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Santana: Finally Reborn

The band's classic lineup stunned Woodstock, then began to implode. Now, it has pulled off one of rock's most overdue reunions

BY ANDY GREENE

I JUST HAD AN EPIPHANY!" SAYS Carlos Santana, during a rehearsal at the Las Vegas House of Blues. His band, Santana, has just finished the raucous 1971 track "Everybody's Everything." "This song is like a nice filet mignon," he continues. "We can play it in the set right after 'Evil Ways' and 'Soul Sacrifice.'" The group starts "Love Makes the World Go Round," from its new album, *Santana IV*, but Carlos stops it abruptly. It seems Michael Shrieve is hitting his drums a little too hard. "I don't want it to sound like Bruce Springsteen," Santana says. "Try it softer."

If the band sounds a bit rusty, there's a good reason: It hasn't played a full show together since 1971. After a nasty breakup, the members headed in all directions, ending up everywhere from other famous bands to jail. Although Carlos carried on under the Santana name – eventually selling 11.8 million copies of 1999's *Supernatural* – his group's classic lineup cast a long shadow. These were the guys who forged Santana's signature sound, who cut hits like "Black Magic Woman" and "Oye Como Va," and who played a stunning set at Woodstock, after Carlos took a hit of mescaline from Jerry Garcia and tripped so hard he saw his guitar neck turn into a snake.

By the time Santana take the stage at the House of Blues in front of a capacity crowd, the kinks from yesterday's rehearsal have been worked out. The band opens with a long version of the 1969 instrumental "Soul Sacrifice," with every member taking a solo. As Shrieve re-creates the iconic drum solo he played at Woodstock, Carlos beams with pride from the side of the stage, and the rest of the set smokes. "We can now offer each other 45 years of acquired wisdom," he says the morning after. "We all have a deeper appreciation for one another, and now we have a second chance."

They first came together as the Santana Blues Band in San Francisco's Mission District



REUNITED

Carlos Santana (above) in Las Vegas in March. Below, from left: Rolie, Santana, Schon, Shrieve and Carabello. "We can now offer each other 45 years of acquired wisdom," Santana says. "We all have a deeper appreciation of one another."

whole body said, "This is a distraction from the spirit and it will throw you in a ditch."

But drugs were not the only issue. "We were too young to appreciate it the first time around," says Santana. "I was so invested in my agenda. It was my, my, my, my, my, my. Also, nobody was equipped to handle the adulation."

There was also an intense disagreement over the band's sound. Rolie and Schon wanted to embrace their rock sides. Carlos wanted to experiment with jazz fusion, and he brought a parade of new musicians into the studio to record 1972's *Caravanserai*. The results horrified Columbia Records chief Clive



MARYANNE BILHAM, 2

Davis. "I remember sitting in his office and just staring into a candle," says Santana. "Clive said, 'There's not a single here within a thousand miles! Why do you have to do this? There's already Weather Report! There's already Herbie [Hancock] and Miles [Davis]. I said, 'We don't want to rubber-stamp another "Black Magic Woman" and "Oye Como Va." Santana is thirsty for adventure!'"

Tensions within Santana got so bad that Carlos was essentially tossed out of his own band during one East Coast tour, in 1971. He had given the group an ultimatum: Either certain members lay off the drugs and devote more time to practice, or he was out. The band chose to fly off to tour without him. But after a couple of shows, it became quite clear that a Carlos-free Santana wasn't going to work. "I think the first one was at Boston Garden, and it went off OK," says Schon. "But then I got heckled the whole time the second night. And that was the end of that."

Rolie and Schon left in 1974 to form Journey. Rolie stayed with the new band until 1980, then watched as a new frontman, Steve Perry, helped turn Journey into "Don't Stop Believin'"—powered stadium killers. Rolie was left in a strange position: He was the original singer in two hugely popular bands, but hardly anyone had ever heard of him. When he told people he sang "Black Magic Woman" and "Evil Ways," they often didn't even believe him. "I was never bitter," he says. "I was always like, 'Good for you guys. I helped build that.'"

Some of Rolie's former Santana bandmates suffered worse fates. Bassist David Brown died of liver and kidney failure in 2000. Timbales player Jose "Chepito" Areas was arrested in 1996 for allegedly molesting two children, and wasn't invited back for the reunion. Percussionist Marcus "The Magnificent" Malone was with Santana at the band's formation, but months before Woodstock he was caught having sex with another man's wife. In the ensuing fight, he stabbed the man to death. Malone was convicted of manslaughter and spent three years in San Quentin.

Three years ago, a TV news crew discovered Malone living on the streets of Oakland and orchestrated an on-camera reunion with Santana, who hoped to bring him into the studio. "We got together after our meeting on the street," Carlos says, "and I could tell he hadn't played in years. He didn't have the strength or stamina."

In 1997, Santana's Woodstock lineup (minus Brown and Carlos) released an album under the name Abraxas Pool. But once again the members learned the public had no interest in a Santana-free Santana. "That was a really good record," says Shrieve. "But if Carlos wasn't there, people didn't care."



SOUL SACRIFICE

Shrieve, Carabello and Carlos
Santana at Woodstock, August 1969

Shrieve – whose biggest brush with fame post-Santana was playing percussion on the Rolling Stones' *Emotional Rescue* – swears he wasn't bitter at the success that Carlos achieved without him and his bandmates, not even when *Supernatural* swept the 2000 Grammys. "I cried in

"The Doors are my favorite group," Santana says. "And I keep saying we're like them if only they had some more discipline."

joy," Shrieve insists. "He deserved every bit of it."

The classic Santana lineup played its Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction ceremony in 1998, but members remained skeptical a full reunion would ever happen. It took a series of random encounters with Schon to convince Carlos to reunite the band. "I kept running into Carlos in the Bay Area," Schon says. "I said to him, 'If you really want to turn everybody's head around, we should get the original band back together.'" Schon eventually wore Carlos down. "It seemed like everywhere I go, this cat is there," says Santana. "His eyes became very vulnerable, very ego-less."

Finally, in 2014, Schon was summoned to Santana's rehearsal space in Las Vegas for what he thought was a meeting about a possible reunion. "I arrive and hear [the band playing]," says the guitarist. "I said, 'I thought we were gonna talk.' He goes, 'No, man, this is the meeting.' It was surreal."

The bandmates cut an album of new material within weeks and called it *Santana IV* to make clear they were carrying on right where they left off. "When we play together, it can't help but sound like anyone but us," says percussionist Michael Carabello. "It feels good to be home."

The morning after the reunion concert, Santana is sitting in the conference room of his new Las Vegas office. An original Woodstock poster hangs on one wall, along with a mural of ticket stubs from his 1984 co-headlining tour with Bob Dylan. There's a tiny meditation room with an image of Buddha on the wall near a detailed chart of the seven chakras.

Santana is feeling good about last night's show. "The Doors are my favorite group," he says, "and I keep saying we're like them if only they had the sort of discipline that doesn't lead to distraction and destruction." But even in the wake of such a triumph, his mind drifts to other places. He wants to fight the rise of Trumpism by staging a grand summit of peace and love: "What I want is to invite the pope, the Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, and others who have won Nobel Peace Prizes, seven men and seven women, and invite them together, like in a *Star Trek* movie. We can go to the Sydney Opera House or a resort in Honolulu."

Future plans for the original Santana are unclear. Rolie spent the past four years as the keyboardist in Ringo Starr's All Starr Band and is back on the road with them this summer; Schon has more than 50 Journey dates on the books. "There's been no talk of a tour," says Shrieve. "It drives you crazy, but I've come to the realization that if it's gonna happen, it's gonna happen, just like this whole thing."