

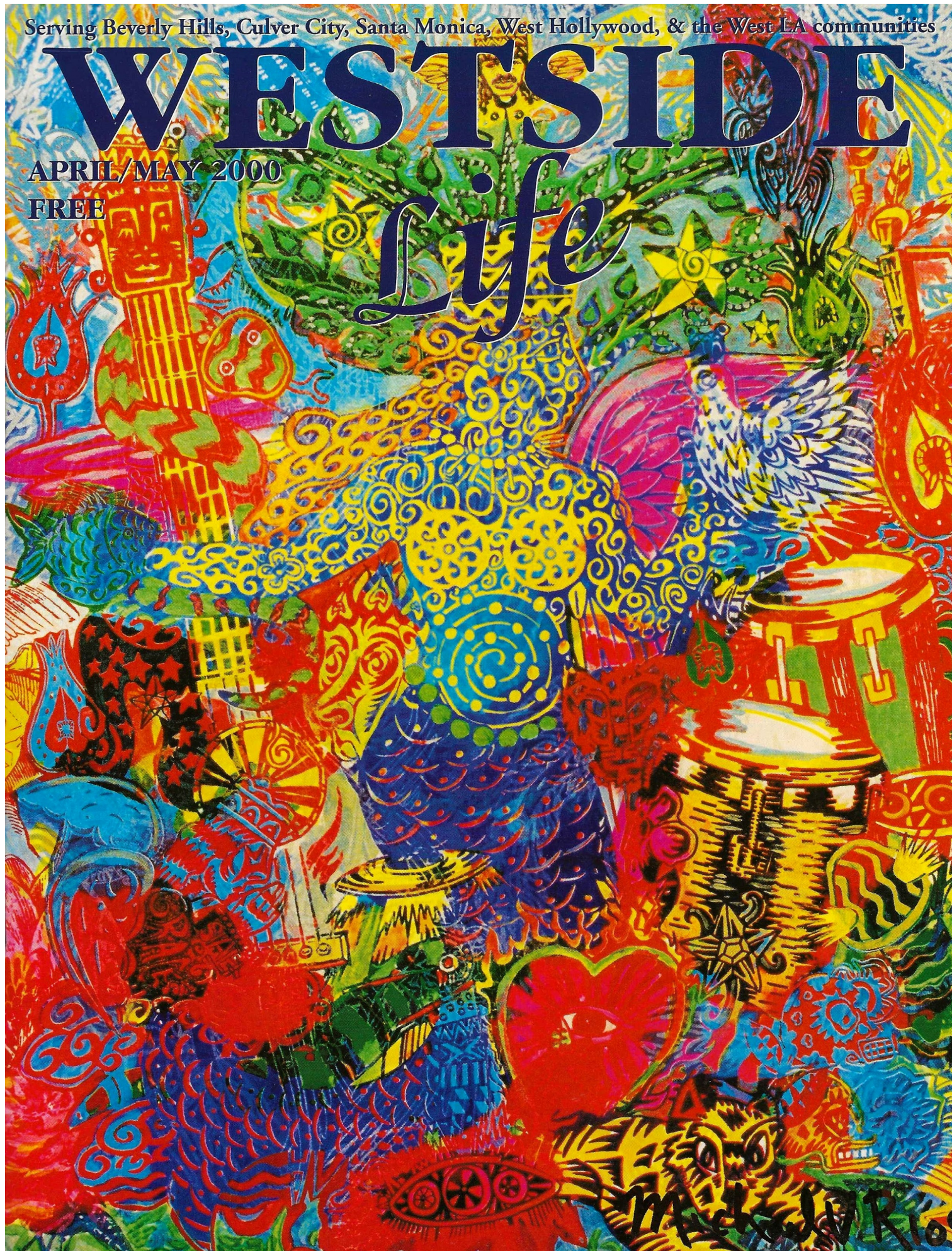
Serving Beverly Hills, Culver City, Santa Monica, West Hollywood, & the West LA communities

WESTSIDE

APRIL/MAY 2000

FREE

Life





Printed with soy ink on recycled paper.

APRIL/MAY 2000

VOLUME 1 NO.3

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MICHAEL RIOS

Setting the stage for Carlos Santana

HEAVEN SMILES IS A MOST APPROPRIATE name for Michael Rios' company, for his art is spiritual and enlightening, sacred and powerful. Michael's work has been highly regarded by many, most notably Carlos Santana, with whom Michael has been collaborating since 1986. Michael's mind-blowing artwork "Mumbo Jumbo" and Santana's multi-platinum CD "Supernatural" have taken the world by storm. "Mumbo Jumbo" has not only beautified the cover of "Supernatural," but also served as the backdrop for the album's world tour and was projected behind Santana during his recent performance on the Grammys (where he won nine of the coveted awards).

Westside Life is honored that Michael Rios gave us the nod to feature a detail from "Mumbo Jumbo" on our cover. We chose this piece because it symbolizes so much of what *Westside Life* stands for: humanity, art, education, the environment...and more.

WE SAT DOWN WITH MICHAEL IN HIS SAN FRANCISCO studio, surrounded by angels, musical icons, supernatural beings, and so many other wonderful images.

"When did you realize you were an artist," we asked.

I always felt I wanted to be an artist, even when I was a kid. [Michael's tal-

ents were recognized early on by teachers; he wasn't even out of the tenth grade when he was awarded a scholarship to the San Francisco Academy of Art] As I went to school with these older artists, I would see the great work they would do, and I just decided this is what I wanted to do. "I want to be like these cats!" I wanted to be really good. I just knew that this was a magical world to be in. So after the summer session I went up to the owner of the school and told him, "I

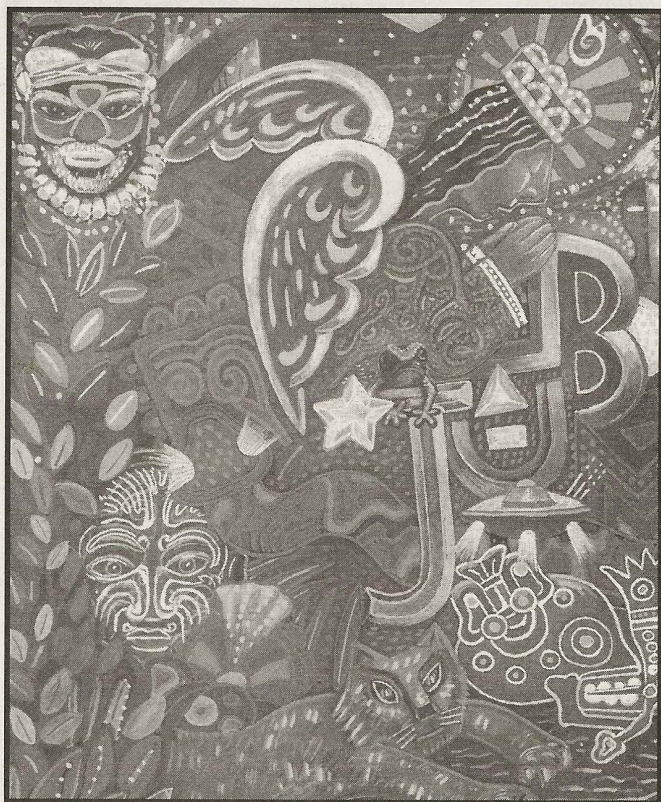
know what I want to be for the rest of my life. I want to be an artist. What can I do to keep coming here while I'm in high school?"

Needless to say, many a classroom was swept and cleaned over the next few years by a striving young artist who remained in school.

How did you first get started in the art world?

After attending school for a while I started putting together a portfolio to become an illustrator. I really admired the New York illustrators at that time. This was right around '67. I was a fresh art student trying to get a job. I went to a bunch of art agencies and after about a month I landed a job at Roos Atkins, a men's clothier. I worked there under an illustrator who was about 63 and getting ready to retire. He wanted someone to share some tricks with—to spread his knowledge. He was great with pen-and-ink; he would do these masterful drawings of apparel.

After about a year I decided I wanted to take off to Europe. I thought I could go there and live, get a job as a commercial artist. While I was there—especially in Paris, where I really got to see some beautiful art in all those museums—you know I just had to say to myself, "Well it's just time to start from zero again (laughs)...time to start all over again, give it up, give up what you have already done and be a new person and aspire for another thing." So it was good, because I had to let go of the past, and it allowed me to do an inner search. It allowed me



to manifest more personally as an artist. Artists are always trying to do that—that's what it's all about.

How did you get started painting murals in the community?

After getting back to the States, I really involved myself in community art. I hooked up with some friends that were into the Chicano movement. At this time I have to be honest: my mind wasn't into political movement—Chicano or otherwise. I was really just into this world of art. But this friend of mine got me hip to the Chicano identity. It's not that I claimed it, but I knew I was part of it regardless. But I could see that people were just crying out for human and civil rights, regardless of what your identity might have been. So I figured if I am going to be a part of anything it was going to have to do with art that helps people come into some kind of consciousness. Because that's all we are trying to do with everybody and each other is raise each other's consciousness—become a little more enlightened. Ignorance keeps everybody in the dark.

What was it like growing up in San Francisco in the '60s and '70s?

I was working right in the heart of North Beach. When I think back, those were some really exciting times. I got to meet Bo Diddley and his guys...there was this place right around the corner called the Jazz Workshop; Mose Allison would come play, all these heavy dudes. Bob Dylan would come around and play guitar; Janis Joplin would play at this one club called the Coffee Gallery where her friend was the bartender. It was a really fun time...being right there in the heart of North Beach. It's funny, I was working doing this real square art, and there I was getting a taste of more psychedelic stuff. You know, I was really being exposed to a lot of stuff...and of course that was affecting me. Those were some great experiences. Some

people still say they see that in the art.

How did you get involved with Carlos Santana?

The last mural I did was "Inspire to Aspire." I wanted to honor someone who was from the same area, someone who was a role model; but not only that, someone who was also an outstanding human being...which was Carlos. [located on South Van Ness and 22nd Street in San Francisco, the mural covers three entire buildings and encompasses musical heroes, icons and symbols that are cherished by the surrounding communities]

A little bit after that, my working relationship with Carlos started. I had painted a drum kit for Michael Shrieve, Carlos' drummer. Shrieve called me and told me that Carlos had seen my work and was really knocked out by my colors and to expect a call from him. A few days later, Carlos called and asked if it was possible for me to paint a guitar for him. We went over some designs and he told me how much he liked my Mexican imagery, and that's what he would like. After I finished the guitar I brought it to him, and he asked what I would like for my work. I told him I would be honored to have one of his 'paint brushes.' "I don't want any money, I would be more honored to have one of your guitars."

SURE ENOUGH, MICHAEL IS NOW THE proud owner of a Dars Vader blue Paul Reed guitar—and a beautiful friendship with Carlos Santana. In addition to "Supernatural," a number of other Santana



titles have had their CD covers and backdrops embellished with Michael's art, including "Sacred Fire," "Harmonious Convergence" and "Embrace Your Absoluteness."

Now widely recognized as one of the world's outstanding poster artists, Michael also creates original clothing designs for Santana, Los Lobos, Al Green, Buddy Guy and the Fillmore Auditorium, among others. To be sure, his remarkable work has inspired us at Westside Life to strive even harder to raise consciousness.

Michael Rios' prints, t-shirts, murals and other work can be viewed and purchased at www.heavensmiles.com.

Interview by Johnathan Singer