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# The Musician's **planet**

The  
Supernatural  
World of

## **Carlos Santana**

**Interviewed:**

**MELISSA ETHERIDGE**

*Win a signed guitar!*

**What's in AL KOOPER's Toy Box?**

**Songwriting with  
AIMEE MANN**

**Plus:**

**Gear Reviews • Chemical Brothers • Vintage Instruments • Beth Hart and much more!**



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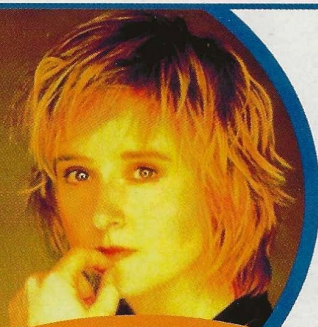
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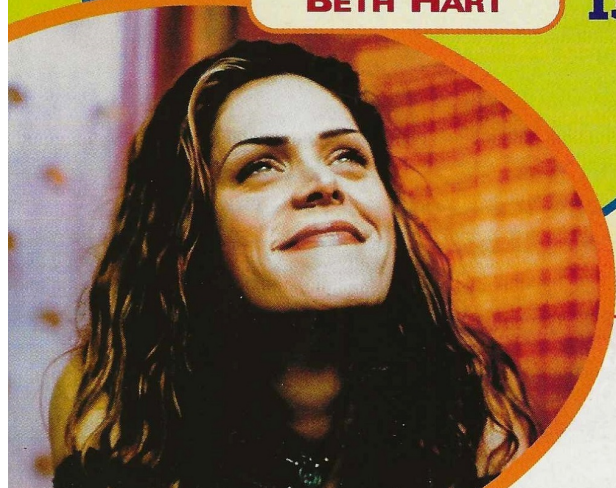
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Cover photo by Jay Blakesberg







# EXPLORING THE SUPERNATURAL

## THE TRANSCENDANCE OF CARLOS SANTANA

BY RICH MALOOF

PHOTOS BY JAY BLAKESBERG

**I**t's been over 30 years since Carlos Santana spun his black magic on the Woodstock stage. It's also been 12 years since the virtuoso has had a hit. But today the crying guitar and heart-quickenning percussion that speak his name are heard high and low.

Reports of Santana's jaw-dropping success with *Supernatural* are now common knowledge; they've been all over television, radio, magazines, and the Web. At press time, the album had sold over five million copies, survived eight months on *Billboard's* Top 10, and garnered the second-place record for most Grammy nominations of all time. (In 1997, Babyface matched Michael Jackson's record of 12 nominations.) The story, though, is not the numbers. The story is the music.

Under the guidance of Arista über-producer Clive Davis, 52-year-old Carlos joined forces with a Who's Who list of talent, most of them half his age. Collaborations with Dave Matthews, Everlast, Rob Thomas (of Matchbox 20), Lauryn Hill, Wyclef Jean, Maná, Eagle Eye Cherry, and Eric Clapton confirm not only Carlos' distinguished taste but his time-honored expertise in blending musical colors. *Supernatural* is also an exemplary mixture of characteristics Carlos has exhibited in the past, besting more than 40 releases by combining the beauty of "Europa," the pulse of "Soul Sacrifice," and even the pop sense of "Winning" in one career-topping album. With Latino artists finally getting their day in the sun, and listeners growing weary of the vapid and violent releases dominating the market, the world was more than ready for a mature crossover to hit it big.

There's no such thing as small talk with Carlos Santana. When *The Musician's Planet* sat down for this conversation with him, we found his words to be right in line with the spirit and mysticism of his music.

*Did you foresee Supernatural being such an enormous success?*

No, because I don't even think like that—my brain is not equipped to think like that. Mr. Miles Davis said, "The joy is in the pursuing, not in the attaining." It was such a joy doing this album with Lauryn Hill and Eric Clapton and Everlast and everybody that I never tripped on the attainment part of it. Although, it was told to me in '95, '96, and '97 that we would have an opportunity to reconnect with the radio frequencies. I know that it's going to sound like gobbledy gook—spiritual hocus-pocus or whatever—but I had a couple of meditations with certain people, and through the meditation they started channeling and telling me that this was going to happen.

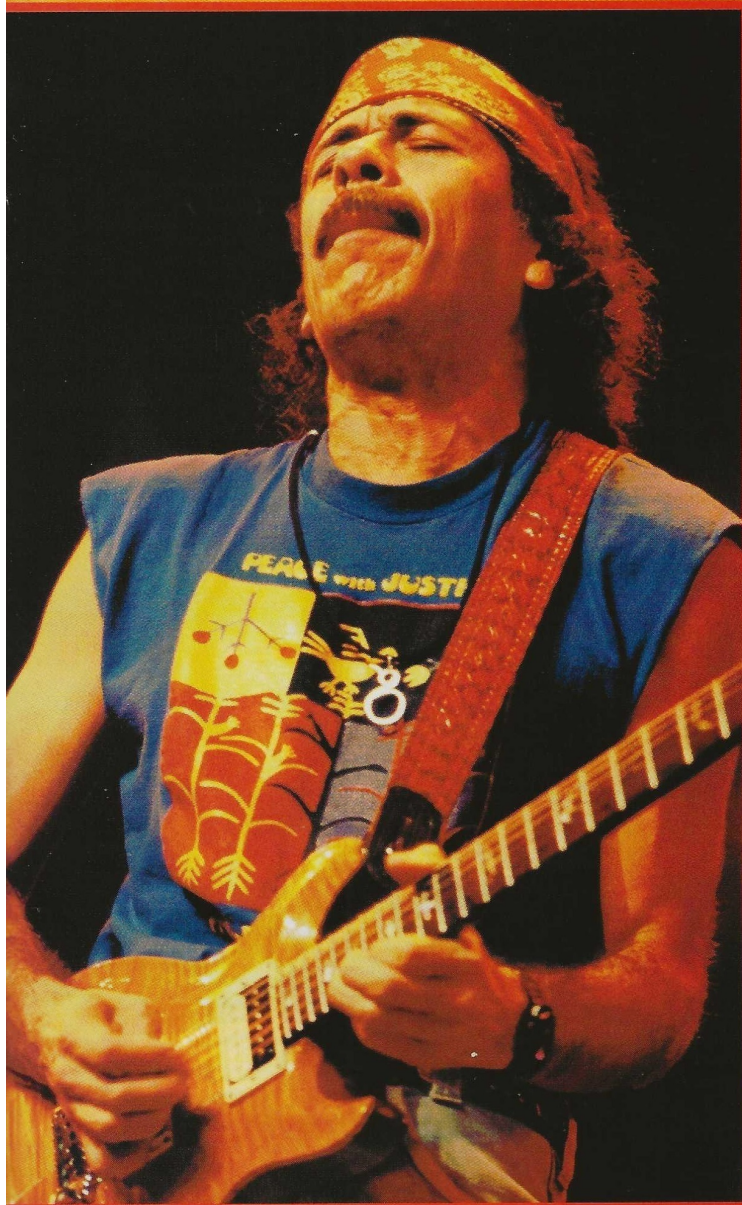
*The album appeals to an audience far beyond the core of fans who have followed you for so long.*

Even though I never thought of going to No. 1, I knew I would have the opportunity to reconnect with junior high, high school, and university people through radio for the purpose of bringing a new dimension of vibration. For example, just about every day there are these shootings in the United States—and in Canada and all over the world, but mainly in America. This CD was designed to bombard the listener and get to people who have the victim mentality. Victim mentality is somebody who wakes up thinking that life is shit, pardon the expression, and that everybody wakes up ready to screw you over. That's a victim right there. This CD, the music in here, is designed to reach people on a molecular, cellular level and get people to a different point of reference about their lives. It's not that I personally want to tell people how to live or what to believe or how to feel—I don't believe in that, I don't want to do that. But it is my passion to present people with a new dimension [with which] to identify and validate their lives. As you know, most people are not happy unless they're miserable.

*A lot of music does seem to come from that perspective.*

It's a human element. But the other side of it is when you have peace, life, love, joy, beauty, grace, and excellence. All of those things also exist in the human consciousness if you choose to work with them. For example, "Put Your Lights On," by Everlast, is a perfect song to play in the shopping malls or elevators or through Muzak to dismantle the shootings. This is a perfect song to play in Folsom Prison or San Quentin, to give them the message to keep their lights on, keep hope





## **SUPER-CHARGED**

GEAR USED BY CARLOS FOR RECORDING *SUPERNATURAL*

### **GUITARS**

PAUL REED SMITH (VARIOUS MODELS)  
1957 FENDER STRATOCASTER  
D'ADDARIO STRINGS (.009-.042)

### **EFFECTS**

DUNLOP WAH  
IBANEZ TS-9 TUBE SCREAMER

### **AMPS**

MARSHALL 100-WATT AMP  
FENDER TWIN AMP  
MESA/BOOGIE COMBO

and goodness burning bright. You know, the reason that there is so much shooting is because there is so much fear in the United States. Fear is usually the problem. People say, "Guns don't shoot people—people shoot people," but fear is the one. The opposite of fear is a masterpiece of joy, which is what this CD is.

That is why I feel so happy in my heart that a lot of people are getting the message. You'd be surprised if I sent you the letters that we get from nine year olds who are getting to it. And their grandparents are getting it, too. To me, that is the real payoff, that we are affecting the listener in a positive way so that the listener does not have to go through that dark period of depression and frustration.

*In the past you've cited religion and spiritual leaders as inspirations for your music. Who or what inspires you today?*

I think mainly the one that still touches my heart in a way that moves me to tears is [Bishop] Desmond Tutu. And Mr. Nelson Mandela. Both of those people are extremely powerful because there is a tone in their voice, a light in their eyes—they don't have a dark agenda to become rich and famous and all that kind of stuff. I guess the best way to say it is that anyone who has the highest goals in mind for people on the planet is my hero. That's my inspiration, that's my motivation.

*Do you feel that you have reconnected to something in your musician-ship that you hadn't been in touch with for a while?*

Yeah. The first thing that I learned was that people didn't wake up trying to screw me every morning. That was the first thing that I learned. I let go, kind of like a snake shedding its own skin, to do the CD. It took a lot of strength to do the CD. My instructions to myself were to be patient, gracious, and grateful. Everyday I was in the studio with all these great artists, and I thought to myself, "Be patient, gracious and grateful. Don't ego trip; don't feel bruised if someone says the wrong thing or something that feels demeaning." If you allow things to happen then it's a win-win situation for the artist, for the record company, and for the radio.

*Why do you think Latino music has taken hold so strongly in the past year?*

Well, first, it's a matter of statistics. I think that most people from Mexico to Brazil don't take birth control as much, and there are just more people! And second, it's the educational factor. Whether it's in Toronto, New York, Detroit, or San Francisco, there are a lot of Spanish-speaking people blossoming. And to me, it's a serious disgrace that we don't have anything on TV to represent us. Every once in a while you see a black person, maybe driving a cab or something. It's like, I think of someone like Woody Allen—how can he make a movie in New York and there's no black people?! You know, where is this guy from?

So now, it's a reality in cities like Los Angeles and San Francisco that there are a lot of Spanish-speaking people, and they love rhythm, which is African music. Man, it's not Spanish or Latino—it's really African music. Gloria Estefan, Ricky Martin, Santana, Marc Anthony, Jennifer Lopez...we're all playing African music. To me it's important to honor what it really is. When it's from Cuba, Brazil, Jamaica, or Mississippi, it's still African music. Even Elvis Presley played African music. *Hello?! Is anybody listening?*

»



*Everyone's dipping into the same well.*

Exactly. There is a fascination with rhythm, and rhythm comes from Africa. And I think that our timing is perfect because there is something about people who want more of the balance between legato and staccato.

*But you've always had that in your music. Did you feel underappreciated in the years preceding this return to success?*

If you think of musicians like Jimi Hendrix, Marvin Gaye, Bob Marley, Wayne Shorter and so on, for a lot of these incredible people the music is really just coming to work [with audiences] now. Aside from Ry Cooder and myself, there are very few musicians who wander off in different directions. Most people just play one thing and that's it. I'm into all of the colors. If I go to Baskin Robbins, I don't also just order vanilla. I like all the flavors. To me it's a matter of honoring your totality.

*Do you think listeners understand where you're coming from now?*

I think so. It helps when brothers like yourself write this kind of story. I was reading a story about *Supernatural* from *Time* magazine, and the guy was very cynical. He kind of presented a picture of me that all I wanted was a hit. I was talking about reconnecting the molecules with the light but all he said was, like, "Carlos wants a hit." That is not why I came to Clive Davis, man. I came to him because my inner self said, "This is a gentleman who could connect you with radio so you could bring this message to the young people." And the message is peace, love and joy. If I die right now and I've been able to teach at least one person those values, my job is done. To me this is a great opportunity to express something that is really dear to me. I'm not tripping with anything else. I mean, I've been around the block a couple of times.

*Do you remember the first time you picked up a guitar?*

Yes. It was in Tijuana. My mother took me to the park in Tijuana because there was a band playing there called the TJ's, as in "Tijuana." And there was this guy named Javier Batiz. He's still there. He had that tone like Peter Green, and B.B. King and Michael Bloomfield. He had that twang-tone thing. The band was songs by Freddie King, B. B. King, Ray Charles, Little Richard, and he had that *tone*. And I remember what it did to me. It was like what someone must feel like when they see a flying saucer. It was a sound from the amplifier and a guitar bouncing up against the trees and the sky and the people in this park. I was electrified, man. I just stopped there and my whole life just became crystal clear. I knew that's what I would do for the rest of my life.

*When was this?*

This was like '57 or '58—right around the same time that Ritchie Valens and Buddy Holly died. By the grace of God, when I came here to San Francisco, [promoter] Bill Graham introduced me to B.B. King and Michael Bloomfield, and I just never looked back.

*Are you still improving as a player?*

I hope so. I play late at night from 10:00 p.m. to 2:00 in the morning, as much as I can. I'll go through albums by Funkadelic, Coltrane, Marvin Gaye, or Aretha Franklin. I'm always trying to learn how to make it real. Sometimes in one note you can reach all the hearts, instead of playing 50,000 notes and having nothing happen. And to do that you have to play a lot.





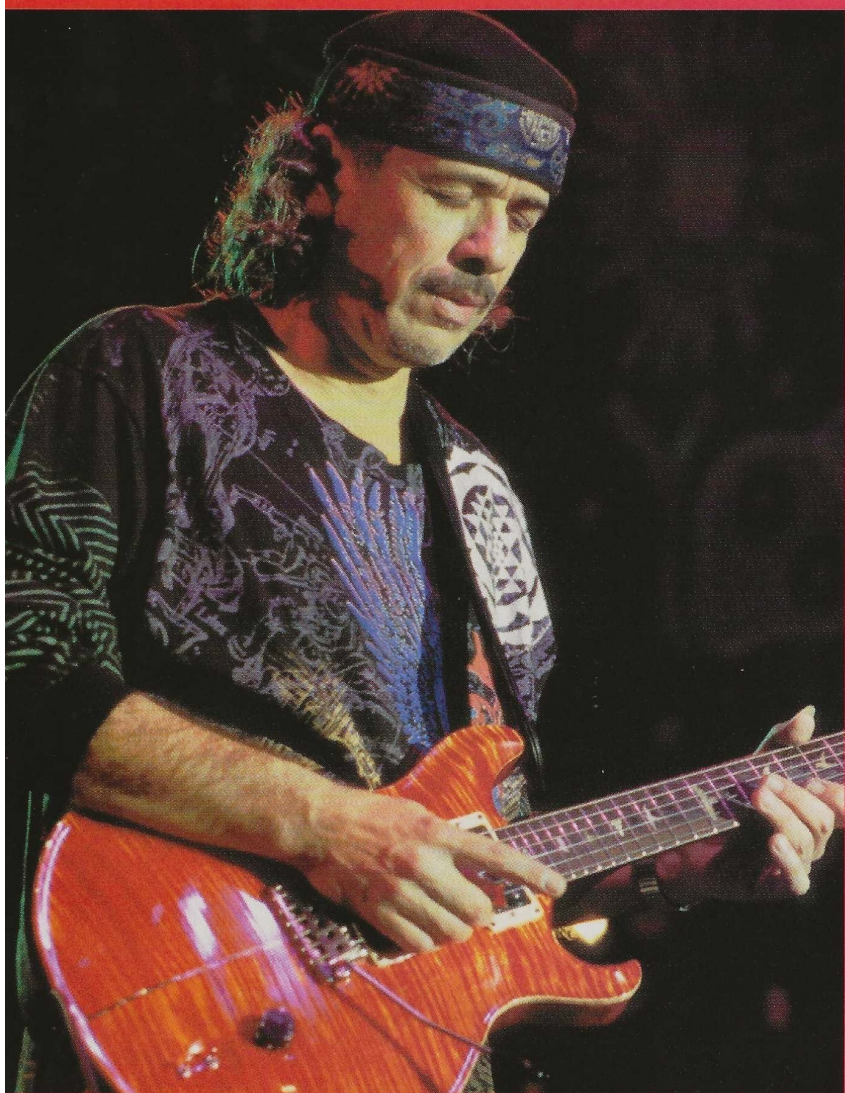
## EVERYBODY'S EVERYTHING

*What's on your turntable these days?*

**CARLOS:** I play a lot of Funkadelic lately, but not necessarily the albums with George Clinton. I listen to a lot of African music, a lot of Miles, Peter Green. It's kind of strange but I couldn't stop playing "Genie In A Bottle" by Christina Aguilera. I just loop that sucker and I keep playing through it. There's something about that song, like Cindy Lauper's "Time After Time," that's so well constructed. The song and the feeling are very appealing to me. Another person I like a lot is Snoop Dogg, the way he phrases and he rhymes.

*There's no telling what's going to just jump out of the radio and grab you.*

**CARLOS:** As long as it's honest. If it is superficial B.S., I don't care who it's coming from, I wouldn't listen to it. Fortunately, you can just change the station.



*It takes a lot of work to establish a voice. When you did "The Calling" with Eric Clapton, it sounded like you were imitating each other's sound. Is it you on the left channel and him on the right?*

Right. I did that purposely so that when he goes back to London and listens in his car, he would hear himself on the side that he drives [laughs]. Yeah, I wanted to make it even so we each just have one [Fender] Twin amplifier and one Strat apiece. It was even-Steven.

I love Eric. It was a real honor to be in the same room with him, sharing, because I have a lot of respect and admiration for him. But what made it easy is that he's such a genuine person, like Dave Matthews is. They're both very comfortable in their own skin now, and that makes it really comfortable to work with them.

*Are there any other collaborations that didn't make it to the album?*

Sting and Prince. Sting apologized but he was in the middle of completing his album [Brand New Day]. He was in Germany or somewhere in Europe and couldn't do it. Prince wanted to do it, but at the time he was very suspicious of record companies. So now he is working with Mr. Clive Davis! Gee, I wonder what led him to it.... [laughs]

*Did you ever feel like the labels you recorded for were responsible for keeping you out of the limelight?*

It's just that now there is passion and vision. I have never met a person more passionate and with more vision than Mr. Clive Davis and [the late] Bill Graham; aside from Miles Davis, but Miles Davis was not into the business, just the music. I think all musicians want two things as much as possible: radio airplay and distribution. If you get those and you still don't achieve success, at least you got a running start. But, it's like, if I am going to swim from Alcatraz to San Francisco, at least don't tie my feet and hands! I think with CBS and Island it wasn't a malicious thing, it's just that they didn't have the faith, the conviction to follow through with me like Mr. Clive Davis has. He has a lot of faith, man. I know that he drives a lot of people crazy, because when he believes in something he really goes for it. But with me he was very gracious. He never told me what to do or what to play or anything like that. He just presented menus to me, telling me things like, "Lauryn Hill loves your music—would you like to play with her?" Of course I would.

Clive Davis put his heart and soul into this album, as well as everybody else who participated in it. Every morning I say, "Okay, this is the day that I am going to wake up and find out it was all a dream." You know, it still feels like a dream. But it's the longest one I ever had. ☹