal of music is to give people a way beyond gravity, time, and space," he says. "When you make love, you're in the zone, in a state of grace. But you can't stay too long.

"Musicians can stay there for two hours. That's the advantage we have. That's the goal." (Next month part II: *The history of Santana*)