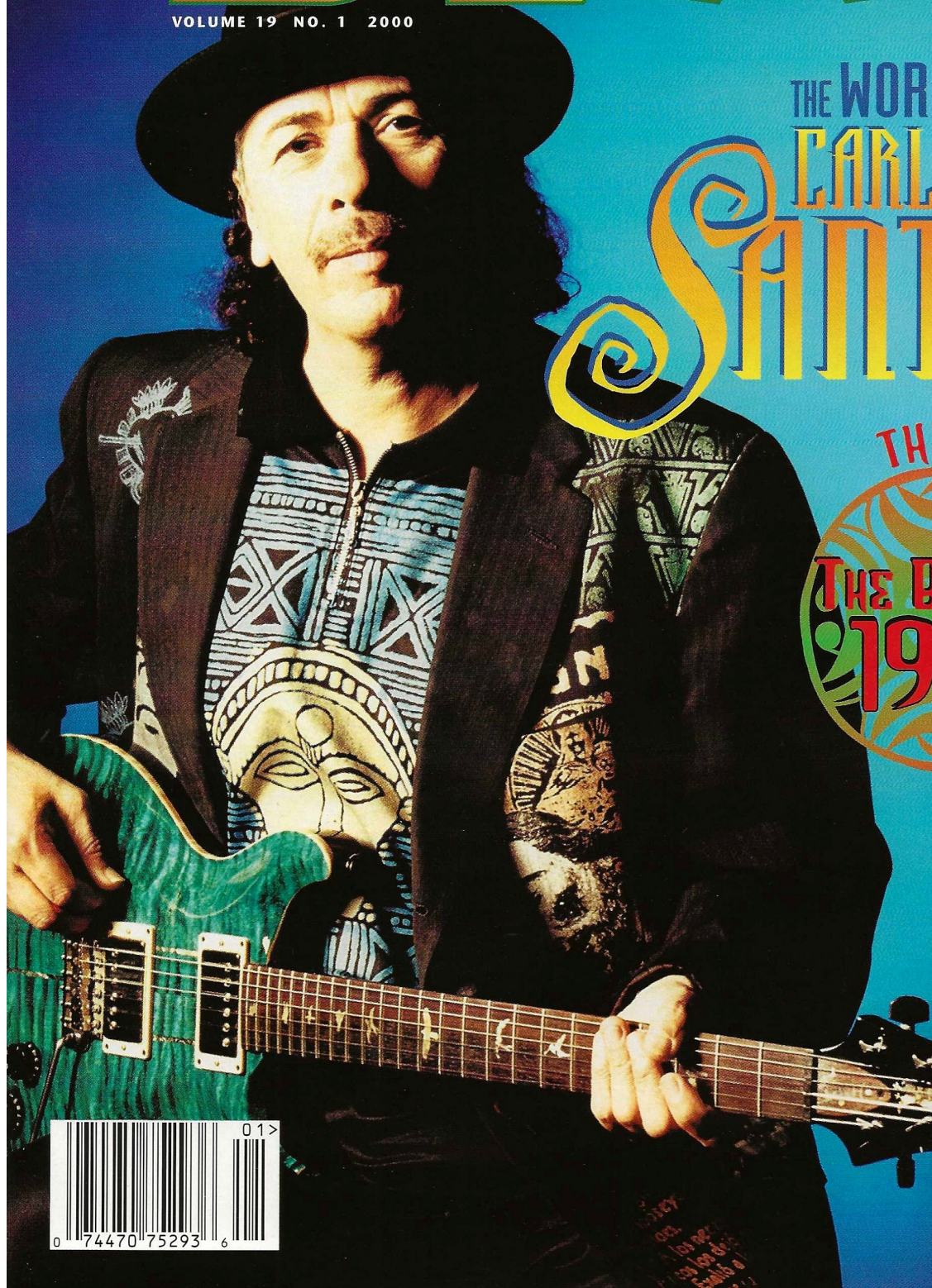


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THE BEAT[®]

VOLUME 19 NO. 1 2000

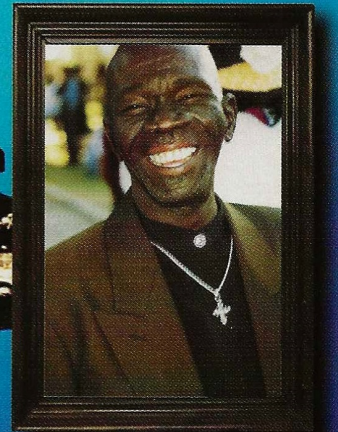
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THE WORLD OF CARLOS SANTANA



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JOE HIGGS



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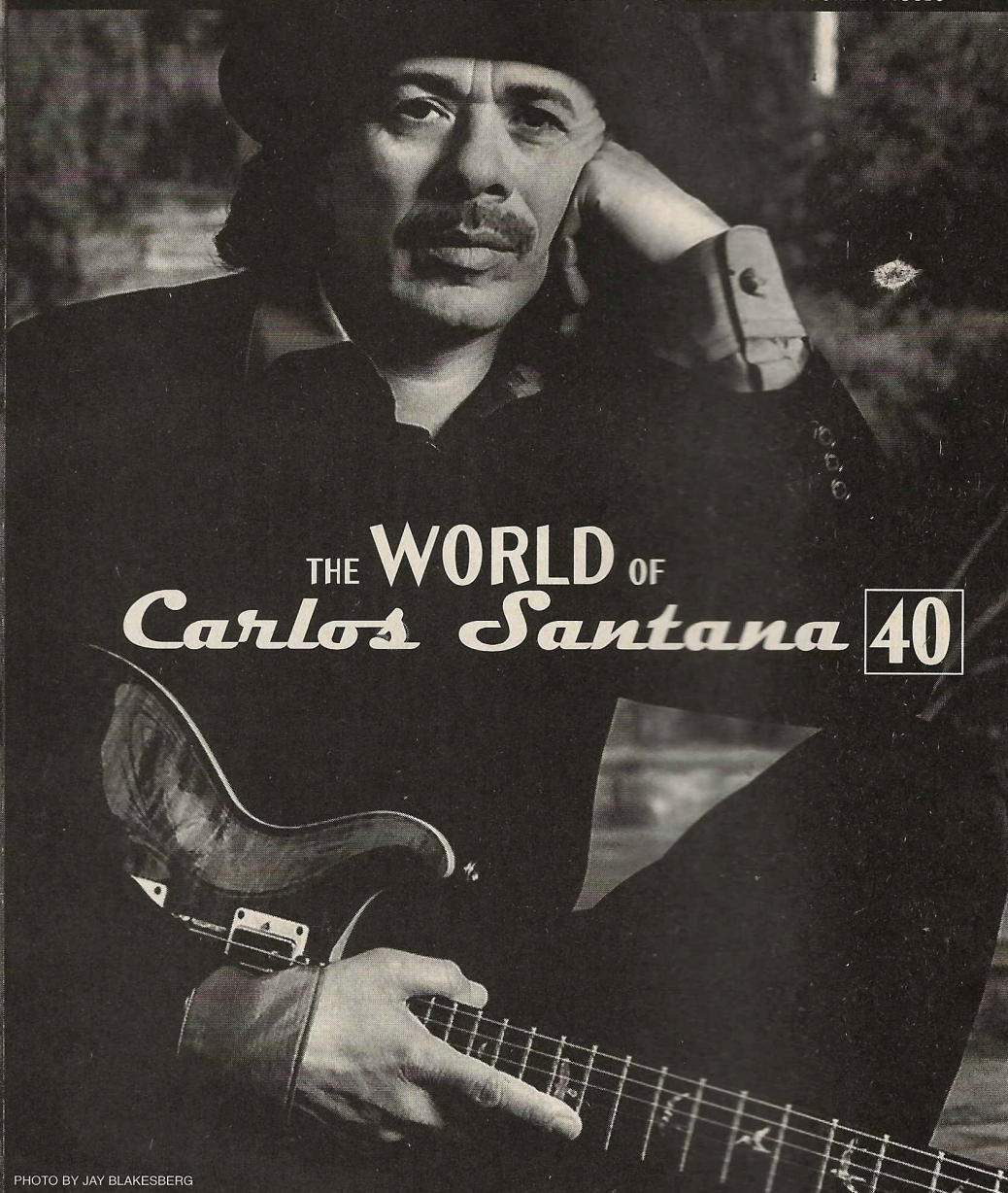
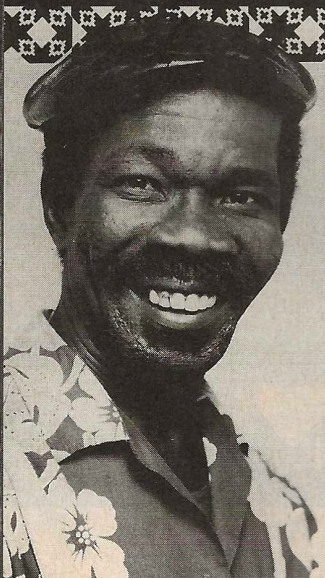


PHOTO BY JAY BLAKESBERG



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PHOTO COURTESY OF ARISTA RECORDS

The World of

Carlos Santana

Soaring, slashing, crying, wailing—within moments you know exactly what it is. It's one of the most immediately recognizable voices in music: the guitar of Carlos Santana, distinctive and unique in any setting. Over the past three decades, that guitar has sung out around the world, playing music from straight-ahead rock 'n' roll to blues, soul, all manner of Latin, jazz and African, and any number of blends therein. As Santana himself puts it, it's *all* African music, but he has probably explored more roots and branches of the African musical diaspora, and certainly been heard by more people as he's done so, than any other music.

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By Steve Heilig

Santana is rarely given his due as a pioneer of what is now widely termed "world music." But looking back at the mid-'60s, when he first began to "sprinkle a little chili pepper into rock 'n' roll," as the *New Yorker* recently put it, it's hard to avoid the fact that his band was really the first to bring international music into the American mainstream. African drummer Olatunji had released an album years before on a major label; Ravi Shankar's sitar had begun to captivate some of the emerging counter-culture; Stan Getz and João Gilberto had seduced the United States with the Brazil-based "Girl from Ipanema," but only people like Herb Alpert and Ricky Ricardo had really broken into the wider American cultural landscape, and those were heavily Americanized—it might even be said Caucasianized—novelties. Santana burst those barriers with driving music that was not only undeniably from somewhere other than Hollywood, but immediately accessible to millions of *norteamericanos* who didn't know guacamole from mole.

Santana, born in 1947 in a "blink-and-you'll-miss-it" Mexican village, was ironically first truly captivated by the African-American musical idiom of the blues. The first version of his band, in fact, was the Santana Blues Band. As he freely recalls, it took legendary rock promoter Bill Graham, a former New Yorker with a long-time love for salsa music, to fertilize Santana's roots by turning him back on to Latin sounds. In the San Francisco of the "Summer of Love" era, blues-based rock filtered through psychedelic chemistry was king. As a teenager newly arrived north of the border, Santana, while certainly influenced by the exploding scene around him, emerged with something new—and something more durable and timeless than most other forms

of popular music. By the time of the Santana band's "coming-out party" at Woodstock in 1969—before the band even had a record out—Carlos' vision had solidified into a driving, percussive and distinctly identifiable musical trademark which garnered fans from Jimi Hendrix to the street toughs in San Francisco's Mission district, where he first landed and formed his first band right out of high school. Even if he had stopped with his second album, the all-time classic *Abraxas* in 1970, his place as a rock legend was assured.

Carlos Santana himself is both a survivor and explorer who credits both ambition and spirituality for his successes on various levels. When the counterculture of the late 1960s dissipated under an onslaught of bad drugs, burnout, greed and evil disco music, Carlos, who has noted that "You either snorted cocaine and shot heroin, or you folded your hands and thanked God," chose the latter path and focused on developing his music. His early 1970s forays into music both explicitly spiritual and ever more Latinized produced such classic high points as the albums *Carnavales* and *Barboletta*. His fame allowed him to bring musicians of the greatest quality into his ever-evolving band. From there, he continued to search, making contact and playing with jazz legends and emerging stars from around the world.

Now an international musical icon, Carlos Santana has appeared all over the world, won most every applicable award—including, fairly recently, induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame—headlined some of the biggest festivals and benefits ever mounted, and filled stadiums consistently on far-flung continents even as his public profile has waxed and waned at home. In San Francisco he's always been a homeboy hero, especially to the sizeable Latino population; in the recent Mayor's campaign, one perennial Latino candidate cruised the streets in a car with speakers blasting Santana hits. And probably got more votes than otherwise would be the case.

Early in 1999, I decided it was past time to pay Carlos Santana a visit. We'd known for years that he was a longtime reader of *The Beat*, and he was virtually a neighbor of mine in Marin County, just over the bridge from San Francisco. I met him in his nondescript offices in a funky industrial section of town, where his small, dedicated staff keep the Santana touring, recording and fan club mini-empire going. At the time, he was hard at work on a new album for a new label, featuring a number of musical guests both old and new, and was very enthusiastic about the sounds they were capturing in the studio at night. The week before, I had caught one of a short run of Santana shows at the legendary Fillmore Auditorium—the venue where he got his start—and witnessed that the storming funky drive of Santana was indeed alive and well. Old hometown hippies, streetwise Mission *vatos*, and whole families joined in the party, which, true to form, was a benefit for the United Farm Workers. Driving up to our interview, I stopped by a local *taqueria* for brunch. Looking at the menu, what else could I order but the "El Carlos Santana" burrito—vegetarian, with sliced yuca and Spanish sauce.

Steve Heilig: Let's start at your start. What's your earliest musical memory?

Carlos Santana: Oh, I think it was like when, you know, Cupid throws an arrow and hits you. Down in Mexico, there was this Mexican band, dressed up with bows and arrow and they were playing some funky weird music—I didn't know it yet, but it was like Lee Perry, George Clinton and Sun Ra mixed up—but Mexican funky. The second was Los Indios Tabajara—playing more traditional folk music—songs like "Maria Elena." I remember it piercing me because my father was always on the road, sometimes for a year, playing music, sometimes up here in California while we were still living in Autlan,

Jalisco, a little town down between Guadalajara and Puerto Vallarta. If you go there still and blink you will miss it.

Q: So you were living there with your family...

A: Yeah, with my parents, until my dad left for Tijuana. He was sending money, but we hadn't seen him for awhile. My mom put us all in the car and drove us to Tijuana. This was '55, so I was like seven years old. He was living with this other woman, you know, but my mom didn't know that, and only had this one address. So she went and knocked on the door, and this lady came out screaming. My mom broke down, you know, what were we gonna do, we don't have any money to go back.

There was this guy on the corner, this wino, who said

"What are you looking for?" She said she was looking for her husband, and showed him a picture, and he said "Oh yeah, he's in there." This is how God works, you know, through this wino, who told her to go back there. So she knocked again, and this lady comes out screaming again, but this time woke my dad up from his *siesta*. So he stuck his head out, saw me, my six brothers and sisters, crammed in the station wagon, and his face turned like the NBC peacock, all the colors, anger, and joy, and fear and doubt. It was the typical Mexican story, the typical African thing...

So he put us in this Colonial Hotel, a really funky place. They were still putting the roof on. We were there for months, and my mom and dad weren't really speaking, but he would bring a bag of groceries and stuff. My dad's a beautiful man, but like a lot of Mexican men, or men in general, a lot of men have a problem with the balance of masculinity and femininity—intuition and compassion and tenderness—and get overboard with the macho thing. And it took him awhile to become more, I would say, conscious, evolved, you know.

Anyway, once we got to TJ, he bought a bunch of Chiclets gum, broke it in half, and gave one to me, and one to my older brother, saying "Don't come back until you've sold them all." And I thought, oh, so that's my reality now...

But he was also teaching me music; even in Autlan he taught me how to read when I was very young. And he taught me the violin in Tijuana, and he would drill me on it, on all sorts of European music. After a while I started going out on the street with two other guys with guitars, and it was like "Song, mister? Fifty cents!" We played all the stereotypical Mexican songs, and I was like, "I hate this stuff," and had started listening to Muddy Waters, Jimmy Reed, John Lee Hooker...

Q: Where were you hearing them, on the radio from San Diego or something?

A: Yeah, American radio. And Lightnin' Hopkins...

Q: It sounds like how the early Jamaican reggae musicians got turned onto American soul music over the airwaves and water. So the blues was the first music you really discovered yourself...

A: Blues was my first love, yeah. It was the first thing where I said "Oh man, this is the stuff." It just sounded so raw and honest, gut-bucket honest. From then I started rebelling. I found myself in the shantytown, where it smells like piss and puke, you know, every town has it, and I was there playing with my dad, and the tables were black from cigarette butts, for there was no ashtray; and no floor, just dirt. And there's a cop, with his hand all over the prostitute, doing his thing because if she doesn't let him, he'll bust her. And I'm watching all this as a kid, thinking, "Damn, this planet is funky." And my father looks at me and says "What's the matter with you?" Because I didn't look like I was having fun, and I said "Man, I don't wanna be here, I don't want to live in this kind of scene." And he said "What do you want to play then, that Pachuco shit?" Pachuco is this music of Tijuana that is integrated with doo-wop, blues... And I said, "Look at where we are, just smell it, do you think this scene is better than that?" That was the first time I ever spoke back to my dad, and I thought he was gonna slap me, but he didn't, it was like I opened his eyes.

And he let me go, and I started getting more involved with other bands playing other kinds of music. There's a guy there who's still around named Xavier Batiz, who dressed like Little Richard, played like B.B. King, with a little Ray Charles in there. He had a beautiful tone on guitar. By the time my dad had moved to San Francisco, I hadn't been doing too much musically, and my Mom took me to the park to hear Batiz's band, the TJs. And the sound of the electric guitars, amps and everything, for me it was like watching a flying saucer for the first time. And I started following him like a guid-

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CARLOS SANTANA'S

DESERT ISLAND DISCS

"Wow, that's the toughest question yet," laughed Santana when I asked him to list his 10 favorite albums of all time. But he agreed to give it a shot....

Miles Davis,
Sketches of Spain

John Coltrane, *Ballads*

Bob Marley and the
Wailers, *Exodus*

Marvin Gaye,
What's Goin' On

Jimi Hendrix, "Any of first
his three albums, don't
make me pick there!"

Salif Keita, *Soro*

Aretha Franklin, *Lady Soul*

The Beatles,
Sergeant Pepper

Eddie Palmieri,
Superimposition

Charlie Byrd,
Byrd of Paradise

"The first three are the big ones for me. The others might change from day to day, but those would not. And if I was stuck with just one, it would be the Miles. And if I had to pick one Santana album, I guess it would still be *Abraxas*. That's the one where it first all came together for us, so it will always be a sentimental favorite."

The World of Carlos Santana | Continued from page 43

ed missile. So I'd come home all excited, and my mom wrote to my dad saying "Carlos' got the music bug again!" My dad sent me a beat-up old electric guitar. Once I got that electric sound, there was no turning back, I knew I wasn't going to be an accountant or English teacher. Even before I came to San Francisco there was nothing that could deter me from this path of music.

Q: How old were you when you came here?

A: It was '62, so I was 14 or 15. First I came with my mom, but I didn't like it that first time. When I worked in Tijuana at this club, I was making like \$9 a week, playing guitar in a club band. We'd start at four in the afternoon, play for an hour, and then the strippers and prostitutes would come out. This was seven days a week. We'd play until midnight on weekdays and on weekends we wouldn't get out of there until six in the morning. I was getting my thing together, playing so much. So when I came to San Francisco I had to go back to junior high school, because I didn't know how to speak English. And I didn't want to hang around with these...kids, you know what I'm saying?

I'd saved enough money to help us emigrate, to get some dental stuff for my sisters, and still get a Stratocaster! But my mom spent it on food and rent, because she had to, and I got so angry at her I wouldn't speak to her or eat for a week. So she got disgusted with me and gave me \$20 and sent me back to Tijuana by myself. When I got there it was Halloween, and there were all these devils and skeletons around, and it scared the crap out of me because I didn't know anybody now. So I went to the church, to the Virgin of Guadalupe, and said "Look, I was here a year ago with my brother, we walked on our knees from the front door all the way to your altar, and I did it, but didn't ask for a favor, so I figure you owe me one. So I ask that you give me my job back while I'm here, and take care of my family."

So then I went back to the club, and the guy said I wasn't supposed to be there, because they knew my mom had emigrated, and that I was underage and didn't have her permission. But I had a letter from her, so they said it was cool, and I stayed there for almost another year, really learning again. So by the time I did come back to San Francisco in '63, right before they killed JFK, I was really confident about what I knew about music. I had picked up all this repertoire. And there there was this consciousness explo-

sion in San Francisco with the hippies and the Black Panthers and the whole thing, so I really landed in the right place at the right time.

Q: Who were the first musicians you hooked up with here—was it at school?

A: No, actually I went to the Fillmore West on a matinee gig, and Bill Graham was there, and Paul Butterfield—I know he was on acid because he was watching the wall like it was a tv, and there was nothing there. And I said, Oh, this guy's not playing today, he's barefooted, looks like he's been up all night... And sure enough, there was a jam, with people from the Grateful Dead, the Jefferson Airplane, and Michael Bloomfield was playing keyboards—his guitar was just standing there. And a friend of mine went to Bill Graham and slipped him a note saying "This skinny Mexican friend of mine plays the blues—will you let him play?" And Graham says "I'm not in charge, Bloomfield is, go ask him!" And my friend, Stan Marvin, he became our first manager, asked Bloomfield, and he said "Sure, man, go ahead." A very gracious guy. So I got the guitar, and stood there, waiting, and waiting...until they said, "Oh yeah, you're still here, go ahead and take a solo." And I jumped on it. And Graham said, "You got a band?" And I said yeah, which was sorta true in a way, and he took my phone number, and we hooked up. I was still working at the Tic Tock diner washing dishes over on Third Street. And this guy named Tom Frazer came and found me there, took me to Palo Alto, where he had musicians ready, including Gregg Rolie on keyboards, and he and I just fit like Wes Montgomery and Jimmy Smith or something.

We started mixing up jazz and blues, and some African flavor. We had something different than what was being played in San Francisco. John Mayall, Eric Clapton, all those guys, were all playing blues—just louder. We mixed it up with the African, the Cuban, with Mongo Santamaria, and we started noticing that the hippies were dancing differently. It wasn't like catching butterflies, it was like, girls' nipples getting hard, and we said, "Oooh, this works." And there was no turning back—we'd open for Paul Butterfield, for Chicago or Johnny Winter or Steppenwolf, and we'd take their crowd. So that gave us a lot of confidence that what we had

was, I wouldn't call it world music, but we took it back to Africa in a way.

Q: So how did you get your first recording contract?

A: We had an audition. Bill Graham called us and said, hey, the head of Atlantic music was in town looking to hear us, and I said "I don't want to be on Atlantic." But Bill said, "Just go, and don't screw it up!" So I went, but I played terribly, just awful.

Q: Why didn't you want to be with them?

A: Well, I knew that Aretha was there, and Cream, but I'd already heard that a lot of musicians were not satisfied with things like airplay and distribution. So then CBS was next, they came to hear us in Santa Barbara when we opened for the Grateful Dead. By the time we got signed, Bill Graham took us aside, and said, you know, if you're gonna make a record, you guys don't really have any songs, just jams, like 17-minute things. "Yeah, isn't that cool," we said. "No, it's not", he said, "You have to have some songs," so he brought us to his office and hooked us up with songs like Willie Bobo's music, "Evil Ways." Then I started hearing things like "Oye Como Va," "Black Magic Woman"...

Q: So you hadn't been listening to people like Tito Puente and all that before?

A: No, no, not really. Maybe a little Mongo Santamaria, and Ray Barretto because of "The Watusi," a big hit. We liked African music from Olatunji's side, but we didn't know the New York Afro-Cuban-Puerto Rican thing until we went there.

Q: So it was Bill, who was from back there and really into salsa, who turned you on to the Latin side of things...

A: Yeah. And we started doing those songs, and people would sing along. It was an instant connection with the audience, who didn't know us. It was incredible to start opening up at big festivals, with all these huge stars. By the time we got to Woodstock, we were set.

Q: And you only had the one album out...

A: No, it wasn't even out yet, so nobody knew who we were. Bill told Michael Lang from Woodstock, "I'll help you put the show together, but you gotta put Santana in there." And I didn't even know there was a movie being made. Later I was with Jimi Hendrix's old lady and she said "C'mon, you gotta check this Woodstock movie





Just like any institution that deals with religion or politics is corrupt right from the get-go. They're all like the pro wrestlers—they pretend to scream and kick each other and all that but at the end of the day they all get a check from the same guy! Every President that leaves takes millions of dollars with them. And I would like to see that money come back and feed the Indians and things like that. Mexico is like three layers—the Indians, the mixed races, and the whites—and they only get together for the Virgen de Guadalupe each December. I said, why not do this every day, and put aside the differences? So, anyway, when I speak like this, they make it real hard for me when I go there.

Q: Of course I need to ask you about this new album you're working on. I hear you've got a bunch of special guests appearing this time.

A: This album has really been a grace kind of thing. It started in '95, when I was touring with Jeff Beck. My wife told me they were doing some special event for Clive Davis, head of Arista records, who has his own humanitarian

out, Jimi and I were checking it out, and when you guys came on, it flipped him out, he sat up straight." Jimi didn't get to the festival until late, and he'd even brought a conga player along for that gig for the first time, but his conga was like decoration compared to what we were doing and it blew him away.

Q: Did you get any negative backlash from Latin music purists?

A: Oh yeah, man, there were New Yorkers who just couldn't stand us, you know, "Who are these Mexicans from the West Coast, who can't even play *clave*, how dare they..." But they didn't get what we were doing, we weren't another salsa band, so forget them. And eventually some did come around, and anyway, the big guys like Ray Barretto and Tito Puente were very encouraging.

Q: And it couldn't have hurt when you got some known players like Orestes Vilato, the Escovedos, Armando Peraza, joining your band...

A: Well, for us it was a natural evolution. I'm not the kind of guy to have a group stay together forever, like the Rolling Stones, Grateful Dead, or something. People would say to me, are you sure you want to play with so and so, that could be career suicide, you'll lose your audience. Well, then I should lose them, because I need to grow, to play with Wayne Shorter, with John Lee Hooker...

Q: Well, it seem you were doing that early, playing with Alice Coltrane, John McLaughlin, Leon Thomas—some of that early '70s stuff of yours, the *Caravanserai*/*Barboletta*/*Lotus* era, really opened some ears.

A: Well, my goal would be to do another album with Alice Coltrane, and with Pharoah Sanders, Ali Akbar Khan, Bill Laswell—I think Bill Laswell is really pushing the envelope more than anyone. I'd like to do something with him, and with a whole bunch of African musicians like Idrissa Diop, Ismael Lo, Toure Kunda, Salif Keita, Mory Kante—maybe do an album like the saxophone player did, with everyone on it...

Q: Manu Dibango?

A: Yeah, like that, just mix it up, bring some Miles and Coltrane songs...

Q: It'd be interesting to hear you play some soukous...

A: Oh yeah, those rhythms and guitar lines are amazing.

Q: You've named Bob Marley as one of your true musical heroes. Did you ever meet him?

A: I never had the pleasure and honor of meeting Bob. The closest we came, I think, was at a show in Europe when we were both in the same town and the whole Wailers band had the day off and came to see us play. By that time he was feeling too weak and they told me "Bob really wanted to be here tonight but he's feeling real frail and couldn't make it. He told us to give you his love." I was really honored that they came, and that he'd heard about us, and I have no doubt that when I'm finished with what I am supposed to be doing on this planet, him and I, and Jimi and Marvin and Jaco, we're gonna be having some fun over there—but I told 'em not to call me yet!

Q: Do you play much in Mexico, your old home country?

A: I'd still like to go back there more but I don't get along with the government.

Q: The Mexican government?

A: Yeah...I kinda feel like Hugh Masekela—he couldn't go to South Africa, and if I go to Mexico, it's a real hassle for me.

Q: Why? Is it things you say and do?

A: Well, I can't seem to just be quiet there...I feel that people need to change things, so that genocide of the Chiapas Indians would stop, for example. I'm not just a show business guy, you know, so when I get in front of a microphone, I don't like accusing or judging, yet I do want the government to know that we know that they are the cause of genocide. It's important for governments from Mexico all the way to Brazil to understand that people know they are corrupt.

foundation, and asked if I would say something for it. And I said that he and Bill Graham were so important, for they brought some balance into popular music, saying that if you wanted to hear Bob Marley, you were gonna hear from Miles Davis too; if you want to hear the Dead you've gotta hear Coltrane. That's what he would do.

So Clive liked what I'd said, and got in touch and asked what I was up to, asking, "What do you really want to do next?" And I told him I wanted to unify the molecules with the light, through music. Miles Davis played "Human Nature" and "Time After Time" until the day he died; Coltrane played "My Favorite Things," and "Afro Blue." The best songs from Bob Marley or the Beatles are simple. People are not so complicated—they need a beautiful balance of rhythm and melody. Rhythm is the male, melody is the woman. The bed don't matter when they get it together! So he got it, even though I was kinda strange in the way I talk. He said he'd make it work, but that he's hands-on and we would fight, but we would have a good album that people would want to hear.

Q: So you've been fighting with him about this project?

A: In a good way. I got told, by an angel in my meditations and dreams, that "We're gonna help you to get back into the ring, because we want you to utilize your sound and vibration and resonance to hook up with a lot of new people."

Q: Care to make any statement about the state of popular music today?

A: Oh, man....Listen, I'll just tell you a story. We were on an awards show recently, and Chris Rock was the mc. Britney Spears or Ricky Martin or somebody was up next, and Chris said "Are you all ready for some fierce lip-syncing?" And we all just cracked up. But a lot of people just went, "yeah!"

Q: Don't knock it until you've tried it...

A: [Laughs] Let me tell you right here, you will

Continued on page 46

When you as a musician feel something really strong—this is the first rule of music—the listener's gonna feel it.

If I don't feel it, why the hell should you? You have to be feeling something before you hit that string.

Actually it's five things—soul, heart, mind, body, cojones—all in one note. That will give you the chills.

never see Santana lip-sync! But, listen, you know this, there are a lot of people doing a lot of beautiful things. People like Bob Marley and John Coltrane played music to uplift, transform consciousness—to bring oneness into the world. “One Love” and “A Love Supreme” is the same message. And I love those guys for it, because they didn't deviate, start tripping out with the rock star thing, at least to my understanding. They were humble and genuine people, so they are my role models. They were consistent, and when it's all said and done, it's like the same reason I love this [Beat] magazine so much—we are conscious of accentuating all the colors—it's not about black or white or grey, it's about a rainbow. The music of the future is this magazine's content—the world music. Every time I go to Paris or wherever that's what I go buy. I don't have many extravaganzas, you know, but in those stores, with all the cds, I can go nuts...

Q: OK, I have to ask this, since I know some people have said you've pandered to middle America too, since you're so popular. How have your relations been with critics in general, since the first breakthrough of your new sound? I've always thought you haven't gotten your due

from the world music world, such as it is, for being a real pioneer there...

A: Well, thanks, and I appreciate that thought. All in all, the journalists have been OK by me, you know, you get some bad and some good and that's just the way it is. And your magazine is important and my favorite. I will say that there are people in the *The Beat* magazine who sometimes do turn me off, though. They can be so righteous in defending some things that they exclude certain things—like myself, and Gloria Estefan, for example. Look, I'm not Lawrence Welk, nor am I exploiting Africa. I'm into exploring, and giving it back in a way they can say “Damn—you see what Santana do with this?” When I go to Africa, I am not just some musical tourist—I am part of the family. My values are consistent with the American Indians, aborigines and African people. I don't know how they look at other people like Paul Simon, David Byrne or Peter Gabriel, but I know how they look at me. If I go to Kingston, Jamaica, I know how they see me and treat me. That's important to me. I try to honor their music, take certain elements, give it back in a new kinda way—and credit them immediately, financially, emotionally, spiritually—give it right back. There's a way to make it a win-win situation—that's the way of the future.

Q: Well, as a journalist, when I hear something I don't like, I tend to just let it go, and only write on what I do like. Taste is subjective and somebody worked hard, hopefully, on whatever they put out. I only diss somebody if they are trying to fool us, or if their message is destructive, like the guns and violence lyrics.

A: I think that's fair. Listen, I talk with someone like my sister Angelique Kidjo, and she said “Man, I was doing my best, trying to mix things up a little, and I just got slammed for supposedly selling out.” I just think, if you go to a concert, and thousands of people are going nuts for three hours, and the guy who reviewed it said “I hated it, it stunk, but that was just my opinion.” I say OK, that's fair, you had a bad day but 20,000 people had an orgasm. All I ask from magazines is that people be fair.

Q: A lot of artists don't have the power and influence with the industry that you do, though. They might have a good vision that gets bastardized by the commercial interests. So even sometimes when they do seem to sell out it's hard to blame them, because it's the only way they'd be able to have the record company put out for them.

A: True. Let's look at my brother Salif Keita.

When I got that first album, *Soro*, I turned Miles Davis, Wayne Shorter, everyone I could on to it. It was unbelievable. The next album was really good, and the next was, you know, OK. But you have to realize that you can only do a *Sergeant Pepper's* once in awhile! You can't just crank 'em out, even if you want to. For me, I don't have anyone telling me what to do, only asking if I'm open to working with different people. I usually say, yeah, sure!

But again, you know, it's important that people know that music itself is like a rainbow—we need to honor African music, pre-Colombian and aboriginal musics, our first foundations. I love to turn people on to that, however I can—especially other musicians. When I'm trying something new, often I'm thinking about how people whose music I love will feel about it, how Bob Dylan or Chick Corea or Herbie Hancock or Wayne Shorter will hear it. It's important to please the people but I'm a musician and maybe the highest compliment you can get is when another musician says “Man, Carlos, with that one you really did something!” Wayne was the one who said, “Make music that is completely new, but totally familiar.” When you do that, you can sleep really good at night.

And, you know, again, the roots of all our music comes from Africa. It's funny, again about Salif Keita—when I played Salif for Miles Davis, I said “Miles, can I play you somethin'?” And he said [imitating Davis' famous scary whisper] “Sure, put it on.” And when he heard those trumpets playing, he nodded and just whispered, “Spanish.” And I said, forgetting that you just don't contradict Miles, “No, actually it's Moorish, because they conquered Spain, you know.” And he just looked at me with that look, repeated, “Spanish.” And I said, “Yeah, it sounds Spanish, but it's really from Islam...” And he just stared at me, and said “Spanish!” OK, Miles, whatever you say! But look, even *Sketches of Spain* sounds like that because of the Moors. Otherwise they'd be playing polkas and waltzes like everybody else in Europe, you know? So again, that's African roots.

Q: I wonder how you stay so positive about things—you travel the world, and see how much poverty and suffering there is. But your sense of positivity and hope comes through in your music.

A: Hmmm. OK. The thing is that, when I go to a place like Rio, I go from the airport to town, and you always have to pass the shantytowns and miles and miles of cardboard houses. But I also know that there's no death, that we're just visiting here, and



PHOTO BY ROGER STEFFENS

Carlos Santana blowing Miles Davis' trumpet at his home in San Rafael, CA, 1997.

that each person has volunteered to come to this planet to raise consciousness in some way. So, I'm learning not to judge, criticize, or defend—I'm learning just to observe. It might be a Zen or Buddhist thing, I don't know, but when you really observe, you can get some clarity. Some people think I'm full of mumbo jumbo: "Give me the meat and potatoes, Carlos. I need to pay the rent." OK, you may spend most of your energy getting the rent money. I spend mine trying to use the same notes and alchemy that Marley and Coltrane used to create a new kind of bread that people also gotta have.

Everybody's born with the same potential to be rich, or spiritual, or miserable. If I trip and fall, I hit the ground like anyone else. If you get huffy and puffy and say "Well, Santana don't know what it's like to live in the heart of the Kingston ghetto or the favela," well, I smelled it, man, that's where I grew up. And it all smells

invaded the music charts, radio and stores, soon becoming the biggest hit album of his 30-year recording career. At press time, it had received an unprecedented 10 Grammy nominations. "The comeback of the century" said one hyperbolic observer, although Santana had hardly disappeared before 1999. At his office, his staff were in self-described "uncontrollable hysterics" about the explosion of activity, while they described Carlos as "completely calm about it all." I thought we should chat again about this return to the top of the musical charts, three decades after his first breakthrough.

Q: So it seems you were right about this being a special record for you...

A: Well, they tell me it's been number one cd, video, and single in the country for the last three

would usually try to find a white guy to get whatever form of non-white music onto the air, and that doesn't seem to be a problem now...

A: It's clear that a lot of forces back in the 1950s didn't want to let the African influences come forward in American music—even though that's what American music is, you know? It's all African, other than pre-Colombian or polkas or waltzes from the German or French. So, right, white musicians used to try to use African music as a kind of backdrop for their ego, you know, to come out like another white Tarzan. Not anymore. Now people honor the music. From my heart, I can say that my association with Baaba Maal, Salif Keita, Toure Kunda, all of those musicians, they don't see me as an intruder, a tourist, but as a fellow brother musician who honors and articulates the music—and, as we already said, pays the royalties! I want it to be

When I go to Africa, I am not just some musical tourist—I am part of the family.

My values are consistent with the American Indians, aborigines and African people.

I try to honor their music, take certain elements, give it back in a new kinda way and credit them immediately, financially, emotionally, spiritually.

That's the way of the future.

the same, from Tijuana to Timbuktu. So what I want to do with music is pinch people, so to see that we all have a passport to some kind of success with our grace and energy. I see a lot of people who come to the U.S.A. and don't really want to work, they just stand around. I came here and my mom said "OK, you're gonna wash dishes, and get a job, you're gonna help with the rent." So I learned about responsibility, and about two things many people lack—focus and determination.

It's like music itself. When you as a musician feel something really strong—this is the first rule of music—the listener's gonna feel it. If I don't feel it, why the hell should you? You have to be feeling something before you hit that string. Actually it's five things—soul, heart, mind, body, *cojones*—all in one note. That will give you the chills. The songs sometimes are incidental. It's that note, that passage, it can make you start crying.

I feel very grateful to God, today, for I feel very stimulated, very charged, and that everything I have been learning is finally coming to fruition. These new collaborations feel so natural. It sounds like one breath, it doesn't sound forced. In fact, at first we were going to call the album *Mumbo Jumbo* but it just had to be changed to *Supernatural* because that's how it's felt.

Six months later, when it was time to put this interview to print, Santana's profile had changed somewhat. The album-in-process he was so hopeful about, Supernatural, had been released in June, and gradually but steadily

weeks or so.

Q: Out on tour, have you been seeing a new audience?

A: Oh yeah, there's a whole new young audience, who scream louder for the new songs than for the other older hits. It's phenomenal.

Q: Sounds like you're surprised.

A: Oh, it is surprising. It's kinda like when the Grateful Dead hit big with that "I Will Survive" song, and they were blown away by all the new young people. Now we have a whole new audience coming to see Santana. I think a lot of them are really surprised to hear we have some more songs than our new singles! And they embrace it just fine.

Q: It's been quite a year for Latin music, really, as also there's been this Buena Vista Social Club blowup, and even Ricky Martin...It seems like this country goes through these cycles where people get very excited about Cuban or African or something, like maybe once a decade, and now we have this. Do you think it will stick around?

A: I don't think it's going to go out this time, like the flavor of the month, as they say. There's more Spanish-speaking people in this country than ever, and they gravitate more towards African music, even if they want to claim it is Latino or salsa or whatever. But it's still African music. It's gonna stay, because more people are becoming aware that anything with rhythm comes from Africa—unless you're talking about some aboriginal or American Indian music. It's African—get over it, accept it, embrace it and honor it!

Q: It's true that in the past, the music industry

known that Santana believes that quality and quantity can go together!

Q: Are you still looking to do more with African musicians?

A: I'd love to. It's something I have a passion for. I think my favorite band is Toure Kunda—their last album came out three-four years ago—and for straight-ahead, kick-butt music, it's Idrissa Diop. Baaba Maal, about two albums ago, that was my favorite song for song, the way things were written and played...

Q: *Firin' in Fouta?*

A: Yeah, that one, every song in there is killer. So, it's all a matter of chemistry. I'd like to sit around and play with all of them, play for three-four days, write some songs, see if we can get it down on tape, and call it *Africa Speaks—America Listens*. Look, now I even have the name for it already!

Q: Any more tours planned outside of the U.S.?

A: We're gonna go to Mexico soon, to Monterrey, Guadalajara... and then I think we chill for awhile, until spring or so.

Q: Now, that's interesting. You told me last time that you couldn't play in Mexico, because of corruption and your political statements. What's new?

A: Yeah, we're going to work with local bands, and I'm ready to not...well, instigate anything negative towards the press or government. I basically think that I can get some messages across without...well, I don't think they need me to tell them what to do in their own country, you know. I want to bring music to Mexico which may give

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Sting, with whom he duets on a song called "Desert Rose" on the latter's recent album. For some reason I've neglected the cheb's recent album *Meli Meli* (ARK 21), which contains "Parisien Du Nord," a passionate hymn to the teeming North African suburbs of Paris in which rai and rap flow in a continuum of unemployment and rebellion. The disc also has a more southerly remix called "Marseillais du Nord," the assistance of DJ Sample, Imhotep and K-Rhyme, and plenty of Mami's trademark lovers-rai treatment of reggae stylings. Most recommended. [www.ark21.com] ★

RAS ROJAH

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Rock" is the appropriately titled new single from the project, which should hit stores about the time you're reading this.

Finally, volume three of *The Complete Bob Marley and the Wailers 1967-1972* is now available in an English-language edition for North America from JAD/Koch. The box contains 46 tracks on two discs, covering the end of the Lee Perry period and the first two years of Tuff Gong's Jamaican singles. Lots of rare dubs and alternates are included, along with almost-impossible-to-find collectors' singles like "Comma Comma," "Satisfy My Soul Babe," U Roy's toast of "Grooving Kingston 12," "Pour Down the Sunshine," plus Marley's 1972 CBS tracks available for the first time ever as they were originally recorded, without any overdubs. "Cry to Me," left out of the acoustic medley on *Songs of Freedom*, is the icing on the cake.

Till next time, Jah love, everyone!

[Reach Roger via rasrojah@aol.com] ★

DECHAUD

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banded around 1973, and in the face of his brother's accompanying decline, Dechaud faded into a state of involuntary retirement. He joined in Nico's short-lived comeback in the early '80s, then slipped again from view when Nico died in 1985.

Dechaud's most famous work, "African Jazz Mokili Mobimba" (often shortened to "Africa Mokili Mobimba"), should have provided him with a comfortable living in spite of the inactivity of his later years. The original version, recorded with African Jazz, and subsequent covers by other artists, have been among Congolese music's most consistent sellers over the years. But, as often happens in the nefarious world of the Congolese music business, little remuneration reaches a work's creator. And indeed little reached Dechaud. It has been said that Dechaud's boss in African Jazz, Joseph Kabasele, bought the rights to his employees' compositions. If so, royalties, had they been paid, would have gone to Kabasele and his estate. Other artists who covered the song often confused the situation further by crediting the song to Kabasele or renaming it and crediting themselves.

As a result, Dechaud lived much of the end of his life nearly destitute, without so much as a guitar of his own to play. He performed occasionally with borrowed equipment in a band of old-timers called *Afric'Ambiance*. For the most part, however, Dechaud passed the time in a modest two-room bungalow provided by Nico's children, receiving an occasional visitor but otherwise keeping much to himself.

In December 1993, thanks to the Voice of America's Leo Sarkisian, the U.S. Embassy in Kinshasa honored Dechaud for his contribution to Congolese (Zairean) music. The American chargé d'affaires presented the instrument-less musician with a new acoustic guitar at a grand ceremony attended by a large number of fans, friends, and dignitaries—all of whose lives had been brightened by his music. Little was heard about Dechaud after that until the announcement of his death in September. Perhaps the man, who in life made Lucifer and his 10,000 devils dance, now does the same for St. Peter and the angels.

—Gary Stewart

Gary Stewart is the author of *Rumba on the River: A History of the Popular Music of the Two Congos* just published by Verso.

SANTANA

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more options for existence. For example, music accentuates the substances of things not seen. If we can start looking at music as beyond nationalism. . . . I don't consider myself a Mexican who has to sell Mexico to everyone. I don't think Bob Marley felt he had to sell Jamaica. I think he saw himself as a planetary citizen. That's how I like to see myself.

Through use of the medium of African music, unity is a healing thing. Division is the evil. Divide and conquer. Anybody who has a superiority or inferiority complex just because of their nationalism, well, it's another form of racism. It's extremely spiritually retarded to call somebody an "alien" when we're all from the same planet. If you're from another galaxy, then, well, OK, you're an alien.

Q: OK, last question, and it's a personal one. Last time, we talked a bit about your spirituality, your beliefs, and someone asked me, "So, what is he?" [Laughter] I'm wondering if you have a "label" for your faith, your spirituality, like Christian, Buddhist, etc...

A: Well, hopefully it's like water, you know; water is very powerful, but very humble. I've read things where a writer said his only religion was to die without shame. Another said that it was just to be kind to everyone. To spread the message of kindness towards everybody. The opposite of that is judging and condemning, and any religion which judges and condemns is a spiritually retarded religion. The basic core may be good, but back at headquarters, they're always trying for superiority. But one that brings kindness and redemption—a win-win situation for people and the planet—that's my religion. But I shy away from that word because religion to me is right next to politics, which is right next to corruption. My metaphor is the desert—in the desert you need water, not wine or beer, because with those you're gonna die. Religion and politics is like Coca Cola or something, when what you need is water. There's a big difference between the love for power and the power of love. ★

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