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UNEARTHING HIS
FORGOTTEN JAZZ LEGACY

By Francis Davis

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Jazz's Favorite Bluesman

Carlos Santana & John McLaughlin

Coltrane in Common

WAYNE SHORTER & WYNTON

Creative Genius
Underscored by Tradition

TISZIJ MUÑOZ

The Guru of Jazz Guitar

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WHY BLUETOOTH
SOUND DOESN'T
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Coltrane in Common

An excerpt from *The Universal Tone: Bringing My Story to Light*,
by **CARLOS SANTANA** with Ashley Kahn and Hal Miller

More than 80 discussions in a half-dozen countries took place with Carlos Santana in assembling his autobiography. His words, stories and personal philosophy revealed a man of continuous self-reflection and intense passions—one of the latter being jazz.

Through the almost two-year process, Santana cycled back to the topic of jazz often: his initial bias against it, seeing it as dinner-club entertainment that “didn’t have fangs and teeth and claws. I wanted stuff that scratched you.” He recalled his first forays: being turned on to Chico Hamilton and Gabor Szabo LPs; catching Charles Lloyd at the Fillmore Auditorium. He repeatedly credited drummer Michael Shrieve for getting him “to listen to Miles and Trane, [and for correcting] my twisted perception that jazz is only for old, fuddy-duddy people.” He talked about his enduring relationships with Miles Davis, Wayne Shorter and other jazz headliners, and about the profound

influence these musicians have had on him throughout his life.

When it came to jazz guitar, Santana was expansive in his taste—“I think Charlie Christian should be required listening if you’re a serious guitar player,” he said, and he spoke fondly of “the octaves and warmth of Wes and the atomic, bombastic sounds of Sonny Sharrock.” He was also brutally honest about his own limitations as a jazz player: “I know what I can and can’t do and what I’m best at, and I still don’t know how to play solos around chord changes. ... When someone like Charlie Christian or Charlie Parker starts doing chord changes, I can play along and hang for the first 20 seconds, maybe 30. ... Thank God Miles and Coltrane moved on to modal playing; it made it easier for me—it’s closer to the blues.”

In this special guitar-issue excerpt, Santana discusses his most celebrated jazz partnership, his friendship and recordings with John McLaughlin.

—ASHLEY KAHN

OPPOSITE PAGE: RUBEN MARTIN/RCA RECORDS



I

In the summer of 1970 I met two heroes in New York, both of whom connected with Miles—Tony Williams and John McLaughlin. Tony played drums with Miles through most of the changes of the 1960s and on an album I loved, *In a Silent Way*. He was leading his own group, Tony Williams Lifetime, with McLaughlin on guitar and Larry Young on organ. It was like all roads led to Miles—Larry and John had also played with Miles on *Bitches Brew*. Lifetime was playing Slugs, a small, run-down club on the Lower East Side. This place was like something in a war zone; it was the club where the trumpet player Lee Morgan would get shot in 1972, and they'd close it down for good. I was walking across Avenue A or B, and some guys were sizing me up, like, "What's this hippie freak up to down here?" John told me he went through the same thing—"Where are you goin', white boy?"

"I'm going to go play with Tony Williams."

"Tony Williams? Man, we'll walk you there. You can't walk alone here. They're going to take your guitar." John's story gave me the same feeling I had when the bus driver in San Francisco had me sit with him that time I was carrying my guitar. We all have our angels.

Man, the Lifetime show was loud and mind-boggling. It fried my brain. I had never heard rock and jazz ideas put together with so much intensity and with the volume turned up all the way like that. Slugs was a small, narrow place, and Lifetime filled it with a vortex of sound. Cream sort of had that energy, but not with the same ideas or sounds—it didn't surprise me so much that Cream's Jack Bruce joined Lifetime a little while later.

The three of them had an attitude

that made them look like enforcers. You almost didn't want to look at them they were so ... menacing. John was killin' brilliant in his playing, and I know that just as he scared me, I'm sure he scared even Jimi Hendrix. It was like, "Holy shit, he's got the Buddy Guy thing down and he can take care of the Charlie Parker thing." There are just not that many musicians who can play fast and deep the way he does. Even today I love to jam with him, then just step back and listen to him *soar*.

I met John when they took a break, and he recognized me right away. "Santana? Nice to meet you." Around a month

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before, I had gotten into Wayne Shorter's album *Super Nova*, which had Sonny Sharrock and John on some tracks, so that was the first thing I told him. "I also love what you do on Joe Farrell's 'Follow Your Heart' with Jack DeJohnette." [Ed. note: That composition, included on the 1970 LP Joe Farrell Quartet, was written by McLaughlin.] I think I surprised him a little with what I was listening to, and then he told me what he was into: Coltrane, Wayne, Miles and Bill Evans—in that order. That's all we needed to talk about.

JUST BEFORE THE TOUR BEGAN FOR the 1972 Santana album *Caravanserai*,

John called me about doing an album with him. I guess because of my album with Buddy Miles, some people saw I was open to collaboration, and John knew that we both had a special place for the music of Coltrane. John's album the previous year, the Mahavishnu Orchestra's *The Inner Mounting Flame*, connected with me in the same place, so it made sense. Later I learned that Mahavishnu was the name that [spiritual teacher Sri Chinmoy] gave to John.

But John had been a guitarist in Tony Williams' group, and was the guy who played with Miles on *In a Silent Way* and then on *Jack Johnson*. People ask me if it was intimidating to play with John back then—it's *always* intimidating to play with John. He was busy restructuring the way a guitar sounded in jazz—in music. What could I do next to him?

It's funny—I had no problem sticking up for Santana's music; I could do that on my own. But when John asked me to record with him, I spoke to a lot of people, including Shrieve and [my then-girlfriend, later first wife] Deborah, before saying yes. I remember [Santana percussionist Armando Peraza] had good advice: "Don't worry, goddammy." (He'd say "goddammy" instead of "goddamnit.") "You let him do his

shit, let him play. When it's your turn, you already got something he don't have."

That made sense to me—I'm there to complement what John does, not compete with him or be compared to him. Before I said yes, though, I was telling myself to get ready to wait—wait to see what he would play and how he would play it, then do the opposite. If he plays up and down the neck, quickly and staccato, answer him slowly, with longer notes, and it's going to be a beautiful contrast.

It was like Miles had taught me—I'd always be learning, no matter what, because that was just who I am.

Those lessons never went away—



► Carlos Santana (left) and John McLaughlin get playful at the Berkeley Jazz Festival, May 1980

I still carry all of them. I feel them today if I have to play with someone I know is great or even if I have to just meet someone like a president or Nelson Mandela. Fear and intimidation are like anger and hatred—all part of the ego game.

Saying yes to record with Mahavishnu—by that time I was calling him Mahavishnu, and he was calling me Little Brother—came down to this important lesson: My mind works for me; I don't work for it. Whatever it is that I tell my mind we're going to do, we're going to do. I told myself, "Yeah, it's going to be a little shaky the first couple of times in the studio with John, but I'll find a way." I still have that attitude, no matter whom I'm going to play with or where I'll be playing.

We sealed the deal when John flew out to San Francisco to sit in with the

new Santana at Winterland at the start of October, which was really the first time the new, full lineup performed. John sat in for the last half hour, and Deborah was backstage for the first time at a Santana concert. I felt so high from everything that was happening—the music coming together and falling in love. I felt light and open to whatever was coming next—like a weight was lifting.

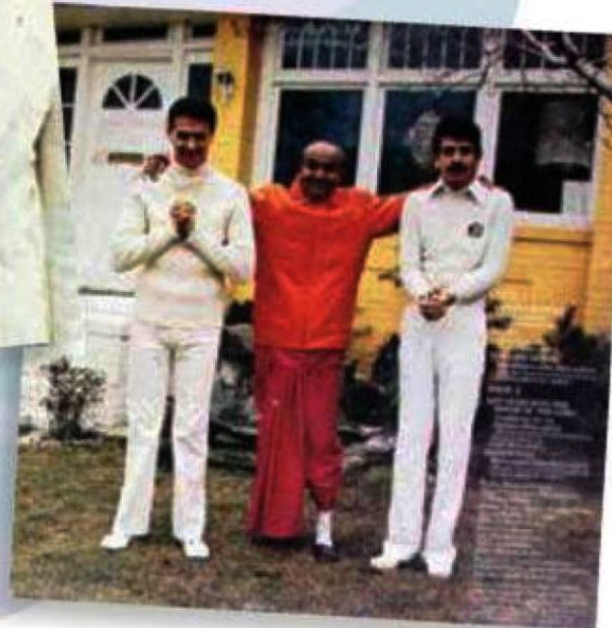
The *Caravanserai* tour across the United States and Canada didn't last long—it ended with a few shows around New York City at the end of October. Deborah met me there, and then McLaughlin and I went into the studio with our respective rhythm sections. We used Larry Young and Jan Hammer on organs, John's wife, Eve, on piano, and Don Alias and Billy Cobham

on percussion, balancing it out with Shrieve, Armando, [percussionist James Mingo Lewis] and Dougie [Rauch] on bass. The music included a few originals by John—he can come up with some long, gorgeous, celestial melodies, and I know that's just one reason why Miles loved him. He did two for this album—"Meditation" and "The Life Divine." There was also a beautiful, meditative spiritual called "Let Us Go Into the House of the Lord," which became a favorite song of mine to play at the end of concerts, because when people heard it they really understood: "OK, it's time to go home."

John and I also did two of our favorite Coltrane pieces—the opening part of *A Love Supreme* and "Naima." Coltrane was the reason the recording came



► The front and back covers of Santana and McLaughlin's 1973 Columbia LP, *Love Devotion Surrender*. On the back, the two stand with their spiritual guru of the era, Sri Chinmoy



together, so we had to celebrate his music and acknowledge him, even if we were rock musicians doing some of his holiest songs only a few years after he died. I was too naive to think anything about that—even after the music came

out, I didn't read any reviews about whether or not we had committed sacrilege. I know there's a jazz police, just as there's a *clave* police. Gabor Szabo had a name for them. "Eh, they aren't musicians," he'd say. "They're just

a bunch of jazzbos. Real musicians don't think like that." That's how I felt. It wasn't like we were putting a mustache on the *Mona Lisa*—it never felt wrong to play that music.

John and I would get together again in early '73 to finish the music for the album. In the end we called it *Love Devotion Surrender*, which was the spiritual path of Sri Chinmoy. Larry Coryell had been the first to tell me about Sri, then John started speaking about him with even more intensity, with a consistency of serenity in his persona. That last week of October '72, John and Eve took Deborah and me to meet their guru for the first time. **JT**

Excerpted with permission from The Universal Tone: Bringing My Story to Light, by Carlos Santana with Ashley Kahn and Hal Miller. Little, Brown and Company, 2014.