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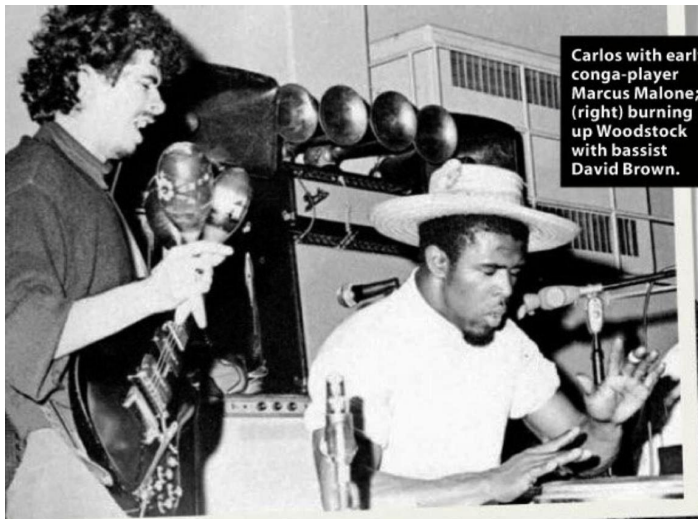
• **HIS FINAL '74 SESSION: THE TRUE STORY**

SHADES OF TIME

THE BROTHERS WHO FORGOT TO BE FRIENDS, **SANTANA**'S CLASSIC, CONGALARRUPING LINE-UP LEAPT FROM SAN FRANCISCO'S '60s FREAK SCENE TO POST-WOODSTOCK FAME BEFORE HEROIN, "CHICKS" AND JAZZ-FUSION TORE THEM APART. 45 YEARS ON, THEY'VE BURIED THE HATCHET IN ORDER TO "CONQUER FEAR" & SAVE THE WORLD FROM DONALD TRUMP. "THE MUSIC DOESN'T GO AWAY," THEY ASSURE **DAVE DiMARTINO**.



Waiting: "Everybody from the Bay Area knew who Santana was," the band in 1968 (from left) Michael Shrieve, Carlos Santana, Gregg Rolie (squatting), Chepito Areas, David Brown, Mike Carabello.



Carlos with early conga-player Marcus Malone; (right) burning up Woodstock with bassist David Brown.

IN AN EMPTY HOUSE OF Blues banquet room atop the Mandalay Bay hotel in Las Vegas, Michael Carabello is recounting his final days in Santana.

The percussionist had been in and out of the band before, but this was the Big One, the Fateful Event, the Turning Point, when, effectively, it all went awry.

There had been ample warning: A portentous early morning conversation on a Hawaiian beach in 1971, just after the New Year. He was awakened by his old friend and bandmate Carlos Santana, who wanted to talk about the state of the band bearing his name. Things were in disarray: hard drugs were everywhere, parties were non-stop, and the commercial success of Santana's first two albums could not help but feed the fire. And the music?

"Carlos took me aside in Hawaii and said, 'Hey man, we've got to start *playing*. You've got to help me out,'" Carabello recalls. "Everybody's into these chicks, and we're not paying attention to the music no more.' He said, 'You've got to help me out with this,' and I went, OK."

Pause.

"But I didn't."

Another pause.

"Instead I went away and did my thing. It just kind of dissolved and dissolved – and we finally broke up."

Santana's ascent had been phenomenal, but hardly blip-free. Even before the band's first album release in August 1969 – the same month they captivated the world with a mesmerising Woodstock performance – there had been line-up ructions, health issues (Santana himself had been hospitalised with tuberculosis), and a manslaughter charge that sent conga player Marcus Malone off to San Quentin. But in 1971, under the wing of West Coast über-promoter Bill Graham and with three successful albums on Clive Davis's Columbia label, they were set fair.

"This was all fun to us," says Carabello. "Like, Oh my God, there's money and women and cars and we're buying houses. I

"IF YOU
WERE IN
WOODSTOCK,
YOU HAD
A CAREER."

GREGG ROLIE



think we're doing the right thing. But Carlos was the serious musician of the band – that's why it was called Santana. Little did I know that this guy had a mission. And his mission was that he was going to be the best that he could be."

By October of that year, Michael Carabello had left Santana.

IN BROAD STROKES, THE STORY OF Santana The Band is a classical tragedy – ambitious visions undone by fatal tragedy – but it may be gaining a redemptive epilogue. Here at Vegas's House Of Blues, the "original" band, as some call them, have reunited to celebrate the unlikely release of a new album – *Santana IV* – with a live performance to be filmed, displayed on TV, released on DVD and otherwise productised. The album is thus numbered for a significant reason. The last record featuring all of these players – guitarists Carlos Santana and Neal Schon, singer-organist Gregg Rolie, drummer Michael Shrieve and Carabello – was *Santana III*, released in 1971. A lot has happened since then.

"After that third album came *Caravanserai*," Michael Shrieve says today. "And that's the album when Carlos and I turned left. We did it very consciously and on purpose. But it seriously pissed off everybody else."

Clive Davis said they were committing label suicide. "And you know," says Shrieve, "rightfully so. But the way we looked at it is we were *saving* our lives. There was the debauchery of the rock'n'roll



Future primitives:
(from top) Santana,
Neal Schon, Rolie,
Shrieve, Carabello,
the reuniting band as
they were back when.



consistently enthusiastic reactions from audiences.

"Everybody from the Bay Area knew who Santana was," says Carabello. "So it's like, do you want to go play with Aum, do you want to go play with It's A Beautiful Day? No, you want to play with *Carlos*, because he's different."

Replacing the jailed Malone in 1969, Carabello brought with him Nicaraguan percussionist Jose 'Chepito' Areas, a pint-sized triple-threat (timbales, congas, drums, even trumpet) who spoke barely a word of English. "All of a sudden we have a timbales player and a conga player and it's not the blues any more," says Carabello. "It's African."

After failed attempts at recording the Malone-Livingston incarnation in Los Angeles with producer David Rubinson (the sessions finally emerged in 2004), the revised line-up left Pacific Recording Studio in San Mateo, May '69 with a career-launching album in the

can and waiting to go. Now, how to launch it with a bang?

CREGG ROLIE – THEN, AND ON this particular day in Las Vegas, the voice of Santana – oozes cordiality, warmth, and maybe a little bemusement that Santana's breakthrough inspires such interest nearly a half-century later. "Pretty simply," he says of the vehicle that took Santana's unheard music to the world, "we were

in Woodstock. If you were in Woodstock, you had a career. It was the most brilliant strategy that nobody really planned. To be in this movie and have your album come out at the same time, it was... There were no videos, there was no *anything*."

The story goes like this: it's mid-1969. The Woodstock Festival is being booked. The logistics, the basics, the minutiae – it's all staggering. The man behind the festival, Michael Lang, needs a helping hand and calls the experienced Bill Graham to ask for assistance.

Sure, says Graham. But you have to have Santana.

Who the hell is *Santana*?, asks Lang.

You'll see, says Graham.

"It's one of those things," reflects Gregg Rolie today. "We just connected with an audience – with a generation, with *many* generations. Carlos has built on that for ➤

lifestyle going on. And most importantly, there was Miles Davis and *Bitches Brew* and Weather Report and Mahavishnu and Return To Forever – this *exciting* music, for Carlos and I, anyway. Very exciting. Much more than what was happening in rock'n'roll. And so, we wanted a piece of that. Plus, we wanted to... *not die*."

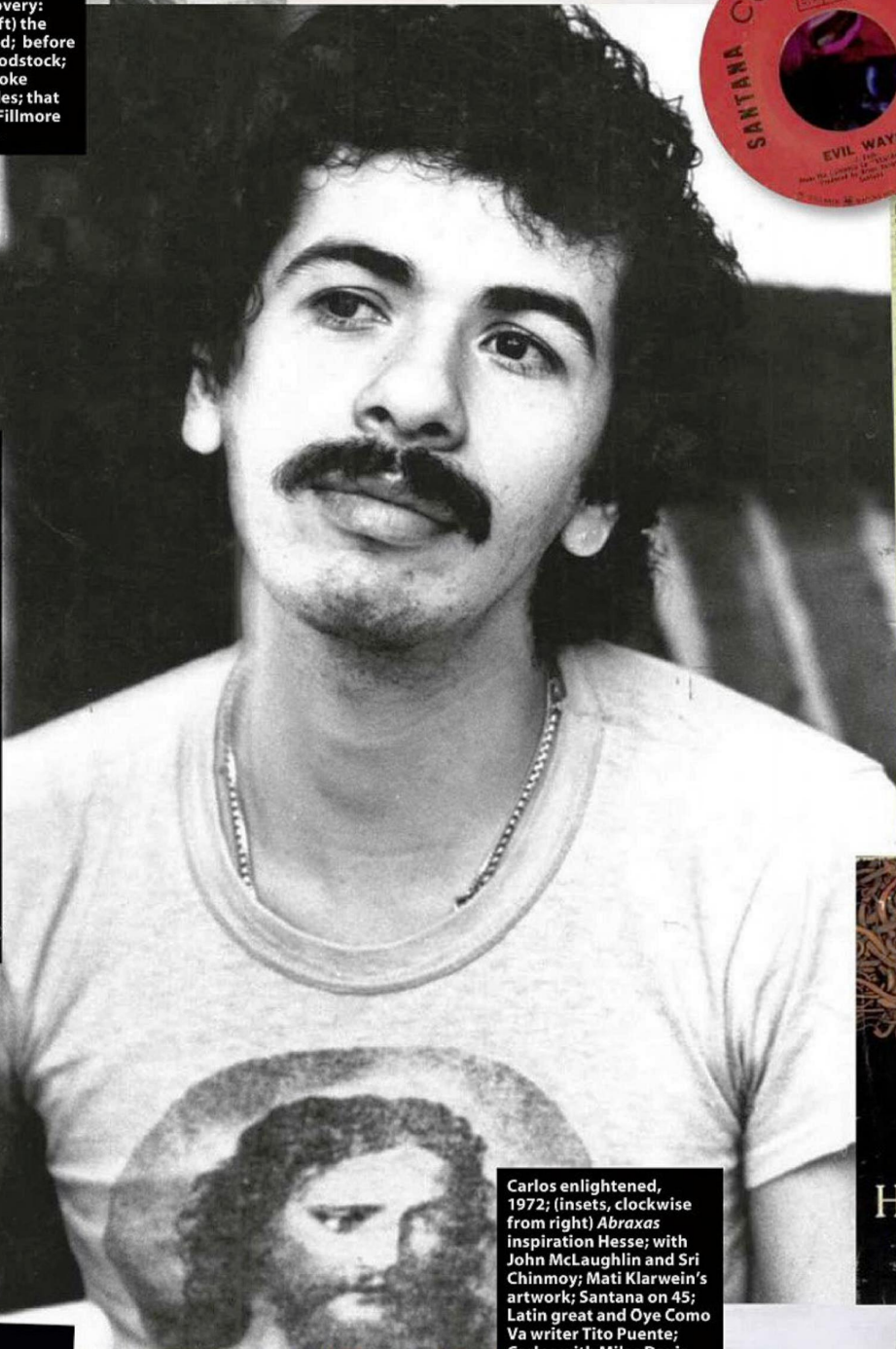
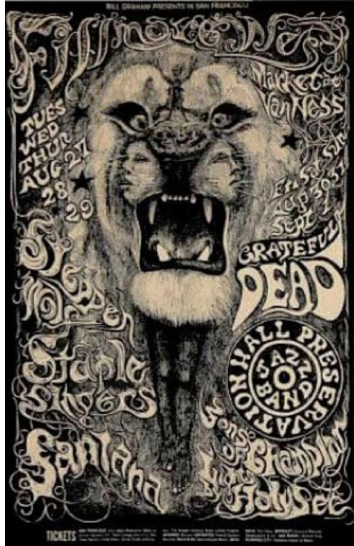
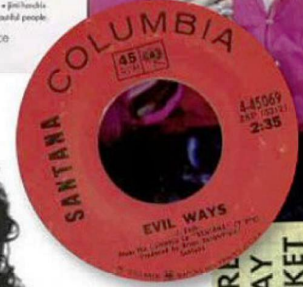
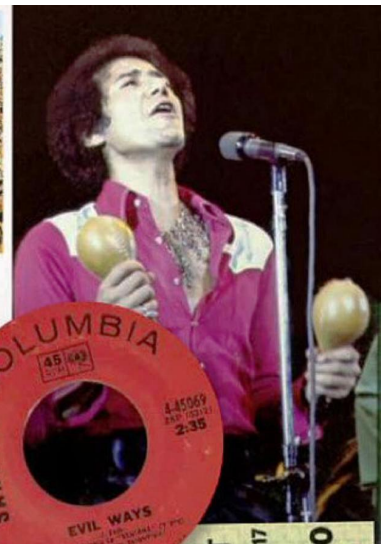
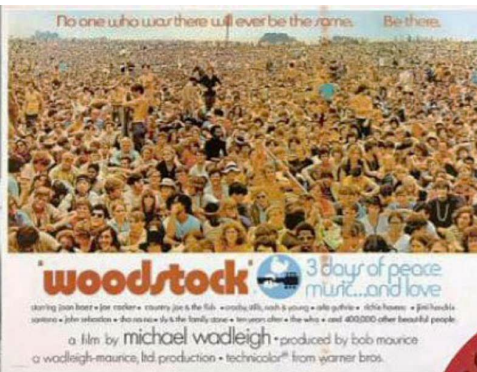
In 1967, Santana were the Santana Blues Band, playing blues and R&B around the San Francisco area, with elements of Latin percussion that would later be expertly refined. Members included keyboardist/vocalist Rolie (ex-of the wonderfully-named, high garage-cred William Penn & His Pals), bassist David Brown, drummer Bob 'Doc' Livingston, and Malone. Significant help in shaping the band came via Stan Marcum – the man who, with friend Ron Estrada, would manage Santana during their forthcoming ascent, a scenario some observers would later describe as the inmates running the asylum. But they had been instrumental in setting up Carlos Santana's development as an inspirational musician – taking him in rent-free, and feeding him.

"Ron Estrada was a bail bondsman," Carabello notes. "Stan used to cut hair, OK? And at the same time, they both sold pot. Back then, not a lot of people did it, but you get by however you get by."

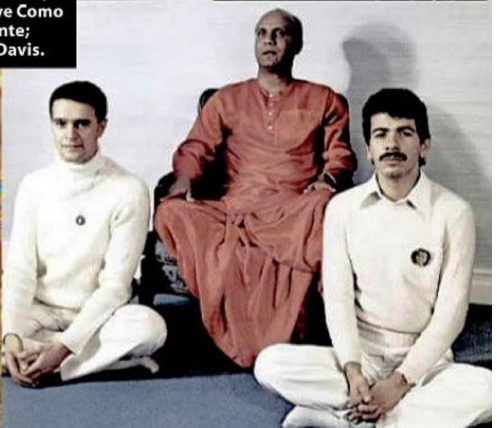
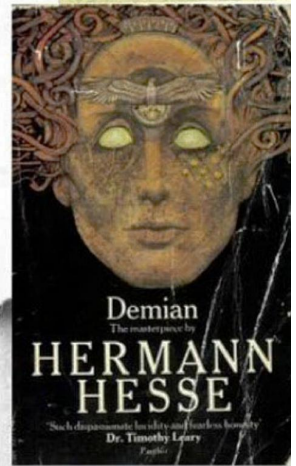
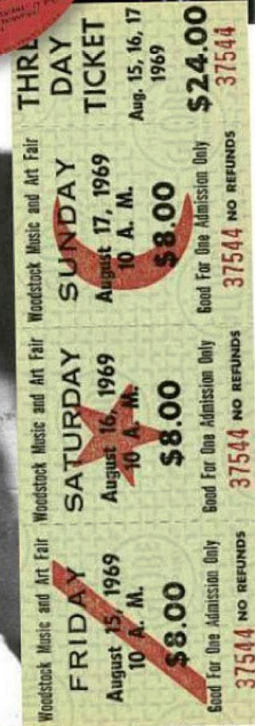
Soon the band's name was shortened to Santana and they were gigging regularly, greatly helped by Bill Graham (the group topped the bill at his Fillmore Auditorium in late 1968) and



Voyage of discovery: (above, from left) the first classic band; before video came Woodstock; percussionist Coke Escovedo; singles; that festival ticket; Fillmore poster (below).



Carlos enlightened, 1972; (insets, clockwise from right) Abraxas inspiration Hesse; with John McLaughlin and Sri Chinmoy; Mati Klarwein's artwork; Santana on 45; Latin great and Oye Como Va writer Tito Puente; Carlos with Miles Davis.



ages. And the music is kind of like blues – it doesn't go away."

The audience connection was there at Yasgur's Farm on the afternoon of August 16, and on the outside in the burgeoning underground, who recognised Santana's unique sound even if they couldn't quite put a name to it. The album soared to the upper reaches of the Billboard charts and stayed around for a while, aided by singles Jingo and Evil Ways and eventually the Woodstock film, from which the band projected stunningly. Ironically, Rolling Stone, that bastion of the San Francisco sound, had given the album a jarringly negative pan, calling it "a speed freak's delight – fast, pounding frantic music with no real content."

"I'll never forget that," says Rolie, whose keyboard style was likened to "the noise made by that guy in junior high who used to scratch the blackboard with his fingernails". "Like most of the media today, [they were] all locked up in their own little world, their own little bubble about it. 'Oh, it's a San Francisco group – they should sound like the San Francisco bands.' And we just *totally* did not. But on purpose!"

Outside of Rolling Stone's offices it was widely agreed that Santana were becoming exquisitely good, unexpectedly commercial. 1970's follow-up album, *Abraxas*, with its mind-blowing sleeve by German artist Mati Klarwein (the painter of Miles's *Bitches Brew* cover), would make cultural inroads that were unprecedented in its time. "It did me a world of good," Klarwein himself would later note. "I saw the album jacket pinned on the wall of a shaman's mud hut in Niger and inside a Rastafarian's ganja-hauling truck in Jamaica. Muchísimas gracias Carlitos!"

The extracted version of Peter Green's Black Magic Woman was an instant US radio hit and propelled *Abraxas* to the top of the Billboard album chart. Significantly, the song segued into Gábor Szabó's Gypsy Queen, a nod to the Hungarian jazz guitarist and an indicator of the breadth and prescience of Santana's concept of world music. Bolstering the impact of the album's combo of aural and visual exotica was this conspicuous quote from Hermann Hesse's *Demian*: "We stood before it and began to freeze inside from the exertion. We questioned the painting, berated it, made love to it, prayed to it: We called it mother, called it whore and slut, called it our beloved, called it *Abraxas*..."

Santana's new commercial profile meant good things – there was money, there were significant friendships struck up or rekindled with the likes of Jimi Hendrix and Miles Davis, the latter of special significance both to Carlos Santana and Michael Carabello, with whom they shared friends in common. But there were bad things. Drugs, non-stop touring and management issues. One memorable passage from Santana's 2014 memoir *The Universal Tone* recounts a dialogue between Santana, Shrieve and pianist Keith Jarrett, then of Miles Davis's band, waiting in a hotel elevator for Davis and Carabello to return after scoring some drugs. "How do you do it?" Shrieve asked Jarrett, wondering how he coped with the trumpeter's wild ways. Jarrett snapped his fingers: "Like this. I just turn it off, like a button." In his book, Santana wrote: "I remember thinking, *Whoa what button is that?*"

With money troubles brewing, splinter factions formed, both within the group and between manager Marcum and Bill Graham, and it was time to record *Santana III*, the follow-up to Santana's most successful album to date. Enter guitarist Neal Schon.

CARLOS SANTANA IS SITTING AT A TABLE IN THE House Of Blues Foundation Room this March afternoon, looking dapper, as he always does, and focusing intently on his choice of words. His manager Michael Vronis looks on, sitting down at the other end of the table, and we are both listening.

So, I ask. Why did one of rock's most characterful and commanding guitar virtuosos need Neal Schon?

"Miles Davis asked me the same thing," says Santana. "And he asked me in a way that, like (*imitates Davis's famous gravelly pitch*) 'WHY WOULD YOU DO THAT?' And I was like, Well, Peter Green has another guitar player and *they* sound good, and Eric Clapton's been playing with Duane Allman, and Paul Butterfield's had Michael Bloomfield and Elvin Bishop, and I'm not *threatened* by Neal. I like to think the both of us are so different with respect for one another that we can bring a whole other dimension of it."

"But Miles, he just shook his head and said, 'AHHHHHH.' He definitely didn't like that decision. But it wasn't his decision to make. It was my decision. I basically did it for *energy*."

There was energy all over *Santana III*. It was a guest-filled affair, including trumpeter Luis Gasca, Sly Stone drummer Greg Errico, The Loading Zone's Linda Tillery, the Tower Of Power horns and, significantly, percussionist Coke Escovedo, who'd get a partial writing credit on album hit No One To Depend On. Like its predecessor, the album took the Number 1 slot on the Billboard charts and seemed to signify a band at its peak both commercially and critically.

But internally? Not so much.

Shortly before recording had started, Carabello and Santana had had their conversation on the beach. And where the first album had taken only three weeks to record, the new album needed six months, as studio sessions were slotted into those few dates the band weren't gigging elsewhere. Meanwhile, Areas had been sidelined by a brain aneurysm.

"My understanding is that he accidentally took some acid at a concert in Santa Clara, California," Michael Shrieve says today. "He would never do that kind of stuff, but inadvertently – which is the way things were in those days, you always had to be careful. Chepito didn't take to it. And apparently that had something to do with him having an aneurysm at a later date. Things were never quite the same after that."

Chepito was briefly replaced by Willie Bobo in time for a March trip to Ghana for a festival dubbed 'the African Woodstock' and documented in 1971's *Soul To Soul* film.

"It was incredible," recalls Shrieve. "I mean, could you imagine flying on a private 727 with Ike And Tina Turner and Wilson Pickett and The Staple Singers...?"

Santana the band was beginning to look like a high-stakes game of musical chairs. Bobo left. Escovedo returned. Then there was David Brown, the bassist who'd been with the band since the early days, but whose heroin use was causing problems ("David would be the first to say, 'Yeah, I know – I'm in no shape to be playing,'" says Shrieve). Out he went, temporarily replaced by Shrieve's bassist friend Tom Rutley, and, eventually, Doug Rauch.

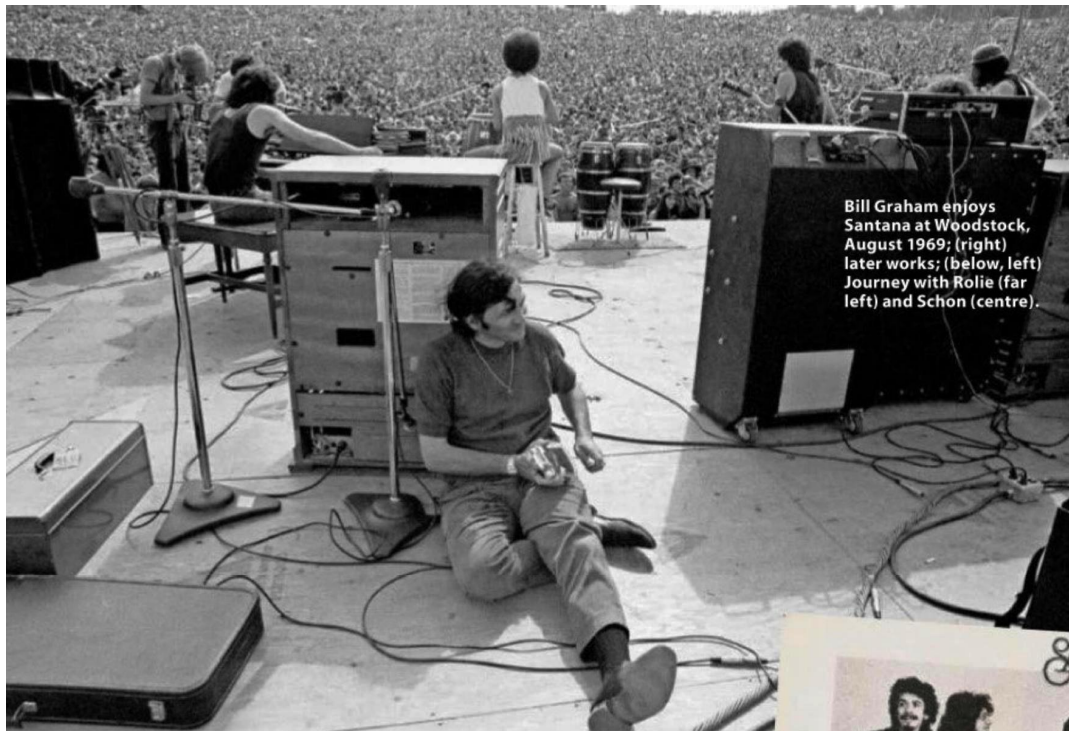
Coke Escovedo brought mixed blessings. "He had very much won Carlos's ear," says Shrieve, while others noted the wedge it drove between bandleader and manager Marcum. "Coke made too much trouble," producer David Robinson told Rolling Stone in 1972.

There followed an eventful meeting in September 1971, at which Carlos declared he would not embark on the upcoming Santana tour if both Marcum and Carabello were involved. "Because they're supplying the band with the heavy stuff and we sound like shit," he said, recounting the conversation in *The Universal Tone*.

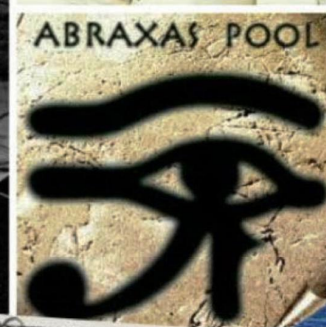
But they stayed, and, quite unbelievably, *he* was out.

IT WAS ONLY FOR A FEW DATES, BUT THERE'S A CHANCE that if you saw Santana perform in October 1971, you did not actually see – or hear – Carlos Santana. It still seems bizarre, and hard to imagine how the band justified sacking their own bandleader.

"Well, I figure it's more like how did *Carlos* have the balls to ➤



Bill Graham enjoys Santana at Woodstock, August 1969; (right) later works; (below, left) Journey with Rolie (far left) and Schon (centre).



“Get rid of this guy or I don’t come,” maintains Shrieve. “It was a real power play. But it was also Carlos saying, ‘I’m serious about this and I’m not going to be involved with people who aren’t taking their responsibilities seriously.’”

Neal Schon remembers that time very well. When he’d been brought in to join the band, he was already a good friend of Rolie’s, and he’d developed a strong relationship with Santana himself. He was 15 then; he’s 62 now.

“We hung out all the time,” says Schon today. “We were kind of inseparable. We had some really amazing experiences all over the world. And I was just taking it all in. I was pretty shy, but I was determined and very sure of myself as a guitar player.”

Santana notes that it was Schon, on the road with the Santana-less Santana, who rang and asked him to rejoin. Carlos said it would only happen if Carabello and Marcum left. “It was actually really crazy and uncomfortable for me,” says Schon. “But I remember, we were playing Boston Gardens. There started to be a lot of fallout inside the band. I got turned on to some not so good things, which took me a while to get out of and get back to myself. I’m glad to be there now.”

Schon made the call, Santana flew to New York and percussionist Mingo Lewis was drafted to fill in for Carabello. Carlos had regained control of his band, a victory almost immediately audible in the spiritual questing (he would soon become a disciple of Sri Chinmoy) and impressionistic jazz-fusion textures of fourth Santana album *Caravanserai*. From its opening track *Eternal Caravan Of Reincarnation* — where the sound of crickets merged with Hadley Caliman’s nebulous sax groan — to its near-10-minute closer *Every Step Of The*

“I WILL
BE CLEAR.
WITHOUT ME,
IT’S A TRIBUTE.
WITH ME, IT’S
SANTANA.”
CARLOS SANTANA

Way, penned by Shrieve, the mostly instrumental album was an abrupt departure both for Santana fans and for several band members. Schon and Rolie stuck around, but barely.

“There were just different dynamics,” says Neal Schon now. “Everybody was into a different thing. When we were in the middle of that record, [Carlos] was very moved by John McLaughlin — which is obvious to everyone after that because he did play with John [on 1973’s *Love Devotion Surrender*]. Gregg and I sort of wanted to stay where we were at on *Santana III*.”

Michael Shrieve stayed with Santana through 1973’s *Welcome* and the next year’s *Borboletta* before heading off to the UK. “It drove everybody else crazy, the direction that we were going in musically,” he says today. “I mean, it *really* did. Not just drove them crazy, it pissed them off. And that’s why [Rolie and Schon] went and started Journey.”

By 1978’s *Inner Secrets*, the only familiar name longtime Santana fans would see in album sleeve credits was Carlos Santana’s.

THERE IS A MID-AFTERNOON PRESS CONFERENCE in front of the House Of Blues today, all within the cavernous expanse of the Mandalay Bay’s casino area. The public is invited. The subject matter is the Original Santana Band performance, taking place in a few short hours. Hotel, House Of Blues, and video production executives will speak, as will members of the Original Santana Band.

The biggest applause comes with the introduction of Carlos Santana himself, who walks to the microphone exuding the warmth

Baron Wolman/Iconic Images, Getty Images, Maryanne Billham

and sincerity that is uniquely his, then pointedly credits Neal Schon, standing with him on-stage, for making it all happen. "Neal is the one that made it possible for us to believe that this is the perfect time for us to create this music one more time," Santana says. "Because we are the band that really tore it up at Woodstock, and Altamont – and the time that we did it, it was perfect, because at that time there was the Vietnam War and Richard Nixon and LBJ. And now it's Donald Trump and it's the same *shit*, you know?"

There is applause and laughter at the mention of that name.

"So we're here again to do the same thing that we did at Woodstock, with the hippies' things. We really believe the same thing that John Lennon, the same thing that Bob Marley, we really believe, like The Doors, that music, and your heart and my heart, can transform fear. Let us conquer fear on this planet – with your light and your heart and the music."

Putting the love'n Haight buzzwords aside, it's been a long time since a Santana band reunion seemed anything like plausible. "I think that Carlos and Gregg really had not talked for years," says Schon. "I didn't really know the ramifications behind it, or if they liked each other or whatever."

In 1997 – with Rolie long departed from a Journey who had transformed from progressive unit ("a San Francisco jam band on steroids," smiles Schon) into a radio-rock staple, and Carlos poised to unleash the duets-fuelled, monster-hit *Supernatural* album – there was even a revival of the Santana-free Santana idea, with an album by a band called Abraxas Pool featuring Rolie, Carabello, Shrieve, Areas, Schon, and Alphonso Johnson, bassist on several '80s Santana albums. "When we got together, it was a Santana vibe," says Rolie. "I lived in Novato, California at the time, and I had a little cabin up there, in Marin County, up on top of this hill, and it overlooked this valley, and the place was *levitating* from the music."

So for Carlos Santana, getting the old band back together has been no trifle. "I think everybody tried different ways without me personally in the centre of what they're doing," he says now. "Because it *is* called the Santana band for a reason, and I don't mean to sound this-or-that, yet I will be clear..." He points down at the table settings. "This is a knife, this is a fork, and it is what it is. Without me, it's a tribute. With me, it's Santana."

THOUGH HE MAY BE AT THE CENTRE OF THINGS BY definition – his band has borne his name for a near-half-century – Carlos Santana is the first to admit he gets as much as gives. "What I bring to the centre are the things that I've learned from all of them," he says. "From Michael Shrieve I learned Coltrane and Miles, from Gregg Rolie I learned The Rolling Stones and The Beatles, from Michael Carabello I learned Sly Stone and Jimi Hendrix – *everybody* in the band has taught me something."

So the obvious question: getting together with them again, after all these years, what was it like? Would you consider yourselves... friends?

"That's a great question," he says. "I think we have always been *brothers* – but we forgot to be friends. And I think what happened, with the friendship going out the window, was because we were blindsided by what Bill Graham [had] said: that we would be victims of an avalanche of adulation before we were prepared. Nobody is really prepared. Michael Jackson, Whitney Houston, Marvin Gaye, Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison, Janis Joplin, the guy from Nirvana, *nobody* is prepared for the adulation worldwide that you get."

They close *Santana IV* with a song called Forgiveness. Does the title have a special meaning for this group?

"Forgiveness, to me, is this," says Santana. "There are three kinds of speeds that we know: the speed of sound, the speed of light, and the speed and velocity of *forgiveness*. Once you forgive, you don't have to remember, because you let it go and you release it. So don't bullshit yourself, man: 'I'll forgive but I can't forget.' That's BS. You're playing games with your ego, you know?"

"To forgive, you're moving really *fast*. That's velocity, and that's speed. Because now you're moving at the speed of... at the speed of a *saint*."

On-stage at the House Of Blues, a few hours after MOJO's interviews, there are no hints of anything other than mutual appreciation, however recently re-forged. New songs from *Santana IV* stand proudly next to Soul Sacrifice, Jingo and Black Magic Woman, while there are grins aplenty, most conspicuously on the face of Carlos Santana.

"Music is everything to Carlos," Gregg Rolie had said earlier. "I mean *everything*. He eats it, drinks it, sleeps it, everything. And so he's constantly changing. That's just how it goes. When he wants to get to another place, he'll find somebody to take him to that place, so it's really about the music. After reading his book, it was like – oh, *now* I get it. Because we never *talked*, we'd never talk about things. I understand it now."

Are the tensions the band might've felt in the early days now dissipated? Has time done that?

"This music healed a lot of wounds without a word being said," says Rolie. "It's just – look forward. All we're doing is being who we are, and getting along because we want to. It's a funny thing about saying yes."

He laughs.

"Small words, man. That's a *huge* word."

M

LATIN LESSONS

THE CLASSIC SANTANA ALBUMS, IN CLAVE.

BY DANNY ECCLESTON

SANTANA

★★★★

Columbia, 1969



This cornerstone of the group's reputation retains a 'live'-ness befitting an essentially improvisational collective. 2004's reissue adds all 45 earthy, urgent minutes of their life-changing Woodstock set and the LA sessions from January 1969, whose inferior guitar sounds alone prove the wisdom of the venue change to San Mateo.

ABRAXAS

★★★★★

Columbia, 1970



A weirder, more magical, third-eyed dilated vibe permeates the classic line-up's masterpiece, with debts to The Doors and electric Miles but also Carlos Santana's most unforgettably melodic guitar playing on Black Magic Woman and the all-instrumental Samba Pa Ti. Simultaneously syncopated, psychedelic and sophisticated.

ic), with teenage prodigy Neal Schon showcased on No One To Depend On and horn-parping R&B banger Everybody's Everything. The echt Latin-jazz piano of Guajira adds variety, but the 2006 edition's stunning live version of Miles's In A Silent Way better indicates where Carlos's head was er, heading.

CARAVANSERAI

★★★

Columbia, 1972



Great playing and daring ideas – the near-two-minutes of crickets and avant-sax that opens the whole thing is inspired – but haunted by an overall sense of Carlos not going as far as he'd like, while the vocal numbers sound incongruous. Fans missed the fiery grooves of yore. So did the label. And the band.

SANTANA III

★★★★

Columbia, 1971



Shape-shifting fare (Batuka could be Funkadel-



Santana today: (from left) Mike Carabello, Carlos, Gregg Rolie, Neal Schon, Michael Shrieve.