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Carlos Santana

## ARTISTS

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Carlos Santana's Signature Paul Reed Smith







# A LOVE SUPREME

CARLOS SANTANA SPREADS THE GOSPEL OF TONE

"I'm proof  
musician can coexist  
Wayne Shorter and Kirk  
and P.O.D.," exclaims Carlos  
San Rafael, California, headquarters. "I'll even play with Kenny G., Billy  
Joel, or Elton John if the song is right."

that a  
with everyone from  
Hammett to Plácido Domingo  
Santana, as he reclines in his  
stream cheese, two smash albums (*Supernatural* and *Shaman*), and  
an attic's worth of Grammys, well, consider Carlos jamming with  
Antonio Banderas on the 2005 Academy Awards telecast.

If that previous quote doesn't confirm that Santana is sticking with  
"I thought the whole experience was going to be a lot  
weirder than it actually was," says Santana. "But  
after you play Woodstock on acid, nothing's a  
big deal anymore!"

With the same peaceful strength  
that stands behind every note he  
plays, Santana makes it clear  
that he doesn't care  
what people think of  
his star-struck pop  
collaborations  
—the latest  
of

BY DARRIN FOX



"I don't trip when  
people say stuff  
about me or Eric  
Clapton selling  
out. You know  
what—we're  
really open, and  
you're not."

which [Arista] is untitled at press time, and includes confirmed guests such as Uncle Kracker and former 'NSYNC member JC Chasez.

"I'm not going to have the opportunity to play with Herbie Hancock, and then worry about the weird expectations people put on me, and not work with a talented songwriter like Rob Thomas," he exclaims. "I don't care what people say about Santana playing corporate rock, and I never have. It's like, 'Whatever, man, I'm going to go hang out with Buddy Guy and John Lee Hooker [laughs]. And I've got news for all of those intellectual snobs and brainiacs: You try and write a song like Green Day, and get it on the radio and connect with people. Even John Coltrane connected with larger audiences with 'My Favorite Things'—a *pop* song. No matter what you're playing, it all comes down to one basic thing: Can you connect with the people—whether it's a three year old, a 17 year old, or a 50 year old? What's the point of speaking an elite musical language that only you can understand?"

It's tough to argue with that—especially when Santana is far more than "just" a pop-

ular artist. Sure, his guitar solos are on nearly every radio station across the land, but he has also been an adored and respected collaborator with the likes of John Lee Hooker, Wayne Shorter, and John McLaughlin. And his current workload includes several decidedly non-pop-star projects, such as finishing some tracks with blues legend Buddy Guy, readying the release of the *Santana/Shorter at Montreux* DVD (a performance at 1988's Montreux Jazz Festival), and wrapping up an all-instrumental Santana album. If the preview I heard is any indication, the instrumental record will delight fans of Santana's pure 6-string magic with everything from thoughtful nylon-string workouts ("Gabor") to heavy Latin-rock numbers ("Nomad").

"At this stage of my life, all is one in my eyes," he says. "I don't have to be just the 'Latin rock guy.' If I have the chance, I want to be able to play the Grand Ole Opry, or in the middle of Africa. Look, it's not like I want to be liked by everybody, but who wouldn't want to reach as many people's hearts as they can?"

**There aren't many rock guitarists who keep company with people such as Wayne Shorter, John McLaughlin, and John Lee Hooker. Why do you think these players are so accepting of you?**

Well, I remember Wynton Marsalis saying that I shouldn't even be on the same stage with Wayne Shorter because I was playing rock music. But Wayne's response was beautiful. He said, "Wynton, you could put children from different parts of the world in the same sandbox, and even though they won't speak the same language, they're still going to play with the same bucket and the same shovel."

But, first and foremost, I think people like Wayne and John Lee read my intentions. They saw it in my eyes that I wasn't there to steal from them or disrespect their music. I'm there to learn from them and honor the music. And that attitude gave me a first-class ticket with those guys.

**What's your first reaction when you hear guitarists who have been influenced by your approach to tone and phrasing, such as Los Lonely Boys' Henry Garza or Orianthi?**

I cheer so loud, man. It feels good, because for a long time I wasn't sure if people thought of me as an influential guitar player. As a matter of fact, it wasn't until Prince told me that I was a major influence on his playing that I realized maybe I had left a mark with my guitar.

**When you recorded *Shaman*, you were over the moon about discovering Dumble amplifiers.**





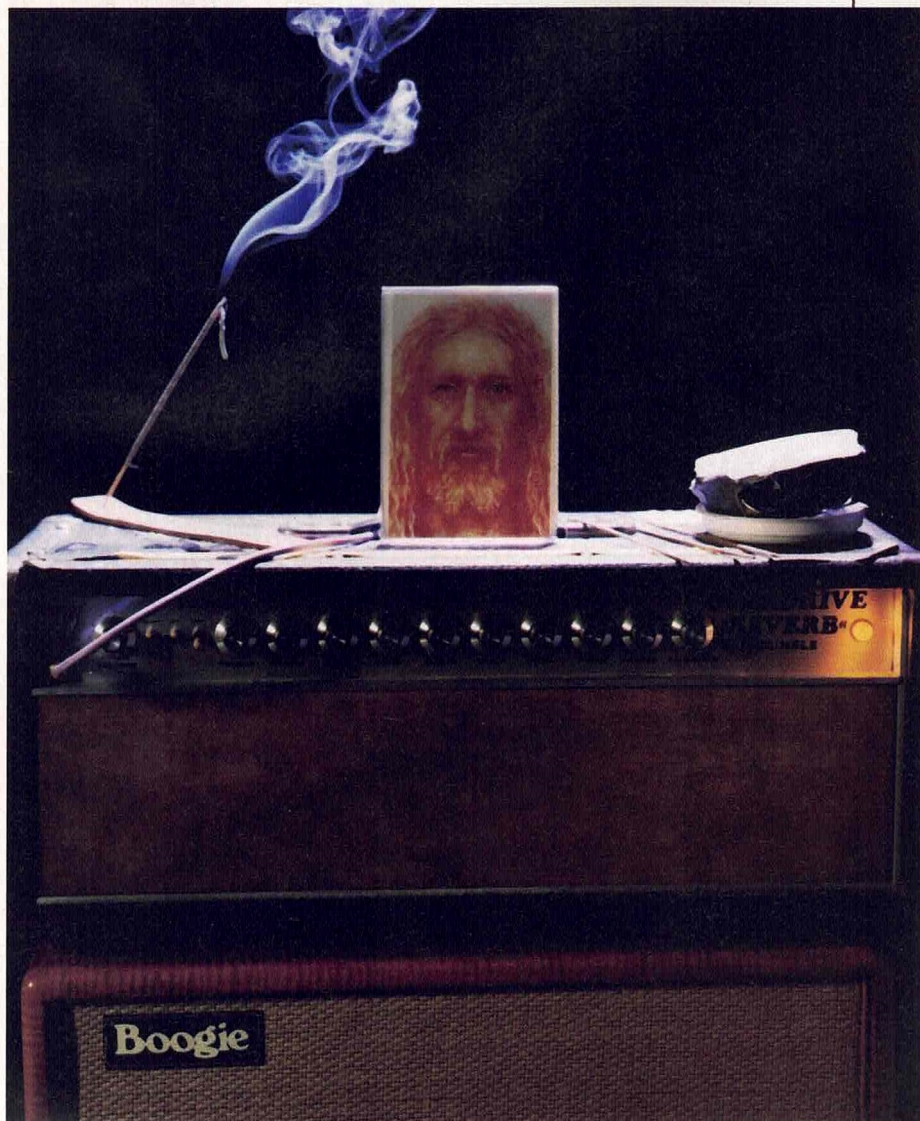




Did you have any tonal discoveries on the new albums?

What I'm learning more and more is that there are a lot of tones within myself that I can form simply by looking inward. Sure, Dumbles are incredible amps. But Alexander Dumble himself would tell you that Larry Carlton, Robben Ford, Eric Johnson, and myself have our own fingerprints with or without a Dumble amplifier. I can tell you every little piece of gear I've ever used, and you're still not going to sound like me. Your sound as an individual comes from sitting and playing for one, two, or three hours nonstop. It's where you get into this zone, and something takes over where the music truly plays you, and your mind is free of insecurities. The muscle memory and mechanics will handle themselves at a certain point, and you can get down to the matter of true expression that goes straight to

What would Jesus play?—  
Santana's altar of tone.



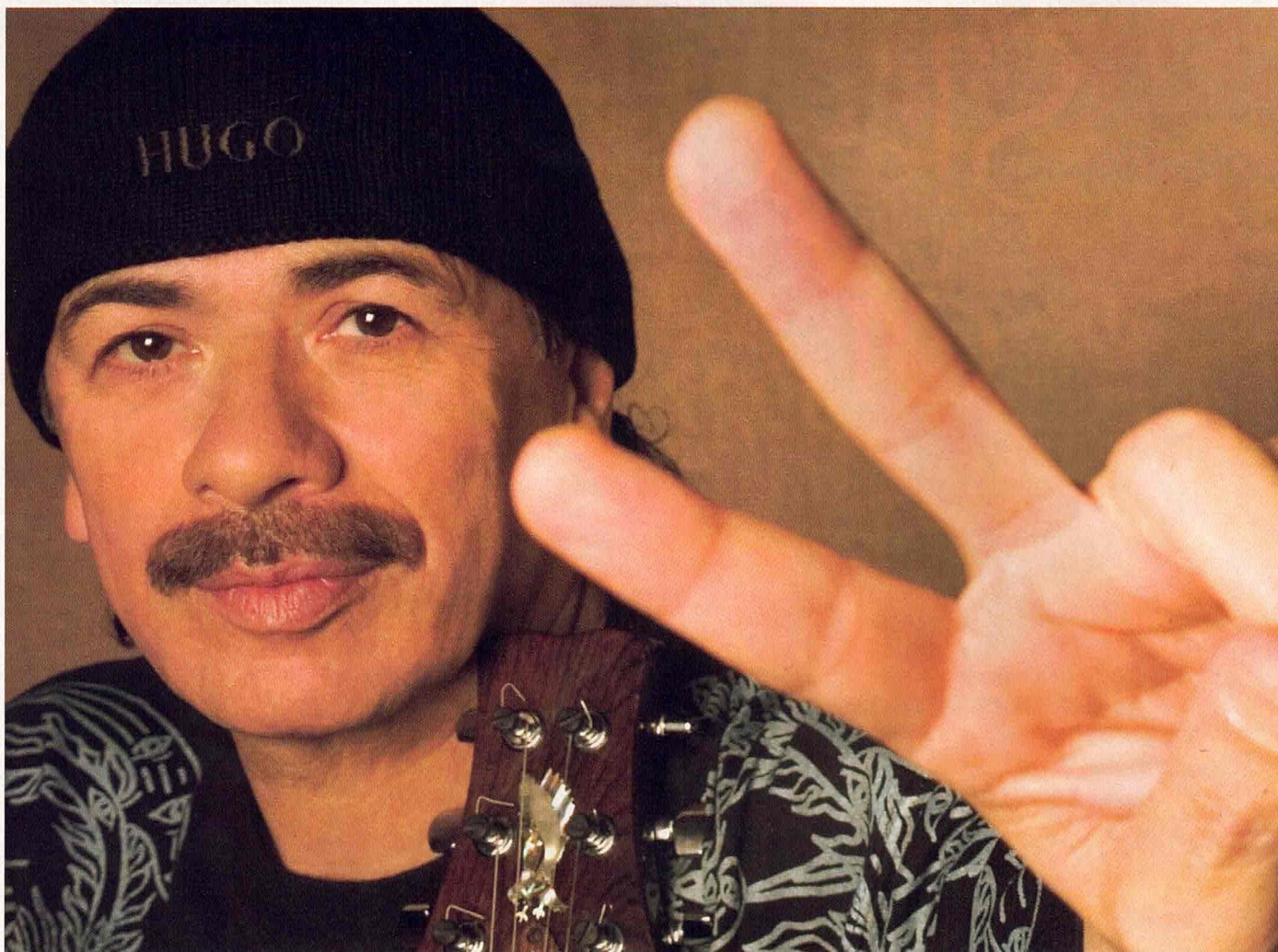
## SANTANA'S TONAL MÉNAGE A TROIS

"For the most part, Carlos' setup has stayed the same," says Rene Martinez, who, along with Ed Adair, watches after Santana's tonal arsenal. "His main guitar is a stock, green PRS Santana model which he has used consistently for the past year. From his guitar, the signal goes to a switcher box that allows Carlos to choose between two Dumble Overdrive Reverbs and a mid-'70s Mesa/Boogie Mark I head. The Boogie and one Dumble are dialed in with a fair amount of overdrive for sustain, whereas I try to dial in the other Dumble for a cleaner tone. All of the amplifiers are ready to go when Carlos steps onstage, and it's up to him to decide what he wants to hear. Sometimes, he'll only use the Boogie for most of the night, or he'll use all three amps at once. The only effects Carlos uses are a Dunlop 535Q wah and a delay pedal." (Martinez was reluctant to divulge the brand of delay, as Santana is always changing it, but word is he's currently stomping on a T-Rex Replica at rehearsals.)

As for speaker cabs, the Mesa/Boogie Mark I runs into a 1x12 cabinet loaded with a JBL E120 that has been outfitted with a hemp cone for its slightly mellower tone and added durability. The first Dumble Overdrive Special powers two Marshall 4x12 slant cabinets. One is loaded with Celestion Vintage 30s, and the other sports two Vintage 30s and two Celestion G12M-25 greenbacks. The second Dumble drives an A Brown Sound 4x12 open-back cabinet loaded with Tone Tubby 12s.

"Carlos records with this exact stage setup," says Adair, who assisted Santana at Berkeley's Fantasy Studios while the guitarist was recording his two new records. "The only difference being, instead of a delay pedal, we'll use an old 1/4" Studer tape machine or a Lexicon PCM-80 for about 350ms of delay. Carlos tracks everything in the control room, and we typically use Royer ribbon mics on the 4x12s, and a Neumann on the Mesa/Boogie 1x12." —DF





the instrument from your heart. You have to reach inside yourself. There's absolutely no substitute for locking yourself away and not coming out until you have your own sound.

**Do you think guitar magazines perpetuate gear lust too much?**

Guitar mags have a valid role. They turn people on to the gear that's out there, and help them understand that certain gear sounds a certain way. For example, a Strat is going to sound the way it sounds simply because of its construction. That hasn't changed since Ritchie Valens and Buddy Holly. And with a certain amp, your tone is going to be a certain way.

But people should try to go *deeper* into the instrument, and transcend its actual construction. To do that, you have to make ugly faces, pucker up your butt, and *get to that note*. You need to put different levels of brutal freakin' *force* behind your playing. The next thing you know, you start getting into the territory that Stevie Ray Vaughan and Jeff Beck inhabit. Let's face it, Stevie made some pretty ugly faces. And, hopefully, so do I. Anybody who goes for the note,

makes that face. It's like having an orgasm. I don't know anybody who looks nice when they have an orgasm. And if you're not having an orgasm, then you're not all the way into it like you're supposed to be.

**Is there a guitarist who best typifies overcoming an instrument's construction?**

Jimi did it. He willed a Strat to do what he wanted it to do. Back then, Strats sounded like the Beach Boys and Jan and Dean and Dick Dale. Not until Jimi came along did the Stratocaster get away from the surf sound. Why do you think Jimi said, "You'll never hear surf music again?" It's not that his music is better or worse than surf, it's just that Jimi wanted a Strat to sound like Mt. St. Helens, so he made it happen.

**At a certain point, it becomes a question of dedication.**

Exactly. Take John Coltrane. He played nonstop—even to the point of going to the kitchen and playing when other guys were soloing on the bandstand! That's supreme dedication. If you go for supreme dedication, you get a bonus—the big tone. But for people who have that kind of dedication, it's

"We can talk about Dumbles and Mesa/Boogies all day, but none of that stuff is important unless you're doing something for another human being."





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almost like they aren't allowed to have quality tender time with other people, or their kids. I don't want that. I don't need that. I'd rather drive my daughter to school. As much as I love music, it's what I do, it's not who I am.

**Did you ever start going the route of supreme dedication at the expense of personal relationships?**

Sure. But once I had children, I knew I couldn't b.s. myself. My son and two daughters are more important than anything. I'd rather go back to washing dishes in the Mission district than play music and not take care of them.

**Can you point to an album of yours as a watershed moment in your development as a player?**

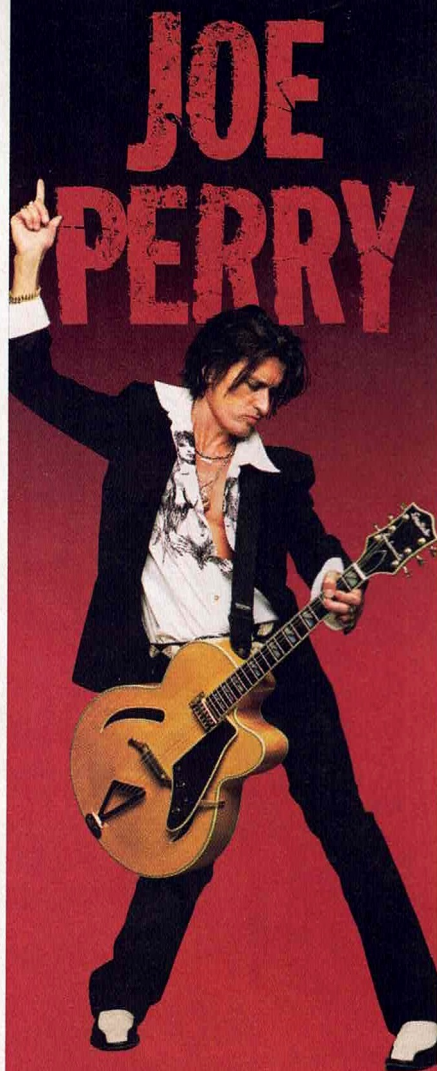
There were two: *Caravanserai* [1972] and *Welcome* [1973]. At that time, I felt my whole existence being pulled toward John Coltrane.

"I was surprised that Jeff Beck and Eric Clapton had never heard Eddie Hazel's solo on 'Maggot Brain.' I thought, 'Man, what are you guys listening to?'"





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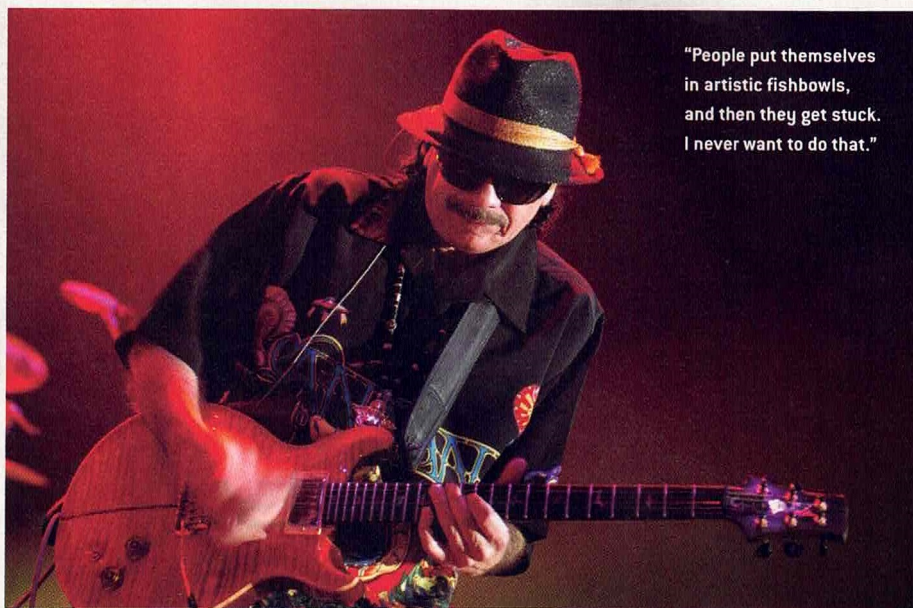
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"People put themselves  
in artistic fishbowls,  
and then they get stuck.  
I never want to do that."

I remember going to the record company and telling them, "I know what you want, but I can't give it to you because I don't hear it." I knew I would pay the price by not selling a ton of records, but I didn't care.

**You've said that you practice with John Coltrane records, but that you don't play or sound like Coltrane. What specifically are you listening for that can be applied to your own style?**

I'm trying to get to that tone that's not merely a result of what gear I'm using. When I listen to Coltrane, I hear children playing and birds singing. I'm not romanticizing—that is actually what I hear. It wasn't always that way. His music used to sound like the equivalent of someone opening a fire hydrant. But because I'm open, I began to understand what he was going for. It's the same thing Jimi Hendrix strove toward—tones that serve to remind us that we're multi-dimensional spirits, not just blacks or whites, Jews or Mexicans. That's small stuff.

**Are there any guitarists who you go to for that kind of inspiration?**

I still find myself going back to my John Lee Hooker and Jimmy Reed albums. I just read a Branford Marsalis interview where he said that he noticed his tone improved when he started listening to more John Lee Hooker and Son House. Something about their music compels you to look at the bigger picture of tone—not just a guitar or an amplifier. You'd be surprised how much time I spend with the Paul Butterfield Blues Band's *East-West*, too. That album was a major ground-breaker. The three Bs—Butterfield, Bloomfield, and Bishop were scary, man! They opened up the entire spectrum.

**How much do you feel a person's life experiences add to their depth as a player?**

Well, there's the saying, "To get to it, you gotta go through it." But the flip-side of that was Miles Davis, who said, "My dad is rich. My mom is good looking. I've never suffered, nor do I intend to suffer. But, man, I can play some blues." So he broke that stereotype. It's funny—I remember John Lee Hooker telling me that a lot of people play the blues, but if they don't wear those silky pimp socks, he doesn't believe them [laughs]. As for me, I knew when I saw B.B. King for the first time, I had to leave my mom and move out with no one to wash my clothes and cook for me. It wasn't that I was looking to suffer. I just knew that I had to go out and get some real, first-hand life experience in order to create.

**Do you ever look at your fabulous success and think about the players you came up with—say Elvin Bishop or Harvey Mandel or Mike Bloomfield—and ask, "Why me?"**

Of course. I remember standing onstage accepting a Grammy from Bob Dylan and Lauryn Hill, and I swear, guys like Tommy Castro and Otis Rush were going through my mind, and all I could think about was, "Why me?" And then, all of a sudden, I hear this voice that says, "Because of your heart." See, my heart wants to wake people up to their full potential. And to realize that potential in yourself, your heart must dictate to your brain. It should never be the other way around. If your brain dictates to your heart, then you're just shucking and jiving. No person or thing is going to validate you more than your own heart. So which one do you want to hang with? ■