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GUITAR WORLD

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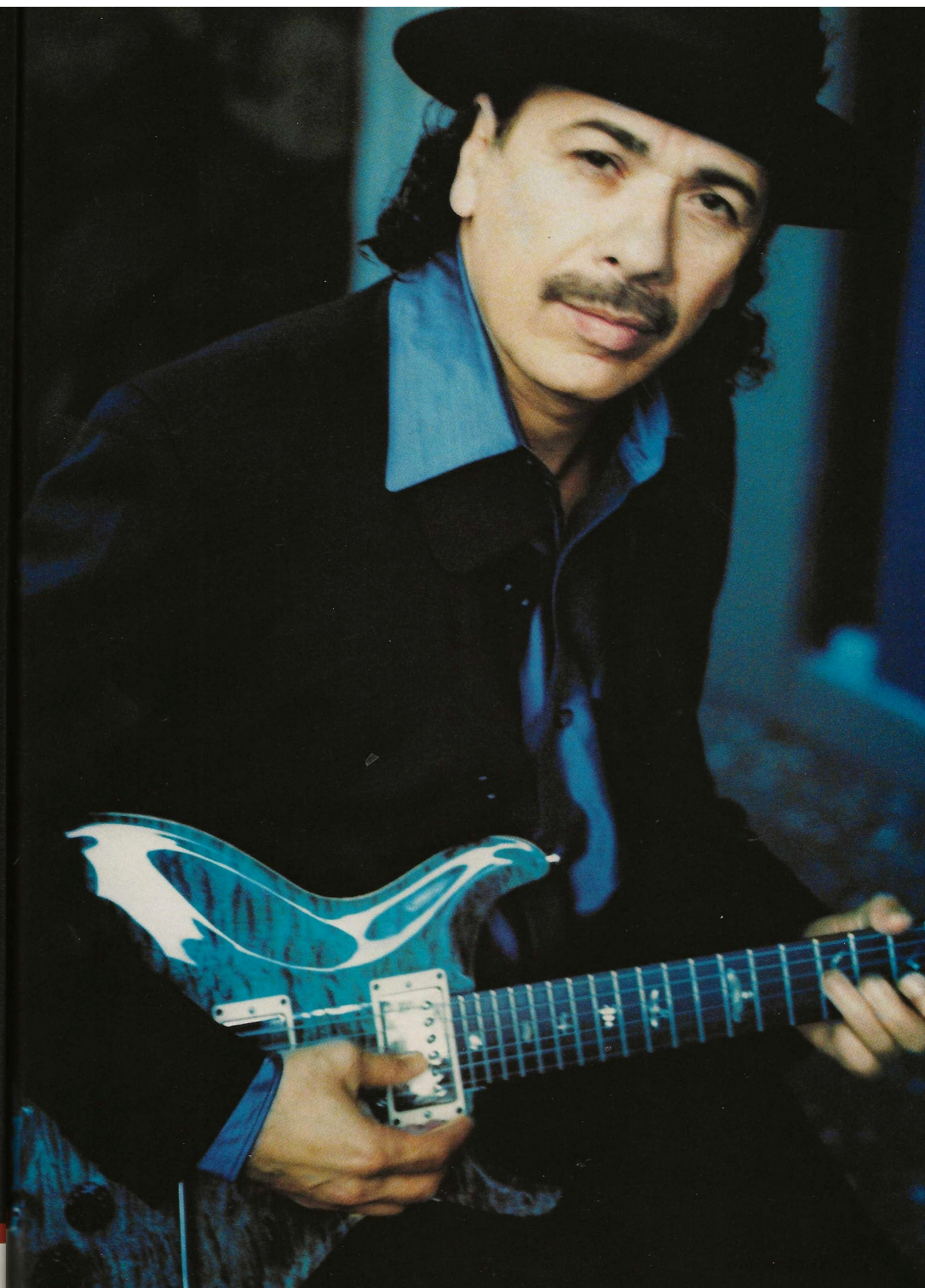


# TOUCHED BY AN ANGEL

Carlos Santana collaborates with Lauryn Hill, Eric Clapton, Dave Matthews, Everlast and a slew of other stars and has a *Supernatural* experience.

by Alan di Perna photography by Jay Blakesberg

"It's a good time to be alive," Carlos Santana pronounces. The 51-year-old guitarist has much to be thankful for: a loving wife and family, a beautiful house overlooking the San Rafael Bay in woodsy Northern California, the respect and admiration of musicians and music lovers worldwide. And right now, Carlos is especially pleased with his new album, *Supernatural*. The disc finds the guitar legend dueting with a wide cross-section of contemporary music stars, including Lauryn Hill, Eric Clapton, Dave Matthews, Everlast, Rob Thomas of Matchbox 20, Eagle-Eye Cherry and the Dust Brothers. It's a testament to the breadth of Santana's sonic vision that he's able to make his guitar complement all of these very different voices. But then, wide-angle musical multiculturalism has always been Santana's way.





“THERE ARE VERY FEW BANDS AND MUSICIANS WHO ARE, AS THEY SAY, PUSHING THE ENVELOPE.”



“What’s amazing to me is it sounds like one breath,” he says of *Supernatural*. “Usually, when you have that many people collaborating on one CD, it feels like a party that is not cohesive, where nobody’s listening to one another. But in this case, it’s not like that.”

*Supernatural* is Santana’s first release under a new contract with Arista Records. The disc’s superstar collaborations were instigated by Arista chief Clive Davis. It was Davis who, along with the late rock entrepreneur Bill Graham, urged Santana early in his career to include catchy vocal tunes like “Evil Ways,” “Oye Como Va,” “Black Magic Woman” and “No One to Depend On” on his first three albums, juxtaposing them with the Santana band’s pioneering Latino rock instrumentals. Energized by his band’s stirring debut at the original Woodstock festival in 1969, Santana instantly gained widespread popularity, and these tunes have become a treasured part of the classic rock legacy. Santana’s music foreshadowed the worldbeat sensibility of the Eighties and Nineties, and is still heard around the globe today.

A tireless musical explorer, Santana collaborated with jazz guitar virtuoso John

McLaughlin in 1973, embracing not only the jazz-rock fusion movement that McLaughlin spearheaded in the Seventies but also the British guitarist’s guru, Sri Chinmoy. Carlos remains a deeply spiritual man to this day.

The guiding intelligence behind one of the most distinctive, instantly recognizable guitar styles on the planet, Carlos has forged his own highly individual path through the rock music of the last three decades. Much like his fellow San Franciscans the Grateful Dead, he has built up a sizable concert following which has won him a comfortable margin of freedom from the fickle mandates of the pop charts. Yet he can also land the occasional record in the Top 10, such as 1981’s *Zebop*, which made Santana one of the few artists to score chart success in the Sixties, Seventies and Eighties.

There’s every indication that *Supernatural* will net the guitarist some Nineties hits as well, as the decade, and century, draw to a close. But even if this doesn’t happen, Santana’s place is secure. He is today a patriarch of globally conscious music, claimed with equal pride by the Latino, worldbeat and rock communities. It’s been a long time since Carlos was just a kid from Autlan, Mexico,

with a boundless fascination for blues and rock and roll. But he has retained his sense of wide-eyed wonder and passion for music.

**GUITAR WORLD** Where did the idea for you to collaborate with all these other artists on your new album originate?

**CARLOS SANTANA** It really started with Clive Davis. Once we’d consecrated the act of signing the contract, he said, “You know, I was just talking to Lauryn Hill, and I found out she really likes your music. And she’s thinking of doing ‘Samba Pa Ti,’ [from Santana’s 1970 album, *Abraaxas*] the same way [the Fugees] did ‘Killing Me Softly’ and Puff Daddy did that Police song [‘Every Breath You Take’].” Clive said, “I hope you don’t mind, I gave her your phone number ‘cause she wants to talk to you.” So we talked, and Lauryn invited me to play on her CD. She liked what we did so much she invited me to participate with her at the Grammys. It was my first time at the Grammys. I’ve never been to any of those things.

And because of that, I connected with Eric [Clapton], who was in the audience right in front of the stage when we played. The record label had been trying to get hold of Eric to ask

JAY BLANCENBERG



## CARLOS SANTANA

if he'd like to play on my album, but they hadn't been able to connect until Eric saw me at the Grammys. Afterwards he called and said, "I hear your record company has been trying to reach me. I'm sorry I took so long to respond. I'm going through some personal, financial changes in my life." I think it's common knowledge that he's changing his management of 30 years, or however long it's been.

So the whole thing was really a chain reaction, started by Clive Davis. Clive put me in touch with Lauryn. Lauryn put me in touch with other people, and all of a sudden I was in the studio with Wycleff Jean, Everlast...all those people.

**GW** Musically, this must have been quite an

adventurous leap for you: Carlos Santana entering the world of hip-hop, the world of alternative rock...

**SANTANA** It is important, first of all, to honor Dave Matthews, Everlast, Eagle-Eye Cherry, the producers, engineers, writers and lyricists who worked on this album, not forgetting my own band, too. My instructions were mainly to be patient, gracious and grateful, and this would get done. And I would be connected to the frequency of radio—this was consciously directed toward radio. That's something I've never done before. The first three Santana albums just happened because they happened. There was no premeditation there, like "Okay, let's go after radio."

**GW** A moment ago you mentioned instructions you received to be "patient, gracious," etc. Whose instructions do you mean?

**SANTANA** Instructions that I got from my inner dreams—writing down my dreams and meditations. And I particularly got instructions from an entity, an angel I call Metatron. He said, "I will help you if you will help me solder back molecules with the light." Because, you know, certain music—John Coltrane, Bob Marley—is assigned and designed to raise your soul. And we need that badly, with what's happening today with the so called "outcast children." People between seven and 27 start falling into depression and frustration. They start thinking they're victims and outcasts: "Life is crap, I'm pissed off as hell and somebody's gotta pay for it." There's a lot of arrogance, cynicism and sarcasm permeating the airwaves of the United States. The Jay Lenos and David Lettermans—it's on all TV channels and most radio stations. Even Christian stations say, "Well, we should shoot them like dogs, because they're pagans." So we drop bombs in Kosovo, Iraq...The thing I see is humanity becoming very disconnected. So my instructions were to work with a company of the stature of Arista and Mr. Clive Davis, to connect with the radio frequency so that the sound—the tone and the vibration in the lyrics—could start to reconnect humanity. As you know, this country and this whole world needs a spiritual jump-start. Like when they bring a guy in the emergency room, he's just about gone and they put those big things on him and give him a jump-start. They bring him back.

**GW** Did you discuss your larger vision for the album with Lauryn Hill, Wycleff, all those people?

**SANTANA** Yeah. All of them. And they all agree. They all want to do the same thing. We all know, as musicians. Lauryn Hill knows. We were talking in the parking lot before the Grammys and I said to her, "It's no coincidence or accident that you're going to receive all these awards, and that you are number one in the universities, high schools and junior high schools. God gave you that position so that you could rescue people from their misery. The reason your music is so in the center of everything is because God wants you to deliver this message to them. The message is that we are all multidimensional spirits, filled with enormous possibilities. All of us. And like children with Easter eggs, we have to go find them. Get off your butt, here's a basket, go find your blessings." And she said, "You're right. That's what's happening in my life, and it's all God's grace."

**GW** What was it like to work with Eric Clapton?

**SANTANA** When you come into a room and hear Eric Clapton playing the guitar by himself, it's like listening to a Buddhist monk chanting Nom Me Renge Kyo, or an Islamic guy going on about Allah. There's no mistaking it. He started playing, and literally it was

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like Josh White or Son House. It was like, "Wow, I forgot that Eric goes so deep." Eric is a stone blues player, first and foremost. The song we did together on the album is named "The Calling." It sounds like something Eric and I might do with Pops Staples and John Lee Hooker. Something really swampy and gutbucket. It's unassuming and totally honest, but it has an Artist Formerly Known as Prince kind of undercurrent in the beat.

**GW** Was it written specifically for this occasion?

**SANTANA** Eric called and said, "I would like to play on the album. Is there any room for me?" I said, "Sure! But I wouldn't dream of dipping you into something that has already been recorded. Why don't you come over and we'll try to do something from scratch? I don't know if you have any song ideas. I have a lot of things floating around. Maybe we can just put a song together." Eric said, "I haven't really written anything lately." So I started running different things by him, and one of them just clicked. We locked into this groove. Then we went back and put the intro on last. We did it backwards. The intro is almost like a prayer kind of thing. Visualize it as two Apaches on the Grand Canyon, calling out to spirits. Looking at the sky. Looking at the earth. Eric does his thing, I do mine, we go back and forth and few times. We resolve it and go into this big, fat groove.

**GW** Were you cutting with your band? With Eric's?

**SANTANA** It was just Eric, me and my keyboard player, Chester Thompson. Just three people. We looped a groove, played on top of it and had a ball. Basically Chester was doing the bass with his left hand, a keyboard part with his right hand, and we had a rhythm machine looping the beat. I played a Stratocaster, like Eric, so things would be even. For most of the album, I played Paul Reed Smiths, as always, through a combination of Boogies, Marshalls and Twins. But for my thing with Eric I actually went out and bought a Strat. I plugged it into a Twin with a Tube Screamer. First time I ever used a Tube Screamer. I started working with Rene Martinez, who used to be Stevie Ray's guitar tech, and he convinced me to try it. I was totally against sustain pedals. But he told me Stevie used pedals for sustain. I didn't believe him at first. But I gave it a try and liked it.

**GW** How far do you and Eric Clapton go back?

**SANTANA** I think the very first time we met was at Wally Heider's [San Francisco recording studio] in 1970 or '71. I came in and Eric and Neal Schon were jamming. I felt really bad because I wanted to play, but I was too out of it. I'd just taken LSD. I used to take a lot of LSD in those days. Sometimes you can play behind it, sometimes you can only observe. Because it is beyond coordination. Sometimes you get into the amoeba color state. Everything becomes amoeba colors. But there are other times when

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## CARLOS SANTANA

you can just pick up the guitar—especially 12 hours after you've taken LSD—and you can just take music to a new height. People who feel that you cannot play when you're in an altered state should listen to Coltrane's "Om" or the first three albums by Jimi Hendrix. I don't recommend it for everybody. But I know that if you do it in the right circumstances, with the right people, it'll make you play more than chops licks. You'll start playing things that, if you tape it and go back and try to play it later, you'll say, "Man, where was my head at?" It's not like a situation where you get loaded and next day you say, "Oh man, I screwed up. I don't know what that is." With mescaline and LSD, it's something totally different.

**GW** Can you get there some other way? Through meditation?

**SANTANA** I'm sure you can, through meditation. If you spend enough time meditating and playing CDs or videos of Ali Akbar Khan, you might get there. Because Ali Akbar Khan and Ravi Shankar are probably the ultimate guys for stringed instruments. I don't think anybody on the strings, including Jimi Hendrix, could do what Ali Akbar Khan does. And I'm not comparing apples to oranges. Just as far as fingers on strings go, it's phenomenal. I make it a point to listen to him.

**GW** So when did you and Eric finally get to sit down and play together?

**SANTANA** It was on the road in 1975, when my band got to open for him. But we never

really "sat down." I was just invited to play a song or two on his set. This new record is the first time we actually sat down.

**GW** Is the lyric to "Put Your Lights On" something Everlast wrote specifically for you? It has a spiritual kind of vibe.

**SANTANA** It's actually the first song he wrote after coming out of his surgery. He had a heart attack a while back. They really opened him up. And that's the first song God gave him when he came through that. So I'm really honored that he shared it with me. Years ago, I played at San Quentin [prison], and I remember facing all these guys with tattoos and muscles and anger and hate in their eyes. And I think of that when Eric [*Schrody, a.k.a. Everlast*] says, "Hey now, all you killers, put your lights on."

**GW** Tell me about co-writing "Love of My Life" with Dave Matthews.

**SANTANA** If you listen to that song, you might notice there's a lot of Brahms in there. [*sings vocal melody*] That's Brahms. We just put lyrics and a hip-hop beat onto it. So it's coming from all kinds of places: aborigines, European white males like Brahms...we haven't excluded anyone.

**GW** How did Brahms get in the mix?

**SANTANA** When my father passed away, I wouldn't listen to music for a week—which is the longest I could go without music. I was kind of numb. But about a week later I went to pick up my son at school, close to San Francisco State, and finally turned on the radio. It

was tuned to a classical station, and the first thing I heard was Brahms' *Concerto No. 2*.

And man, it just hit me so hard. Like a tattoo, it left a lasting mark on me. Only I didn't know what it was. They didn't say the name of the piece on the radio. I was really frustrated. For days, I couldn't get this melody out of my head. So I finally went into Tower Records, into the classical department, and said, "Look, man, help me out. I got this melody. I think it could be Strauss." One of the clerks said, "Sing it." I sang it and another clerk said, "No, it's not Strauss. It's Brahms. Concerto No. 2." I bought the CD and later brought it into Electric Lady Studios on a really cold day in New York City. And I said to Dave Matthews, "Look, I have this tune, but here's what I want to do with it." We recorded the music, but we had no lyrics.

But then Dave was looking over my shoulder when I was writing something for my wife: "You are the love of my life. You're the breath of my prayers. Take my hand, lead me on. With you is where I want to be." And Dave said, "Oh, those are the lyrics? Those are just precious." We left him alone in the control room for a while and, before I knew it, he wrote all the other verses. Beautiful. You listen to Dave Matthews and it's like Billie Holiday singing through him. The phrasing—that "way back behind the beat" kind of melodicism. Only squares play right on the beat. So now, when I listen to the song, it's Brahms, it's my dad, it's my wife, it's Dave

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## CARLOS SANTANA

Matthews, it's Billie Holiday. It's like a collage of people I love most. My favorite things.

**GW** To bring up another one of your favorite musicians, is "De La Yaleo" a Sun Ra tune? The songwriting credits include an "S. Ra."

**SANTANA** No, that's Shaka Ra. A friend of mine. An African musician. See, when I go to Paris, I have a lot of friends, by the grace of God. I hooked up with Idrissa Diop, Mory Kante, Toure Kunda, Majek Fashek, Baaba Maal, Salif Keita, Angelique Kidjo. [Paris is home to a thriving community of musicians from Mali, Senegal, Cameroon and other former French African colonies—GW Ed.] I've played with all of them. I'm very honored that they invite me when my band plays in Paris and that they come to my concerts and we can interchange. So "Yaleo" comes from a song by Shaka Ra. Whenever I go to Paris I go to Virgin Records and spend a lot of money on records and CDs. Specifically African stuff that is brewed in Paris. I happen to feel that this is the future. It's fresh and new. In America there's a lot of regurgitation going on right now. We regurgitate the Fifties, Sixties, Seventies and Eighties. I'm not hearing a lot of new things other than maybe Bill Laswell and Buckethead. There are very few bands and musicians who are, as they say, pushing the envelope. So the ones I know are doing it are the African people.

**GW** That French African stuff is really powerful. It's really well produced and urban, yet it has those primordial African qualities.

**SANTANA** Exactly. You gotta remember that anything we say we invented in America—like rap or blues—if you go to Africa, you realize that we didn't invent it. They did it a long, long time ago. And they still manage to make it fresh the way they do it. And honest.

**GW** Who did the horn charts on "Yaleo"?

**SANTANA** Those are basically my ideas. We did the horns for "Yaleo," "Migra" and "Africa Bamba" in one day. It just comes from hearing so many Toure Kunda, Mory Kante and Baaba Maal albums. I hear the link between those horn charts and James Brown or Tower of Power. It really complements the guitar. I can see why B.B. King has horns.

**GW** "Migra" has that lovely trumpet and guitar harmony.

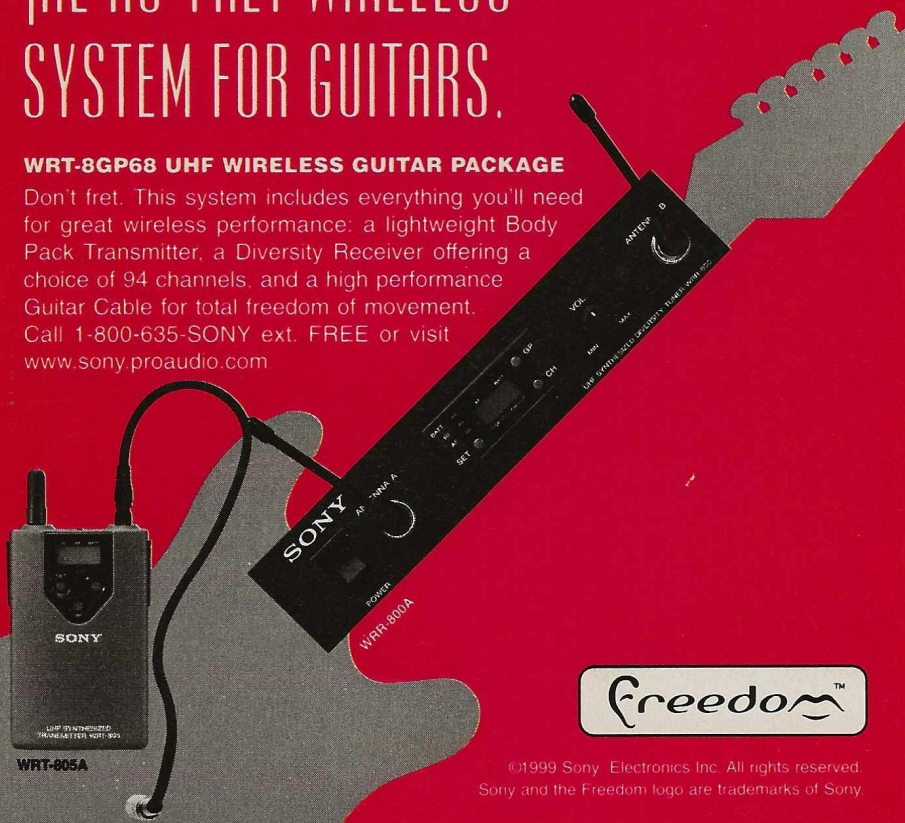
**SANTANA** That song comes from Rachid [Taha], an Algerian artist. I heard that song two or three years ago, but in my head I kept hearing lyrics for it in Spanish. And that became the song called "Migra"; those are the people who guard the borders [between Mexico and the U.S.]. And I said, "This is interesting. It sounds like Bo Diddley before he was Bo Diddley. It's like an African Bo Diddley with Irish/Celtic accordion and mariachi trumpets! This is a real weird, but the groove is there." What I do is I call everybody. I called Shaka Ra, Rachid, Toure Kunda and said, "Listen, I love your song. Would you allow me to put lyrics in Spanish or change a couple of things? Can I work with

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## CARLOS SANTANA

your song?" I always ask permission. And we work it out financially, spiritually, ethically and morally. Once I get the green light, then I record it. Therefore I have their blessing.

With this album, it was important for me to have everyone's blessing. As far as I can see it's a win-win situation, for Mr. Clive Davis, for all of the artists and producers. I tried to create a situation where we're all gonna win with this CD, because of the way it's geared and what it's doing. The motives are pure and the intentions are clean. I haven't seen anybody have a cow. I haven't seen any temper tantrums. And that's a lot of producers, engineers, musicians, artists and lyricists. And I haven't seen one person have an ego trip, bug or freak out. Everybody's

like, "Oh yeah, that'll work." So it's a wonderful process of crystallizing our intentions, motives and purposes.

A lot of credit is also due to my wife, Deborah, who has a lot invested in this particular concept album. Because of her prayers. She's the one who motivated me to work out the musical ideas. She's the one who motivated me to hook up with Mr. Clive Davis. She's the one who motivated me to be open enough to reaffirm what my inner guidance was: be patient, gracious and grateful. Don't let people control you, but don't be a control freak. Go right through the middle. Which is challenging. But like Miles Davis said, "The joy is in the pursuing, not in the attaining." That's what a masterpiece is about.

*Guitar World* and its readers—all you musicians—should know that. So have fun, late at night, scrambling the eggs differently. It's the same eggs that Eric Clapton or Jimmy Page or Jeff Beck or Buddy Guy are dealing with. Just learn to scramble them differently.

**GW** Were you worried that people were going to say, "Oh, this is Carlos cashing in. He's looking to get some spin off all these people with hits?"

**SANTANA** No. I wasn't tripping on that. I haven't even thought of that. Because I don't give those people my time or energy. There are people who are born just to look at shit in the world—dog shit in the street. They'll never look up and see the beautiful clouds in the sky. I used to love to go to Hippy Hill in San Francisco and just sit there, look up at the sky and watch the clouds do their thing. So I'm used to seeing both perimeters. But critics, they're not trained to see roses and babies being born and grace and potential. They just see dog shit. And that's their job. What an extremely frustrating, depressing job to have.

**GW** Tell me more about the angel Metatron.

**SANTANA** Actually, he created the electron, which is physical life. Heaven is just pure thought. But God wanted to taste, to hug, to feel. So he called Metatron, and Metatron is the architect of the electron. If you look at sunlight reflecting on water and you really zoom in, you're going to see dancing triangles. Metatron took two triangles, like the Star of David, spun them, and from that he created physical life. Without him, there wouldn't be any hugs or kisses. No touchy-feely stuff. We'd be all just thought things.

**GW** And music belongs to both worlds.

**SANTANA** Music, as I say, is assigned and designed to transform your molecular structure. If you ever run more than six or seven miles, it's like your body turns to crystals. Music can have the same kind of effect. People cry and laugh at the same time. They get horny and spiritual at the same time. Or they get chills. Music to me has never been about entertainment or show business. Music to me, even before I knew what to call it, is about acupuncture. Physical, spiritual acupuncture. You align people together. In the dictionary, the definition of the word "healing" is to be whole and sound. That's the key word: "sound." People used to cure with tea leaves, flower petals, herbs, roots and sounds. They'd give you this tea and play you this song with the drum and flute. And that takes care of making the connection. Today, they give you pills made in a laboratory. And that makes you more dependent. It doesn't cure or free you. [pause] I know, I know, I'm going off now. This is supposed to be a guitar interview.

**GW** I know what you're saying, though. Like the yogis, the Sufi mystics and so many other spiritual traditions, you're talking about alignment with the universal vibration.

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### Kid Rock.

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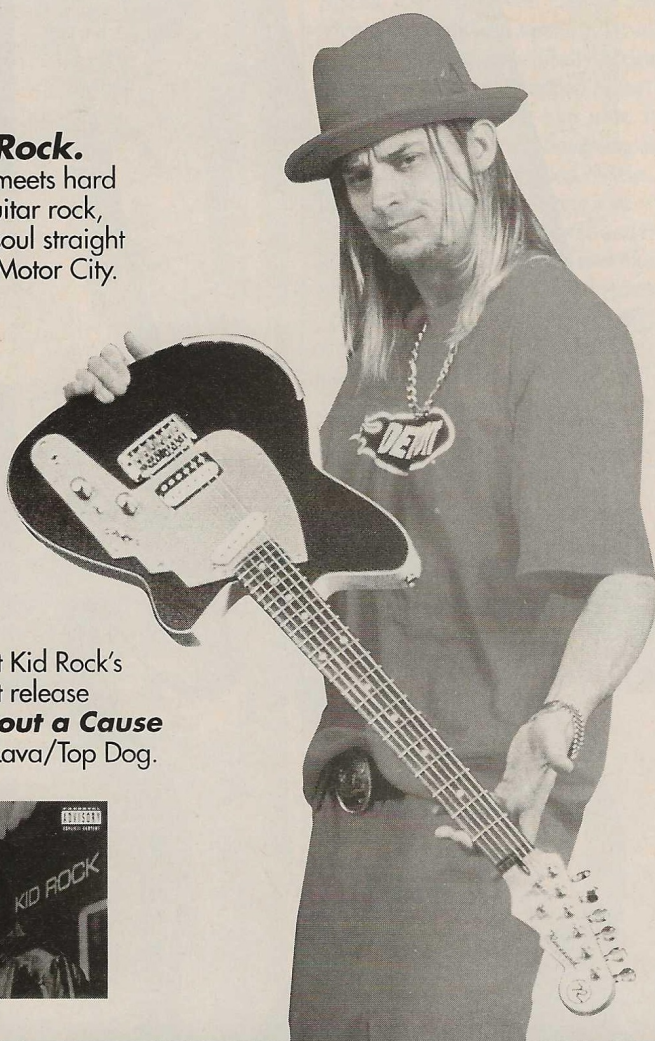
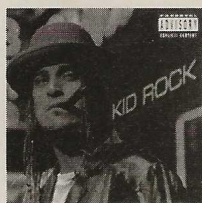


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## CARLOS SANTANA

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**SANTANA** And to me, the universal vibration is very compassionate and kind. It's only when we fall off it that we create unhappiness for ourselves. I don't see things in terms of "Devil" or "God"; I see things in terms of pure energy. I don't believe there is a God that is jealous, vengeful, resentful or any of those things it says in a lot of books, whether it's the Koran or the Bible. You can have that God. That's a man-made God. Those are human qualities. Real God is about spirit. One mind that dwells in all of us and that constantly has agents, which I call entities or angels. And he picks out certain musicians, artists and other people, and gives them direct instructions: "Do what you do to uplift consciousness." And when you're doing that, music is not wasted. There is nothing higher, man, than to come to this planet and do your best to uplift, transform and illumine consciousness.

**GW** And so you've made this album and called it *Supernatural*.

**SANTANA** Originally, I was going to call the album *Mumbo Jumbo*. But Clive Davis talked me out of it. Because of, like, what you said earlier: "Carlos trying to fit in with all these youngsters and too many people." So *Mumbo Jumbo* sounds like [laughs]...mumbo jumbo, you know? But I said to him, "Mumbo Jumbo was originally a king, a real person, like Hannibal. Mumbo Jumbo was a king in Africa who would heal with music and herbs. But I guess the white man turned that into a negative thing and said, 'Oh, it's just mumbo jumbo.'"

So I changed the name to *Supernatural*. Because it's very natural, it's very super and there were all these paranormal coincidences with the artists and their dreams. So many people on this record have said, "Man, I knew we were gonna work together. I kept hearing your music every place I went. You kept popping up in my life in one way or another. So I knew something was up."

**GW** At this stage in your career, you've become kind of a patriarchal figure. You won the *Billboard* Century Award. You've been honored in various ways. You're known as a man who can build bridges between different musical cultures. Is that a heavy responsibility? How do you feel about that?

**SANTANA** I feel like a child. I'll tell you, man, I'm 51 years old, but I feel like I'm 17, on the enthusiasm side. Because I get to fulfill an inner promise. I'm 51 years old and I still have my inner guidance. Miles Davis comes to me a lot in my dreams, and Bill Graham. Miles Davis for music, Bill Graham for monetary, financial reasons. They're both constantly telling me when and how to duck. I feel like I'm becoming the people that I love. I love B.B. King, I love Harry Belafonte, I love Arthur Ashe. And, truly, I look in the mirror and I'm becoming my father. Also, when I was a kid, I wanted to look like Einstein. And now I am beginning to look like him. So God is really really merciful with me. I am becoming my aspirations. **GW**

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