

PAPADIE



The guitarist
and bandleader
—who began
his career
on Tijuana's
mean streets—
talks about
his gratitude to
this country:

An
Interview
With
Carlos Santana
By Ben
Fong-Torres

**'I Owe
America
My Life'**

Carlos Santana might have gone bad in Tijuana. But destiny brought him to America, where he created the evocative sound and healing vision that appeals across generations and ethnicities.

He Wails For The World

CARLOS SANTANA MAKES NO bones about it. "If I hadn't come to America," he says, "I probably would've been dead by now."

I'm visiting Santana, one of the world's most admired and enduring musicians, at his offices in the industrial section of San Rafael, Calif. Santana has had several musical lives. He first became known as the Latin-rock pioneer who scored such hits as "Evil Ways" and "Black Magic Woman," both in 1970. Then, after several musical, spiritual and personal transformations, he came back in 1999 with the superhit CD *Supernatural*. His latest, *Shaman*, was No. 1 its first week out, last October.

I wanted to learn the secret of Santana's longevity in music and why he feels he owes his life to America.

He was born in 1947 in Mexico, the second son of José Santana, a popular violin player who supported his wife and seven children with his traveling mariachi band. Carlos spent his boyhood in the rural village of Autlán and later in Tijuana. He studied violin and guitar and dutifully learned traditional Mexican music, earning money by playing for tourists on the streets.

**BY BEN
FONG-TORRES**

Then, he says, he discovered American rock and blues music, which he heard on the radio. He became entranced with the electric guitar of B.B. King and the gritty blues of Muddy Waters. By age 13, he was playing in a rock band in Tijuana dance halls, alternating with strip acts.

Despite his attraction to the American sound, Carlos hid and stayed behind when his family moved to San Francisco in 1960. He played guitar in Tijuana's bars and strip clubs until, a year later, his parents sent his older brother Antonio to fetch him.

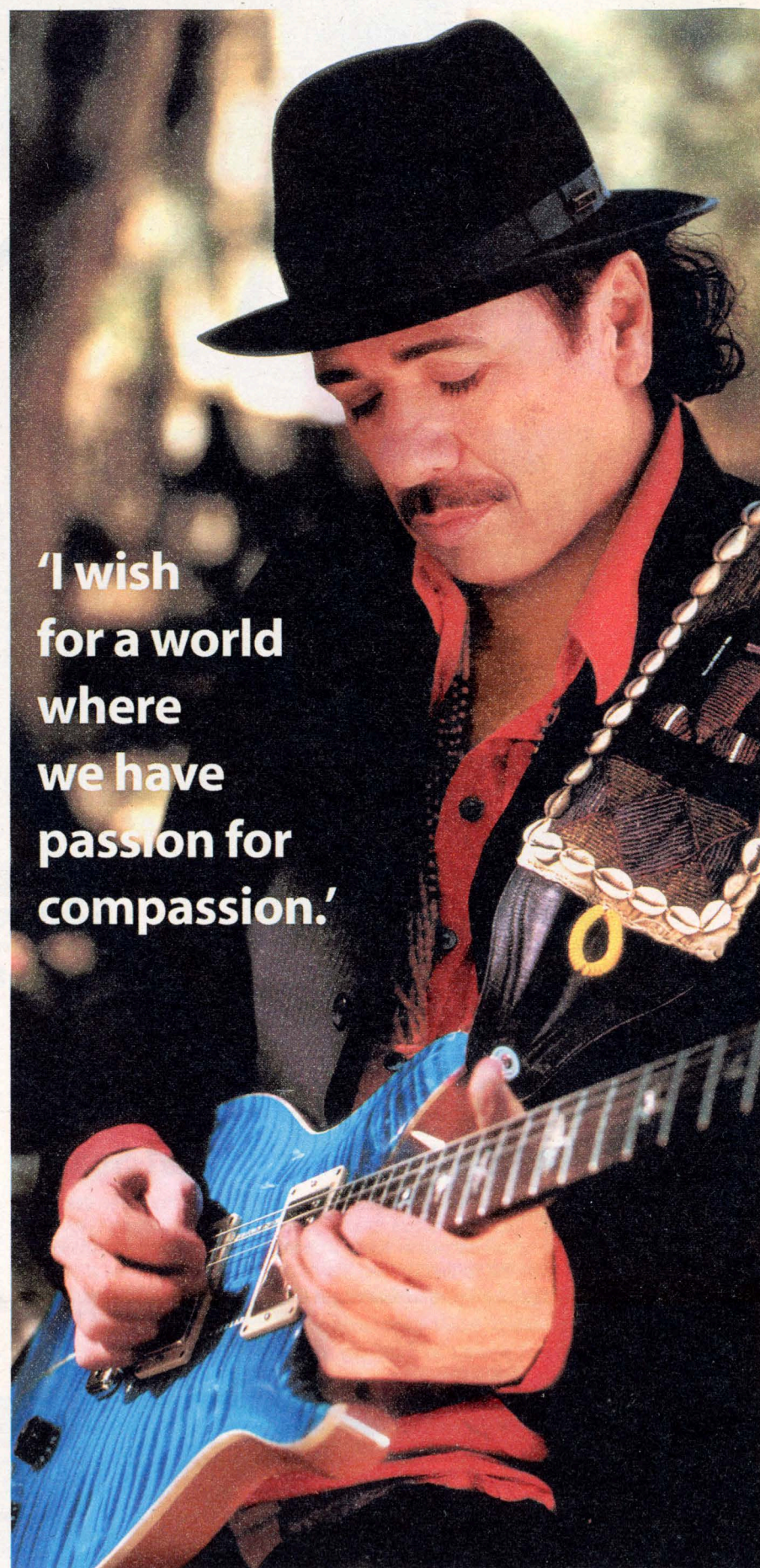
"They brought me here kicking and biting," he says. "I wanted to stay in an environment in Tijuana where I was around grown-up musicians and prostitutes." And he didn't want to go to school in San Francisco. "I said, 'This is my university right here. This is where you learn the real music, man!'"

The teen, in fact, was learning more than music in Tijuana. Life on the streets was fast, he recalls. "Fast everything. I was going toward the path of becoming an alcoholic. It was part of 'the fuel,' as we call it."

In San Francisco, a flower-powered rock music scene was blossoming at the Fillmore Auditorium and the Avalon Ballroom. Newly arrived, Carlos was the outsider trying to look and listen in. Though he had formed a band, he made his living toiling at a fast-food restaura-



Carlos Santana and Deborah, his wife of 30 years. "We must feel the sacredness of the family," he says.



**'I wish
for a world
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rant, giving most of his earnings to his family. Hungry for music, Carlos says, he would try to sneak into the Fillmore, only to be tossed out by the owner, the late rock promoter Bill Graham.

One night, Santana paid his way in and got a chance to join in a jam session. He impressed not only the audience and other musicians but Graham as well. Santana recalls their exchange: "Graham said, 'Hey, you have a band?' I said, 'Yeah!' He said, 'Would you like to open for The Loading Zone and The Who?' I said, 'Yeah!'" It was 1967, and America had welcomed him.

Graham became a champion of Santana—and more. He got the band a slot at the Woodstock festival in 1969 and introduced them to the song "Evil Ways," which became their first big hit.

Santana's band, a melting pot of black, white and Latino musicians, brought a new sound to rock music. It was, simply put, a blend of all their musical influences: Top 40, R&B, Afro-Cuban, Mexican, Latin, jazz and blues. The exotic mix—Santana's crying guitar, Gregg Rolie's rollicking Hammond B-3 organ and a battalion of drums, congas and timbales—tore its way onto the radio and millions of turntables. Other bands followed suit. "Next thing you know," Santana says, "the Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix, Chicago—everybody's got congas."

ROCK MUSIC MADE SANTANA wealthy. He bought a house for his parents in San Francisco. Remembering their difficult beginnings in Autlán—the town had no running water, and his mother washed their clothes in a river—he made sure there was a washing machine. "I feel really grateful," he says, "that most of my dreams are manifested."

Success also brought him nightmares: stress, physical ailments, ego trips among musicians, financial problems—and drugs. Santana admits to taking some but adds, "I didn't like being fogged. I like clarity."

He focused more and more on his abiding passion: to grow musically. "I wanted



Carlos (r) with his father, José • 1959



With Rob Thomas, making the video for the hit song "Smooth" • 1999

'If you play a certain kind of music, you can dismantle the violence on this planet.'

to become more intoxicated," he says, "with how [Brazilian composer] Antonio Carlos Jobim made this song or how [jazz sax legend] John Coltrane arrived at that scale."

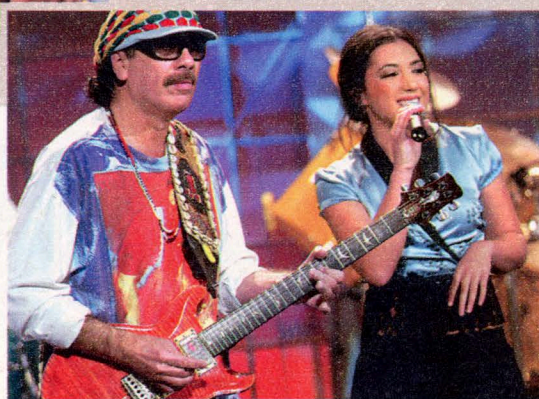
In the years following the band's first success, Santana explored spirituality and fused jazz into his music, with sporadic hits and usually respectable sales. Then came *Supernatural*. He'd been turned away by several record companies when he was signed to Arista by Clive Davis, former president of Columbia Records, Santana's original label. The other companies had

A Band For All Ages

Carlos Santana studied the violin as a boy and played traditional Mexican music in his father's mariachi band. As a teen in San Francisco, he formed a Latin/blues-based rock band featuring his distinctive "crying" guitar sound. One of the hot new groups at the groundbreaking Woodstock festival in 1969, Santana was a major force in rock in the '70s. Today, with a vision of music's healing power and a range of styles, Carlos Santana continues to create hits featuring pop, rap, jazz and soul artists.



At the Woodstock festival • 1969



With singer Michelle Branch on *The Tonight Show With Jay Leno* • 2003

told him, "You're too old. It's over."

In fact, he'd only just begun. *Supernatural*, which included younger stars such as Lauryn Hill and Rob Thomas, sold 25 million copies and won nine Grammys. "The main word that I heard," Santana says, "was 'phenomenon'—the phenomenon of connecting with grandparents, parents, teenagers and little children." He credits his daughters Stella, 17, and Angelica, 12, and son Salvador, 19, for making him aware of the younger artists. *Shaman*—with singers ranging from pop star Mi-

chelle Branch and funky hip-hopper Citizen Cope to opera star Plácido Domingo—followed in 2002. It was an instant hit.

At 55, Santana looks fit and trim. He maintains a regimen of frequent walks and tennis. He does it, he says, for Deborah, his wife of 30 years, and their family. He adds that he doesn't want to wind up on shows like VH1's *Behind the Music*, which chronicles rock stars' ups and, mainly, downs. "I want my life to be a testament of triumph, not of tragedy," he says. "There's so much tragedy and fear on TV. I want to do something different."

The key to his success, Santana says, is discipline. "Teens don't want to hear that. They think they can just snap their fingers, and *voilà!* But with discipline comes knowledge, coordination, balance, muscle memory, confidence—things that make it possible to hit the bull's-eye three times in a row. But you must practice."

For all his success in this country, Santana is concerned about a jittery mood in America. He called his new CD *Shaman*, he explains, "because a shaman is a spiritual healer, and we all need a serious healing right now, from a vibration of anger and fear and over-the-top patriotism. I think humanity should have a higher priority than any nation."

Since he told me he'd be dead if it weren't for America, I ask Santana what he feels he owes this nation. "What I owe the U.S.," he says, "is for me to behave with compassion and respect and dignity."

Santana wishes for a world where, as he puts it, "we have passion for compassion, and children are taught spiritual values." Music can help, he says: "I'm a firm believer that if you play a certain kind of music, you can dismantle the violence on this planet. That's what *Shaman* and *Supernatural* are about—healing, sharing spiritual information, inviting individuals to look at the bigger picture, to feel the sacredness of the family. Then, hopefully, we can behave with a lot more dignity toward each other." ■

Visit www.parade.com for more on Santana, including audio/video clips. www.parade.com