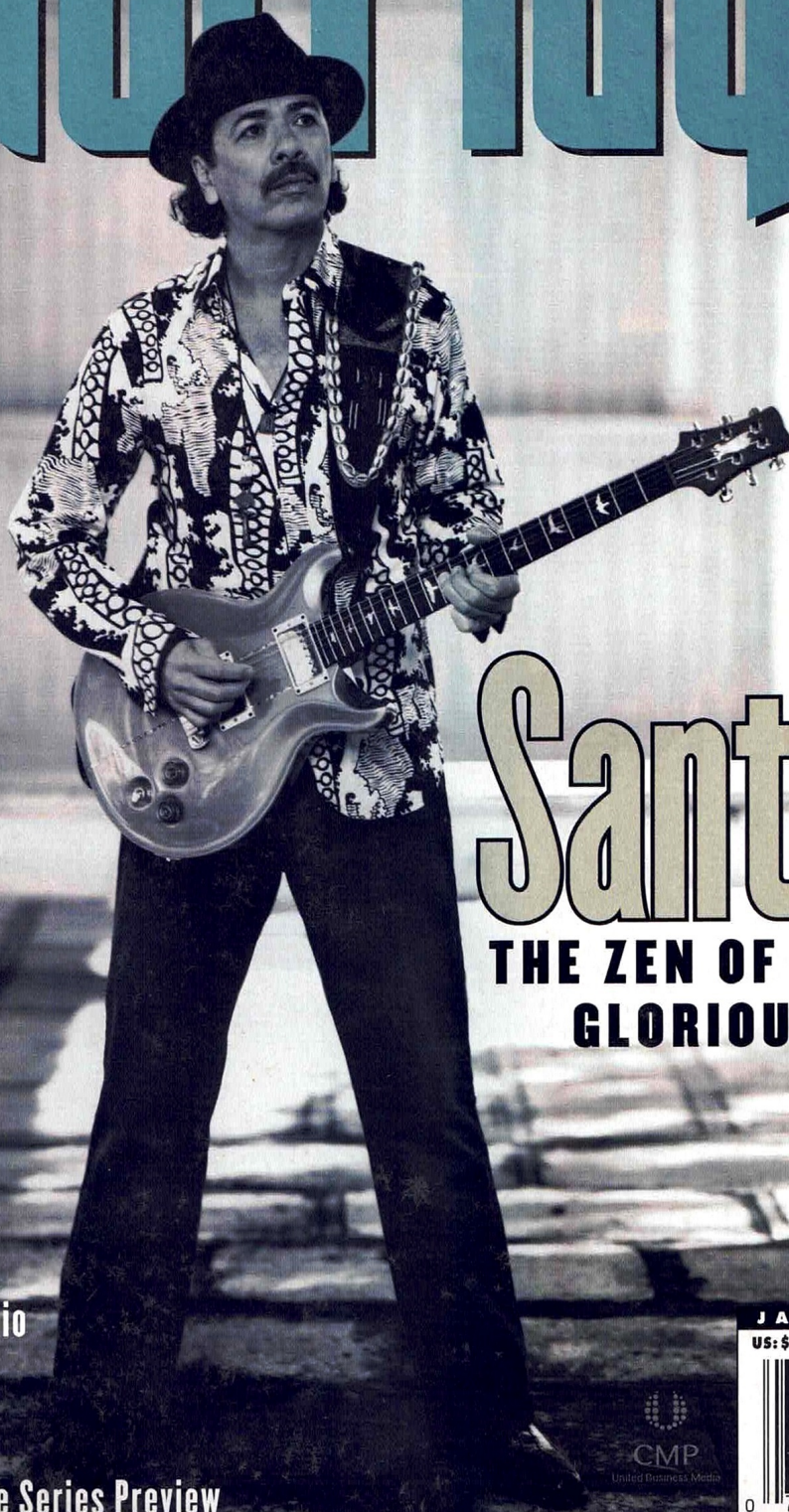


David Gilmour • Mark Knopfler • The Donnas • Zakk Wylde

Guitar Player



Santana

THE ZEN OF CREATING
GLORIOUS SOUNDS

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- Boutique Fuzz Roundup
- Bogner Metropolis
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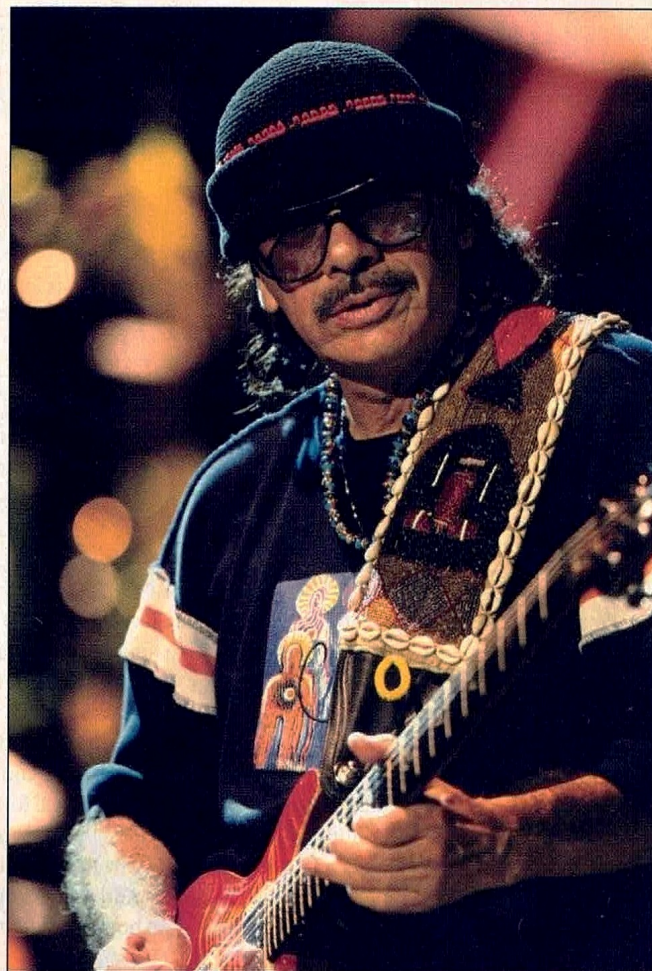
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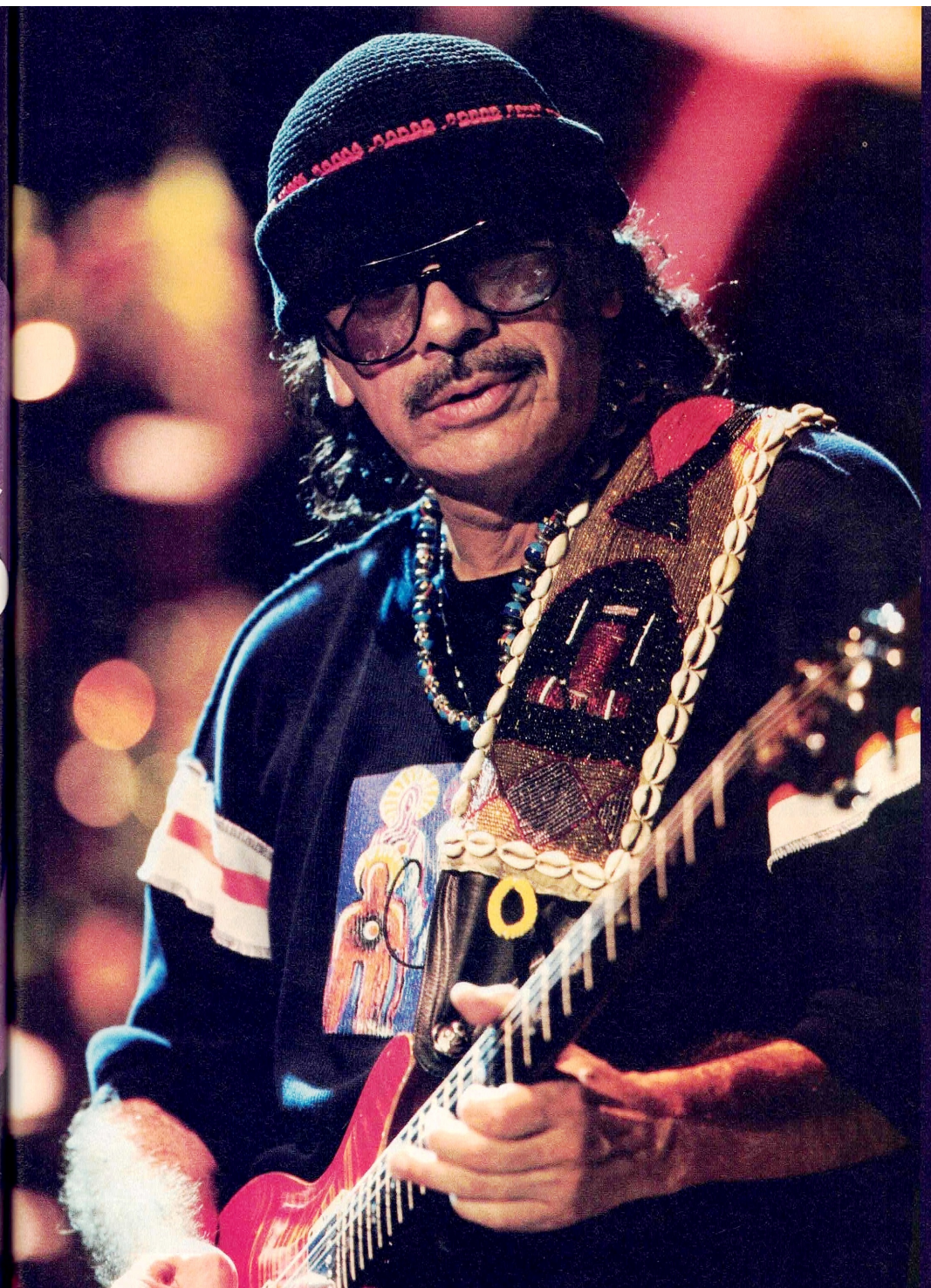
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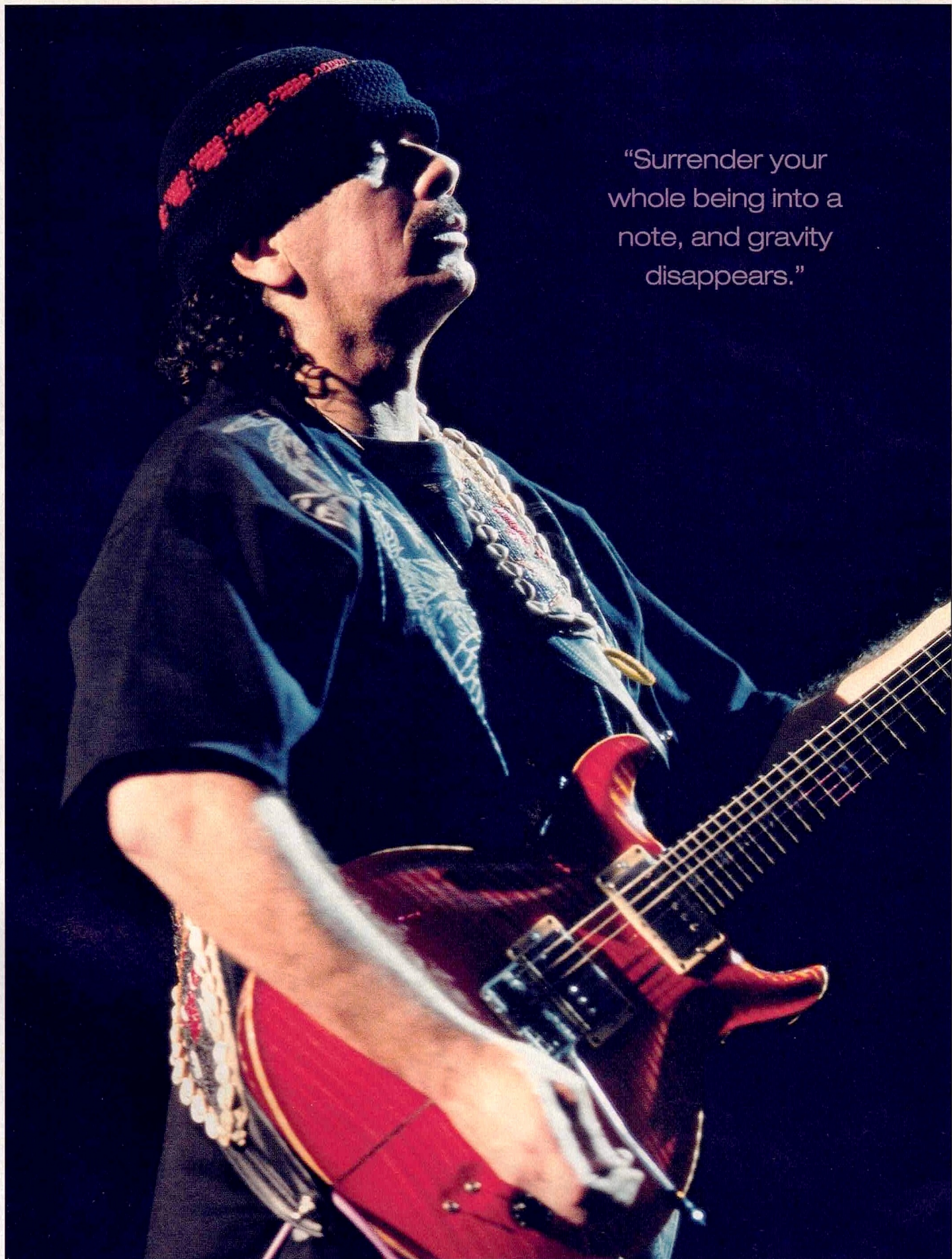
Santana Conjures 6-string Magic with *Shaman*

☪ The astounding success of Carlos Santana's *Supernatural*—which has sold more than 24 million copies since its June '99 release, and earned eight Grammy Awards (including Album of the Year)—has made fans wonder what the soft-spoken guitarist could possibly do for an encore. With his latest record, *Shaman* [Arista], Santana proves that his fiery licks and singing tones are, in fact, hotter and more vocal than ever, and that his collaborative instincts remain strong. Once again, he has teamed up with a small army of musicians, singers, and writers, including Macy Gray, Seal, Ozomatli, Nickelback's Chad Kroeger, Michelle Branch, P.O.D, Marc Anthony, Dido, Wyclef Jean, and, most surprising, opera singer Plácido Domingo.

By Andy Ellis

Photo By Steve Jennings





"Surrender your
whole being into a
note, and gravity
disappears."

Music of the Spheres

While the teamwork is strong, the real action lies in the wall-to-wall guitar that alternately moans, wails, and rips through the 16 tracks. Ripe and tubular—and often accompanied by the audible *thump* of a beleaguered 4x12 cabinet—Santana's notes seem to spring effortlessly from his trusty signature PRS.

As always, the 55-year-old icon answers questions with a compelling mix of allusion and candor, and even if you take issue with some of his observations, they'll make you stop and think. Above all, his enthusiasm for guitar will make you smile, and his latest amplifier discovery will have you scouring basements, attics, and classified ads for one of ampdom's rarest beasts.



Like its predecessor, Shaman is a cooperative effort. Did you try to approach this project differently from Supernatural?

I'll use [saxophonist] Wayne Shorter's beautiful words: "It was completely new and totally familiar." As before, I used six strings and an amplifier to find my way into the music. But I also took some advice from [Arista label head] Clive Davis. He said, "The dimensions of *Supernatural* make it so that many people want to play with you now. But I think we should concentrate on the songs. They're more important than the people at the moment. Once you find the right songs, then we can see who would be best suited to play them."

Like my brother Ry Cooder, I'm learning to navigate different routes. Before it was Hammond organ, congas, guitar, and, finally, songs. Now it's the opposite—it's songs and *then* guitar, Hammond, and congas. But I still don't think in terms of numbers and commercial success. I think of opportunities and possibilities. Working with Dido, Macy Gray, and Michelle Branch—and all these new people—

"Just as Jesus created
wine from water, we humans
are capable of transmuting
emotion into music."

I feel the same energy that I felt when I first heard Michael Bloomfield, B.B. King, or Son House. So I ask myself, how do I express this intensity of emotion and spirit without imposing on the song? The goal is to complement, and also to give some spiritual information.

As you know, the only magazine I read cov-

er to cover is *Guitar Player*. I say this because you cover everything—woman or man, super fast or super slow, deep or shallow. You're not exclusively jazz or country or heavy metal. In

this way, I feel really honored and grateful to participate in *Shaman*, because when you go from P.O.D. to Plácido Domingo, it's like your magazine—it's pretty vast.

What do you look for in a song?

I'd better be able to live with it for the next ten or 20 years! When we were selecting songs

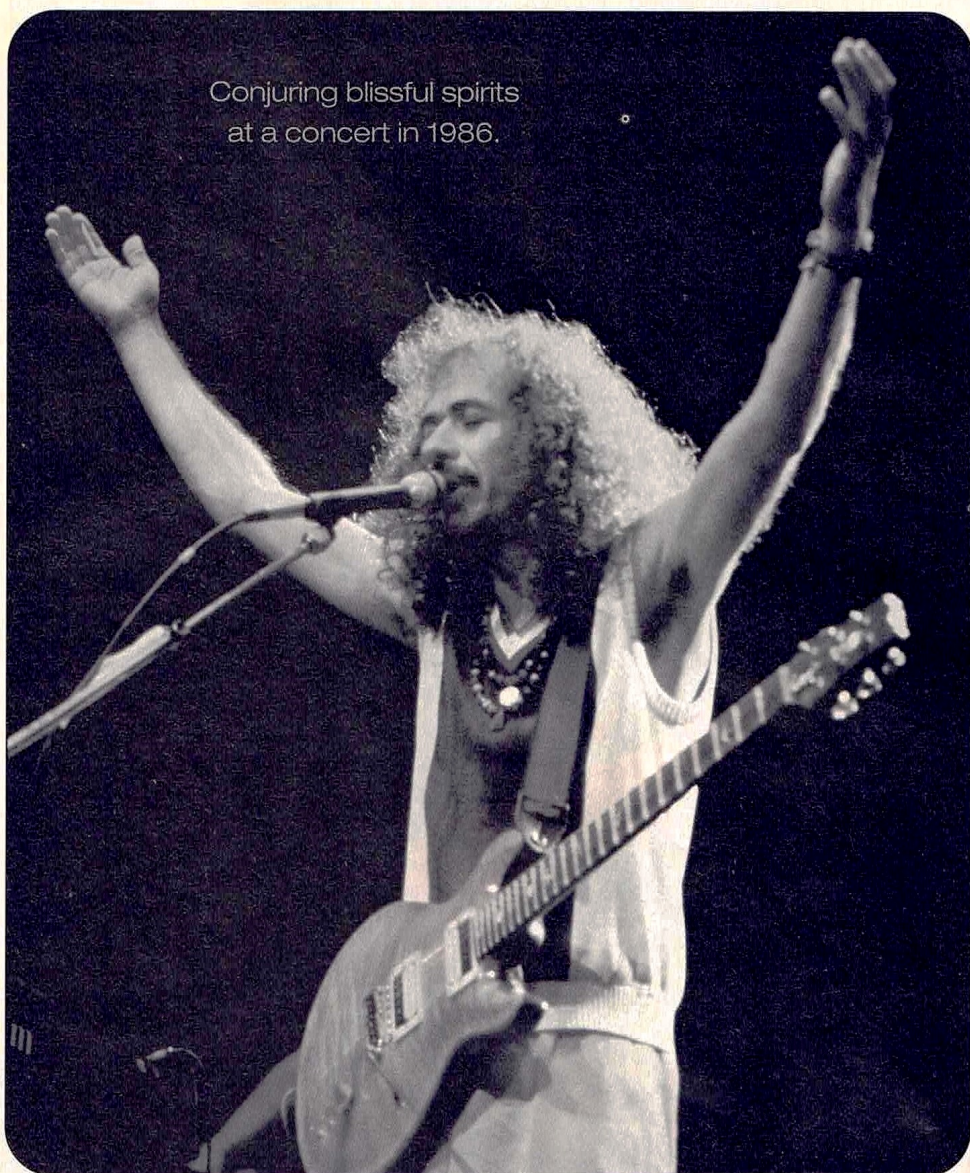
for *Shaman*, I heard several that just weren't me. One was by Diane Warren, who has written humongous hits for Aerosmith and so many others. This song, with all respect, was probably written for John Cougar Mellencamp, and it was too far for me to reach. A song has to make it into the galaxy of Santana. If it doesn't, I don't care if it's a Number One hit—I won't play it.

Throughout the album, your tone is remarkably clean and articulate, yet fat and sustaining. On "Amore (Sexo)," for example, did you use a dual amp setup to get that elusive mix of detail and girth?

No. Early this year, I discovered a phenomenal amplifier made by Alexander Dumble. I'd heard that Stevie Ray used Dumble amplifiers, but I thought, "Sure, whatever. He has great tone anyway." As soon as I tried it, however, I heard Robben Ford and Larry Carlton in the sound. That's how I got hooked for life.

What draws you to a Dumble?

They're touch sensitive. Caress a note, and



Conjuring blissful spirits
at a concert in 1986.

Music of the Spheres

it goes soft. If you have mean intentions, and hit a note a certain way, the amp screams, and you get those seven overtones on one note. You know those supernatural sounds we always look for in Peter Green or Michael Bloomfield? They're right there.

Dumbles are rare. Where did you find one?

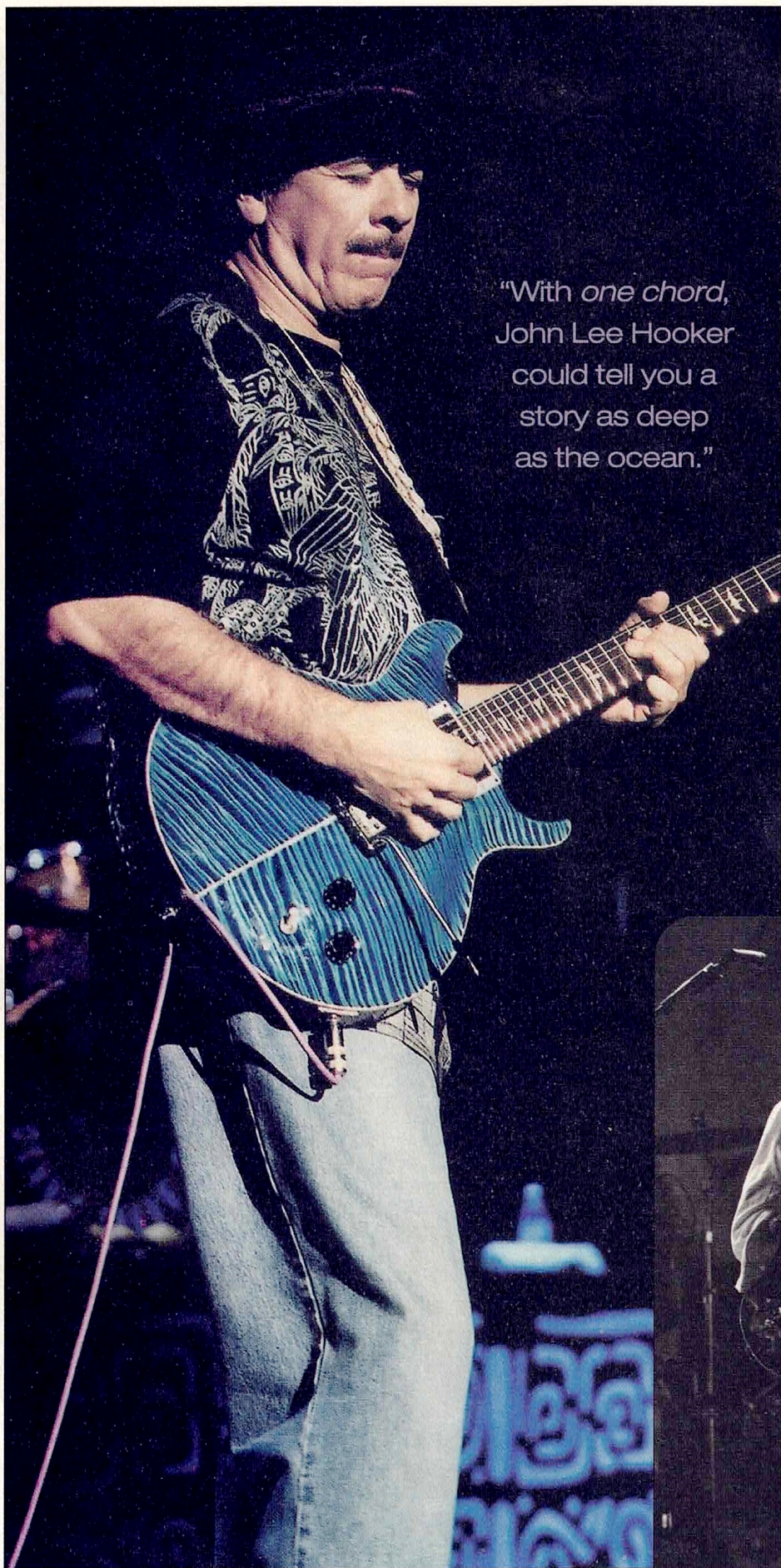
A gentleman named David Workman—a musician in the San Francisco area—lent me his. He said, "I want you to try this amp, but under no circumstances can you buy it. I won't sell it for any price, but you can use it in the studio and on the road." From there, I made the personal communication with Alexander Dumble, and that was it. I went from not knowing about Dumble amps to having four.

Has the Dumble changed how you work in the studio?

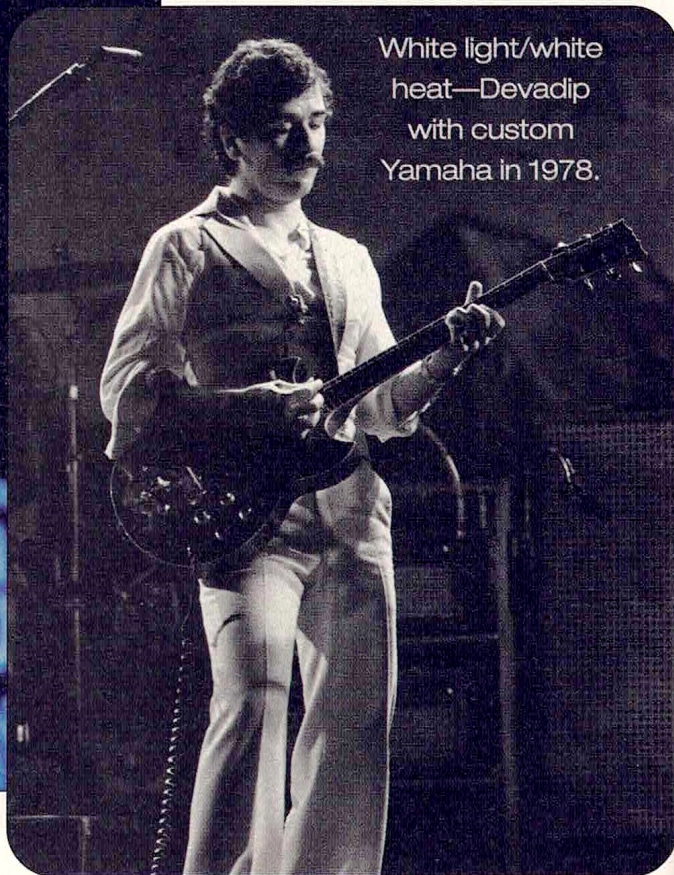
Sometimes it used to take days just to get a tone. Even with the incredible [engineer] Jim Gaines, I was getting frustrated because my sound wouldn't happen in certain rooms. It's really depressing when you're ready to play, but you listen to the playback, and it sounds so horrible it hurts your teeth. I'd go home and think, "Maybe it's me. Maybe I can't play anymore."

The beautiful thing is that with the Dumble, I just plug in and *play*. I don't have to go through hours of placing microphones. We used the same setup at the Hit Factory in New York as we did here in California. Same microphone, same

"With one chord,
John Lee Hooker
could tell you a
story as deep
as the ocean."



White light/white
heat—Devadip
with custom
Yamaha in 1978.



Music of the Spheres

position. *Bam!*—there it is. You don't have to wrestle a wet bear just to get a tone.

Can you compare the Dumble to the amps you've used in the past?

Since '72, I've played through a Boogie amp with one 12" Altec speaker. With the Boogie, I have to turn the volume past seven-and-a-half to get the beautiful, warm tones. If I play under that, it sounds really wimpy and thin and annoying. Playing the Boogie is like being inside a light beam. If you stand in front of it, it's really loud, but if you move two feet to the left, you don't hear it.

With the Dumble, you can play at any volume—like at Sweetwater [a tiny club in Mill Valley, California] or the Berkeley Community Theatre or the Oakland Coliseum—and get all those overtones. With other amps, you have to open them up really loud to get the richness. Bring them down, and it's like a big balloon that's not inflated. Dumble? No, he's got balloons at any size you want.

And you're also using a bigger cabinet.

Yes, a 4x12. We found this gentleman who makes speakers with hemp cones [these are Tone Tubby alnico speakers made by A Brown Soun in San Rafael, California]. When I told this to Dumble, he cracked up. "Oh, I know who that is." They all know each other, these amp guys.

It's remarkable that you can draw so many timbral colors from one amp, from the bright, squawky leads in "Game of Love," to the sweet Peter Green bends in "Sideways," to the thick cello tones in "One of These Days."

Ah, you're listening. "Game of Love" was the last track I did with the Boogie before I found the Dumble. The rest of the album is all Dumble.

People think that I'm crazy, but, one day, my Boogie amp got really jealous of the Dumble and broke down. "Hey, you've been playing me

Inside the Mojo Bag

When guitar tech Rene Martinez (who worked with Stevie Ray Vaughan for five years) decided to take time off from his gig with Santana, Ed Adair was drafted as the new gear guru. "The day I came onboard," says Adair, "Rene told me, 'Here, I'm handing you the keys to the Cadillac.' He was right—this is the best ride."

According to Adair, Santana brings four signature Paul Reed Smith guitars on the road—including the original prototype—and strings his namesake PRS models with D'Addario lights, gauged .009-.042. Onstage, Santana plays through two amps: his faithful '72 Mesa Boogie Mk I combo (loaded with a 417 Altec 12") and a 100-watt Dumble head. The Dumble powers a Marshall 4x12 with stock Celestions, and a straight-front 4x12 made by A Brown Soun of San Rafael, California. The Brown Soun cab is loaded with alnico Tone Tubby 12s sporting hemp-paper cones.

"The Brown Soun cab is rather compact, so we use the Marshall to kick out extra bottom," reveals Adair.

For his lively Spanish tones, Santana flatpicks Alvarez classical guitars with factory undersaddle transducers, and, for wah sounds, he uses an ancient Mu-Tron III pedal. Santana wires his rig with Belden 1192A cable.

Royer ribbon mics are a recent addition to Santana's studio rig. "The combination of the Dumble amp, the hemp speakers, and this new mic means I don't have to look for tone anymore," says Santana. "You just plug in and go *mamma mia*—even if you're not Italian."

—AE

tones, nasal tones, and head tones, but not chest or belly tones. But now because I use four 12s with the Dumble head, I get the Pavarotti and Placido Domingo belly tones.

Several songs on Shaman feature beautiful nylon-string guitar. Did you play those parts?

Yes. I used an Alvarez and recorded it with a combination of a direct signal and a mic. I love acoustic nylon tones. With all due respect to my brothers Paco de Lucia and Ottmar Liebert, the best acoustic nylon tones I hear are from B-Tribe. They do their own version of *Concierto de Aranjuez*, and they do a theme from the

song? Sometimes you walk around, and it's this weird day and people look like old potatoes or apples. Their features are so exaggerated—even if you're straight. But then you hear a certain kind of music, and it makes everything beautiful. You remind yourself on a molecular level that there's goodness in everyone. Beauty, elegance, excellence, grace, and dignity—they're more important than what key you're in, or what chord or what scale you're playing. These qualities transcend what you learn in music school.

How do you translate these qualities into music?

You have to learn how to articulate emotion. When I first heard Jimi Hendrix, I thought, "My God, this guy has a different kind of brush." His was much thicker than everyone else's. They were using tiny little brushes and doing watercolors, while he was painting galactic scenes in CinemaScope. We're working in a field of mystical resonance, sound, and vibration. That's what makes people cry, laugh, and feel their hair stand up.

You play with many young musicians. Do they understand what you're talking about now?

I'm not judging anybody—it's just an observation at this point—but I can tell people's intentions, motives, and purpose from their eyes. I went to see Derek Trucks at the Fillmore, and I could tell that he's looking for the same things I am. I like Jonny Lang, because he puts so much pain and energy into his playing. Yet I see other musicians—I won't mention their names because I don't want to hurt their

"Everyone was using tiny brushes and doing watercolors, while Hendrix was painting galactic scenes in CinemaScope."

for 30 years. Why are you playing that other one?" I was like, "Shut up. Let's just work together." I got the Boogie fixed, and the amps made peace. Onstage, I use the Boogie and Dumble together.

Why?

Like a singer, you want to get belly tones, chest tones, throat tones, nasal tones, and head tones from your guitar. With its 12" Altec, the Boogie is a soprano. It gives me throat

movie *Once Upon a Time in the West*. The way they hit the nylon strings is really mystical. Some musicians, man, you hear the note almost before they hit it. Jimi, Coltrane, and Charlie Parker were like that. Some conga players too—they raise their hand and before they hit the skin, you hear *ta-duk*.

What do you listen for in others' music?

You know "People are Strange," the Doors'

Music of the Spheres

feelings—who act like they're posing in front of the mirror. They cop a tone in order to get something else. They're not going for the pure joy of creating a glorious sound like Otis Rush, B.B. King, or Buddy Guy.

Years ago you told GP readers that to find your sound, you'd play guitar for hours, alone in candlelight. Do you still explore the fretboard this way?

Oh yeah—every night when I'm not on the road. My family is on the school timetable, so after they go to bed, I play until 2:00 in the morning. I play with everybody I love, from John Coltrane to Wes Montgomery.

So you jam with their records?

Yes. When the inspiration runs dry, or I get stuck with too much cosmic music, I go back to John Lee Hooker, Jimmy Reed, or Lightnin' Hopkins. From those roots, I find my way back to Coltrane.

Or I turn them off and just lose myself—and find myself—in the music. I'm not technically proficient, so I run a video camera while I play.

“Like a singer, you want to get belly, chest, throat, nasal, and head tones from your guitar.”

That way, if I want to go back to a tone, I can see where that note is and what guitar and amp I used. When I view a tape two days later, it's like watching somebody peel an artichoke. You're peeling Peter Green, Bola Sete, George Benson, John McLaughlin, Buddy Guy, and, all of a sudden, three notes right at the core are just *you*. And in those three notes—the way they were placed in time and space and feeling—you have the seed of a song.

I'm not tripping about Carlos. I'm tripping about what is that melody, and what is that mood? Because those *moods* are what penetrate people deeply. It's like cracking a walnut—you have to get past the shell to get into the heart of it. You can only do that by playing nonstop for an hour-and-a-half or two hours.

Can you tell us about recording with Placido Domingo? An operatic tenor and a thumping 4x12 cab make a unique blend.

I wanted to transmute opera, symphony, Afro-Cuban beats, and blues into something new. I'm really grateful for Placido's spirit. Many opera singers don't want to sing in English—only Italian, Spanish, or German. When I asked him if he'd have a problem singing in English, he said, “Of course not.” He's 60 years old, but when he hit that microphone from ten feet away, he sounded like two Marshall amplifiers. And he hit those notes at 3:00 in the morning *after* doing two concerts with a sore throat.

The dictionary defines a shaman as someone who uses magic to heal, or reveal the hidden. How does this relate to your music?

Absoluteness and totality—that's the message of *Shaman*. If you want to start healing yourself, you have to start feeling, because nothing is real to you unless you feel it. There's something about bending a string that gets inside your vitals—your *cojones*—and works its way to your brain. The next thing you know, you feel like you're worth more than what's in your wallet or bank account. Sometimes people get so intellectual, cute, and clever with music that only *they* understand it. To me, music shouldn't be such a mystery. It should be something that all humans can say, “Wow, I *feel* it—you're touching me in a place I haven't been touched before.”

As guitarists, we all want to learn how to get so inside the note that time and space disappear. It comes like an orgasm. When you have an orgasm, you don't know if you're Irish, Mexican, Apache, Japanese, Hebrew, or Palestinian. You're in the fullness of a complete Niagara Falls of absolute totality. And that's where I try to take people with my guitar. ■

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