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REFUEL

CARLOS SANTANA AND NEAL SCHON REIGNITE THEIR MUSICAL FLAME

BY JIMMY LESLIE

From left: Benny Rietveld, Michael Shrieve, Gregg Rolie, Carlos Santana, Michael Carabello, Neal Schon, Karl Perazza



RED!

"MY THIRST FOR ADVENTURE IS STILL KICKING," SAYS Carlos Santana, who turns 69 in July. "*Santana IV* is very vibrant and energetic. We don't sound our age, and Neal brings a fire that's like a vortex—a tornado of light."

The larger story of the new *Santana IV* [Thirty Tigers/RED Distribution] is about a classic Santana lineup reuniting, with Carlos Santana and Neal Schon returning to the dual-guitar attack they unleashed on 1971's *Santana III* and 1972's *Caravanserai*. And that

partnership wouldn't have ever happened if Eric Clapton had successfully recruited the teenaged Schon, who found himself having to choose between Clapton and Santana before he was even old enough to drive a car.

"I had been playing with [Santana keyboardist/vocalist] Gregg Rolie, and I was hanging with the Santana band at Wally Heider's studio in San Francisco [now Hyde Street Studios] where they were cutting *Abraxas*," recalls Schon. "Carlos was already thinking

COVER STORY

CARLOS SANTANA & NEAL SCHON

about the group's third album, and while we were jamming on some of those ideas in the live room with Carlos on bass or drums, Clapton walked in the door. We traded leads for about an hour, and we didn't even have a conversation, because I was scared to death, but Eric left a note inviting me to his gig at the Berkeley Community Theatre the next night. Afterwards, I played the 'Crossroads' solo from *Wheels of Fire* note for note in his hotel room, and he invited me to join his band. The next day, I also got asked to join Santana."

"I'm honored and complimented that he choose to go with us, rather than my brother, Eric," says Santana.

According to Schon, he played lead on the funky single from *Santana III*, "Everybody's Everything," and he was surprised at how much they let him shine. But just when the Santana band was rocking hardest together, it began drifting apart. Santana abandoned much of his trademark Latin-rock sound for the jazzy, mostly instrumental material on *Caravanserai* (an album label chief Clive Davis reportedly called "career suicide")—and Schon and Rolie split off to form the pop juggernaut Journey in 1973.

"I don't have any Journey albums in my house," says Santana. "I don't mean to be dismissive, but it's simply not for me. But Gregg was right when we played at the Diamond Head Crater in Honolulu around '71 or '72. He said, 'Carlos, I know you're thirsty to hang around with John McLaughlin, but one day you're going to wake up and realize there's a special chemistry right here.'"

For many years thereafter, Santana and Schon would bump into each other occasionally, and then their meetings became more and more frequent.

"I took this as a sign that it was time to make Carlos crazy [laughs], and get back together," says Schon. "I was invited to what I thought was an office meeting in Las Vegas, but as I was approaching the building, I could hear Carlos, Gregg, Michael Shrieve [drums], and Michael Carabello [percussion] already playing. I didn't have any of my own gear, but I had brought a beautiful new PRS NS-14 as a gift for Carlos. He handed it back to me, plugged it into a cool amp, and we jammed for hours."

With longtime Santana bassist Benny
Continues on page 48

GUITAR TECH ED ADAIR ON CARLOS SANTANA'S STUDIO AND LIVE RIGS

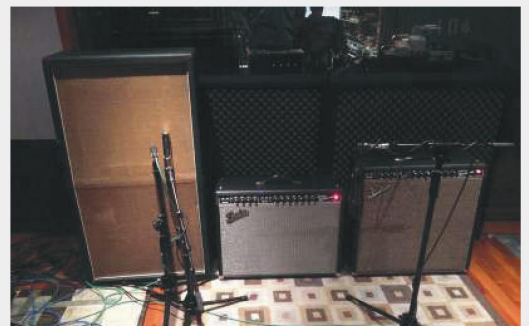
"CARLOS USED A YELLOW FENDER

Custom Shop Stratocaster to lead the band on the main tracking for *Santana IV* in April 2015," reports Adair, who joined the Santana crew in 1988. "He played the detuned part on 'Forgiveness' using a black Strat put together from various parts. That's the only alternate tuning on the record, and, from low to high, it's C, G, C, G, B, E. Carlos was set up in the control room with his amp heads, and a Real McCoy RMC10 wah.

"His signal ran through a custom Pete Cornish amp splitter to his cabinets in a vocal isolation booth. The signals favored most in the final mix came from a Mesa/Boogie King Snake 1x12 combo and a 100-watt Blutodone Universal Tone head driving a Tyrant Tone Dictator 4x12 cabinet loaded with Weber Gray Wolf speakers. Also available was a vintage 50-watt Marshall plexi head with EL34 tubes driving a Marshall 8x10 cabinet loaded with four of its original Celestions, and four Tone Tubby San Rafael speakers.

"Carlos tracked 'Sueños' using a Toru Nittono Jazz Electric Nylon Model T with GHS La Classique strings plugged into an Avalon U5 Instrument and DI Preamplifier. He uses the same guitar live plugged into a custom Pete Cornish direct box.

Carlos Santana used a variety of amps and cabs for the *Santana IV* sessions, including the Dumble and Marshall plexi pictured above and an 8x10 Marshall cab (right).





ED ADAIR

"Once the band had its ideas together, tracking went very quickly. They'd play a song through once, twice, or maybe three times, and then move on. Some tracks, such as 'Yambu' and 'Forgiveness,' were fully formed and ready to mix with solos and all.

"Carlos used the black Strat to record overdubs at Narada Michael Walden's Tarpan Studios in San Rafael, California, and we stripped back the rig a bit. We tracked with a 50-watt Bludotone loaded with 6V6 output tubes through a Tone Tubby 4x12 loaded with their Red Alnico hemp-cone speakers. We used a Royer ribbon mic and a Beyerdynamic mic up close, and a couple of big tube mics for room ambiance.

"We also used a Fractal Audio Systems Axe-FX II XL+ to fill out the tones a little bit. I found a Bludotone amp model in that, and I tweaked it to sound pretty much like Carlos' 100-watt Universal Tone. We added some delay and a bit of reverb from the console during mixing.

"Carlos' current go-to guitar onstage

is a custom 24-fret PRS with a single-cut-away mahogany body covered in 14-karat gold leaf. It has an Indian rosewood fretboard, Phase III locking tuners, and PRS' latest signature Santana pickups. He prefers very little neck relief, if any, on his guitars. His strings are GHS Big Core Extra Light, gauged .095, .0115, .016, .023, .033 .043. Dunlop makes his big, black, .030mm nylon medium-soft triangle picks.

"His live signal chain starts with a Pete Cornish LD-1 Line Driver, then it hits an RMC10 wah, and an Eventide H9 Max—which is a cool multi-effects unit I can control remotely via an app on my phone. We use that when Carlos decides he wants to try incorporating whatever effect he's feeling on any given night. From there, the signal goes to a custom Pete Cornish 6-way amp splitter.

"The live amp situation is similar to what we use for basic tracking in the studio. It's the same 100-watt Bludotone Universal Tone head driving the Tyrant Tone Dictator 4x12. The Bludotone shares that cabinet with a 100-watt

Where the black magic happens—Santana's live rig.

Dumble Overdrive Reverb head with 6L6 power tubes. A custom switcher allows the cabinet to be driven by either the Bludo or the Dumble. In addition, Carlos uses the original Mesa/Boogie 'Budo-kan' Mark I 1x12 combo that spawned the King Snake. Essentially, the Bludo or the Dumble provides the low mids and bottom end, and the Boogie provides the high mids and top end.

"We also use the Fractal Axe-FX to feed the monitor console with a dry signal for level consistency, and the front-of-house mixer gets the Bludo amp model with a bit of reverb and delay. We use that in the rare event that an amp has trouble onstage." —JL

COVER STORY

CARLOS SANTANA & NEAL SCHON

Continued from page 46

Rietveld honoring the chair once held by the late David Brown, and percussionist Karl Perazzo replacing original member Jose Chepito Areas, the group tracked *Santana IV* mostly live at Audio Mix House Studios in Las Vegas. Many tracks started as long jams that were eventually arranged and produced by Santana himself using Pro Tools to cut and paste ideas together into songs like puzzles. Other than a surprising tonal curveball to be discussed later, it's pretty easy to identify Santana's signature style mostly in the left speaker, and Schon's more effected sound largely in the right speaker—just like on *Santana III*.

Remarkably, the band pretty much picks up right where the third album left off a whopping 45 years ago. The interplay between Schon and Santana is stellar throughout. "Echizo" features Schon's soaring melodies and Santana's unbridled, wah-drenched soloing over a brisk bed of Latin rhythms. "Fillmore East"

evokes the vibe of the legendary venue, "All Aboard" is wall-to-wall rock and roll, and "You and I" begins as a ballad, ramps up with Santana's dynamic soloing over a bossa nova feel, and then takes off towards the heavens with Schon's fiery outro solo.

Santana's endlessly expressive bends punctuate the heavenly "Blues Magic," and he shows his nylon-string prowess with the romantic melody for the first half of the instrumental "Sueños," before switching to his signature electric tone. However, the sound on the introductory track, "Yambu," is sharp and dangerous, and Santana credits one of his guitar heroes for the turn of tone.


"Yambu," kicks off with a snarling wah before falling into a super slinky rhythm that most wouldn't associate with Santana. What's going on?

Santana: I used a Paul Reed Smith guitar for "Sueños," but with all due respect to my brother and great friend, I recorded everything

else on *Santana IV* with a gnarly, funky Stratocaster that I found in Chicago. I wanted claws and fangs, and the Stratocaster is incredible for that. I'll eventually do another album with the sound I've been using for many years that's like a warm, smooth hug, but, recently, something inside me wants to be divinely vicious. I got the first sound on "Yambu" using the Strat's treble pickup with the wah totally open. That's the only pedal I really use. Onstage, I play nothing but PRS. Well, actually, I did play one whole concert at Madison Square Garden in '05 or '06 using only a Strat and Stevie Ray Vaughan's 007 Dumble amplifier. That's another story.

Would you mind sharing it?

Santana: Stevie Ray kept coming into my dreams. In the first one, I was playing at the Catalyst in Santa Cruz. I asked him, "Is it my time, are you coming to get me?" He said, "No, no. Carlos, I miss the feeling of my fingers touching the guitar, and hearing that sound coming out of the Dumble's speaker."





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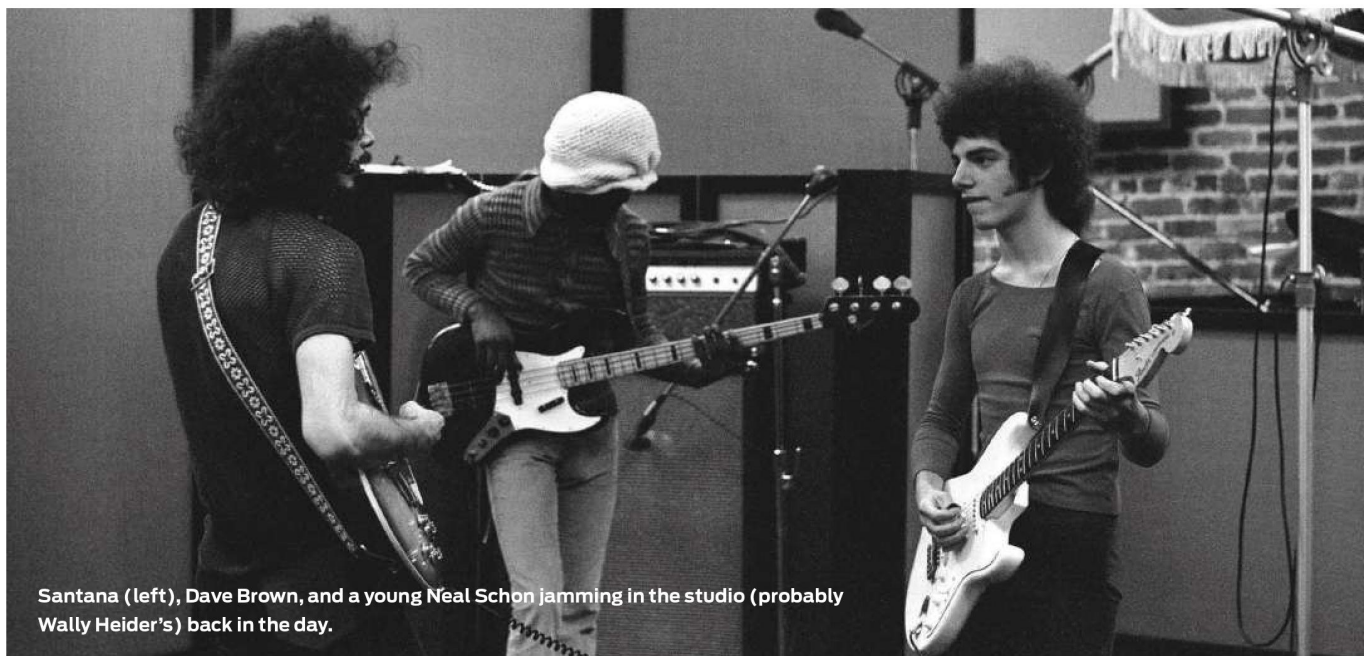


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Santana (left), Dave Brown, and a young Neal Schon jamming in the studio (probably Wally Heider's) back in the day.

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A large advertisement for Allen Eden Guitars. The main image shows a person's hands holding a 1987 Allen Eden guitar with a distinctive burl maple body and a dark fretboard. The person is wearing a plaid shirt. The background is a textured, stone-like surface.

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COVER STORY

CARLOS SANTANA & NEAL SCHON



Dueling Licks—Drummer Michael Shrieve watches the Santana-Schon onslaught.

Tell my brother to lend you the amplifier so you can play it, and I can feel you.”

I had that dream twice, so I called Jimmie Vaughan. He said, “No way in hell will I lend you the amplifier.” I told him that it was no problem. I was just doing what his brother told me to do in a dream. But then, René Martinez—my friend who was Stevie’s main guitar tech and is now with John Mayer—said, “Carlos, I had the same dream when I was in Hawaii. Stevie told me to tell Jimmie to lend you the amplifier.”

Wow.

Santana: That’s my life. The intangible is very tangible to me. People accuse me of being crazy, and I always say, “My craziness is working. How is your sanity working for you?” So, sure enough, the next thing I know, Jimmie calls and says, “Okay. You can come and pick up the amplifier, man.” I sent it to my dear friend Alexander Dumble, and he cleaned up the rust that had accumulated from the amp not being used. When I played that concert using an

old, beat-up Strat and heavy strings like Stevie used, my fingers were like, “Dahl!” And I was thinking, “Oh my god—this is insanity.” But I kept hearing a voice saying, “Man up! Man up!” [Laughs.]

That’s how you get Stevie Ray’s tone.

Santana: That’s it from a gear perspective, but it’s ultimately about commitment. You’ve got to be willing to die for the next note—like the Black Panthers. Go for that note, no matter what. If you get a heart attack, then die, but *get that note*. If you don’t have that intense intentionality, I can give you Stevie Ray’s guitar and his amplifier, and you ain’t gonna sound like that. Stevie, Albert King, and Albert Collins had it. They had the same samurai sword. “Swoosh! Swoosh!” They play three notes, and there’s a bunch of decapitated guys on the floor [laughs].

Neal, what was your thought process as you entered the studio and found Carlos brandishing a Strat?

Schon: I brought a bunch of different

guitars so I could adapt to whatever he was doing and enhance it, rather than being in the same sonic space. I tried a few of my favorite signature PRS NS-15s—15-inch semi-hollowbodies—but they didn’t quite mesh with all the percussion and what Carlos was doing. They were too big and thick, and they didn’t cut through. I wound using the prototype for my new signature Paul Reed Smith—a 13-inch solidbody with a Floyd Rose tremolo and a wide, flat neck. I believe I played that on “Fillmore East,” and “Caminando” using the neck pickup. I often ended up a custom Fender, because it was a good sonic fit with a voice somewhere between a thicker-sounding Fender and a Gibson SG.

Can you provide some details?

Schon: I had Fender make three one-offs with the same unique design. They have mahogany necks and bodies with curly maple tops. They have easy-access necks—which is something I came up with years ago when I was with Gibson.

COVER STORY

CARLOS SANTANA & NEAL SCHON

The hump at the base of the neck where it joins the body is taken out to facilitate easier access to the upper register. I actually sent Fender my Les Paul to replicate the neck, so my custom Fenders have a shorter, Gibson-style scale length, as well. It's a neck-into-body design, but not a neck-through-body design. The tremolo system is a Floyd Rose sunk all way into the body—much like I have it on the Paul.

I've been using the same pickup configuration for quite some time. I have a Seymour Duncan Custom Custom in the bridge position, and a DiMarzio Fast Track in the neck. This provides a thick, warm, Strat-y sound from whatever guitar I put it in, and it cleans up nicely when you roll back the volume. And then there's a customized Fernandes Sustainer pickup, fine-tuned so there's virtually no tone suck at all when I flick it on. I use it when I want the guitar to sound more like a voice.

Carlos, you've been using Dumble and Boogie amps for a long time, and now you're big on Bludotone. What do you get specifically from each?

Santana: I play with three amplifiers, because the Boogie is like the tone you get from your throat up to your head, the Dumble is like the chest to the belly button, and the Bludo is like the belly button to the feet. So, like a singer, you've got head tones, chest tones, and belly tones. The Bludo gives me more bass than I could ever get from a Dumble. When I mentioned that to Alexander Dumble, he got a little shaken up. I said, "Hey man, can you put more bass on your amplifiers, because the sound is too much in the middle. He actually said, "Nobody tells me..." I answered, "I'm not telling you what to do. I'm just saying that if you'd like to make another amplifier for me, can you make it with more bass?" We're still friends, but he didn't take it too kindly.

But as Alexander wouldn't do the bass voicing for me, I found this cat in Colorado who would [Brandon Montgomery]. Bass is masculine. Bass is Coltrane. Miles is feminine. Miles is high like the Boogie. Now, I hit one note using all three amps and it's like, "Oh, this is nice." I don't know how to put it in technical terms, I only know that the sound I envision is like Otis Rush and Buddy Guy combined with the warm, bassy tone of Wes Montgomery.

What was your sonic strategy for Santana IV, Neal?

Schon: I decided to bring a little Fender Super Sonic 1x12 combo, because I'd been playing through it at home, and I thought it was one of the better-sounding new Fenders I'd heard. It was like this jumped-up Deluxe that I used to love. My effects came from a Fractal Axe-FX II that I hooked up in stereo and controlled by foot. I used some of its Fender, Friedman, and Diezel amp models.

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CARLOS SANTANA & NEAL SCHON

The Diezel had a bit more size and punch. I used that on “Shake It.” The only pedals I had were a wah and a Wampler Velvet Fuzz with the fuzz turned way down and the volume turned up to get a really creamy tone—like the solo on “Anywhere You Want to Go.” I had a few wah-wah pedals to choose from, including a CryBaby reissue, and the Jimi Hendrix and Buddy Guy signature wahs. I used a wah primarily as a notch filter throughout *Santana III*, but I only used wah on “Shake It” from *Santana IV*, because I could hear Carlos jumping on his wah constantly when we were trading solos.

Santana: Neal brought in his subtonic, supersonic riffs for “Shake It,” and I was like, “Damn. Is this in 4/4? It is? Okay, where’s beat 1?”

Schon: We actually interacted more on *Santana IV*, because we’re both better listeners now. In the earlier days, it was like a tradeoff. One of us would play rhythm on a section while the other played lead. This

record was kind of a free for all. It was created off the cuff and on the spot. In order to do that, you have to listen. Most cats are busy looking down at the fretboard wondering, “How am I going to play this arpeggio here?” But it’s not about all the knowledge you have over the instrument. It’s about opening your ears and creating something together. For the most part, I think you have to close your eyes. You have to be blind so you can simply play what you’re hearing.

How were you set up?

Schon: I was out in the main room with the drums wearing headphones. Carlos was in the control room—which is where I’m used to being, because I don’t like listening with headsets. I like to be in the control room listening really quietly through the monitors. I find that helps me play more accurately in tune and in time. At one point, when I was having a hard time hearing myself, I even tried to move into the control room with Carlos, but he had the big monitors on at

about 130dB, and I thought, “Oh, I have to get out of here!”

Did you wind up doing overdubs?

Schon: We tracked a lot of the album live, and then we did some overdubs. Most of my solos were done in one take. They happened in the moment during the initial tracking sessions of four or five days. We wound up with one day left, so I took that opportunity to go audition everything I did, because I couldn’t hear very well out there.

Carlos, why did you choose a nylon-string for the acoustic parts of “Sueños”?

Santana: With nylon strings, I get more of the sound I want—like Bola Sete, Paco (de Lucia), Manitas de Plata, and Segovia. Steel strings take me more towards Chet Atkins and bluegrass. There’s nothing wrong with that, but I just don’t hear the acoustic that way.

It seems clear that much of your traditionally round electric tone is derived from your approach to the nylon-string acoustic.

Santana: I never really took the time



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Everything's Coming Our Way (Again)—(left to right) Schon, Santana, Benny Rietveld, and Gregg Rolie.

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CARLOS SANTANA & NEAL SCHON

to focus on it until you just said that. Ultimately, playing electric guitars and nylon-string acoustics are the easiest way for my heart, brain, and fingers to arrive at a voice that sounds like Billie Holiday and Aretha Franklin. Songs like “Sueños” remind me of my father serenading my mother. I’m consistently and persistently wanting to have a vocal sound, because when you play a romantic melody, women remember not to be invested with anything other than that moment with you. European music is a lot more invested in romance. American music is invested more in roller coasters, hot dogs, and loud movies. There ain’t nothing like romance to make you feel thirsty for a hug and a touch, and for someone to look at me like I’m a piece of chocolate cake.

Are there any songs on the record you’d like to discuss a bit deeper?

Santana: “Blues Magic.” I was like a kid pretending that I could be Otis Rush, so when I hit those notes, all I could see was Otis

Rush’s face. We’re good friends, man. When I played in Chicago last year, he came to see me. He was in a wheelchair. He doesn’t play anymore. I played that song, and he immediately looked at me like, “You got it. You found my core—why I play like that.” I felt like I’d graduated. Just like Stevie Ray graduated from Albert King, at that moment I felt like I’d graduated from the Otis Rush school of tone and emotion.

I’d rather hear one note by Otis Rush, than listen to a guitar player who has 20 pedals and incredible technical facility. That note by Otis Rush gives me chills for days, man. I start crying. I get sensually aroused. I want to touch Jesus’ feet. If someone else plays a bunch of notes that fly by, and I might go, “Wow, that’s impressive, but [snores]—it’s boring to me.” What’s *not* boring to me is the spirit of the Holy Ghost, and I can hear that in Freddie King, Albert King, B.B. King, and Wes Montgomery.

Schon: Carlos played some amazing blues

on that track. I was happy to just sit there and play the chords behind him. I had written those chords against a rumba rhythm—kind of like “Black Magic Woman.” I was looking for an early Peter Green-style minor blues. It was my idea to go into “Echizo” out of that, like they did with “Black Magic Woman” going into Gabor Szabo’s “Gypsy Queen.”

How did you compose “Echizo?”

Schon: I’ve been doing a lot of writing by jamming at home with a looper, and that’s how I found “Echizo.” Carlos and Gregg took a few chords out. I originally incorporated a couple of major seventh chords that made the cycle a little bit longer, and they turned the progression into a straight, 12-bar minor blues.

The final track, “Forgiveness,” is an ethereal instrumental with some wild, detuned guitar that comes in and out. How did that come about?

Schon: It’s funny. While we were right in the middle of playing it, Carlos grabbed

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CARLOS SANTANA & NEAL SCHON

a Strat and detuned the whole thing! I was thinking, "What the hell is he doing, man?" He hit that big, rumbling chord, and it was just so cool—so out. That's why I love being around Carlos. Once I'd listened back to the final mix a few times, I also realized that he cut out a very out, Miles Davis kind of thing I played near the end, and pasted in a copy of a part I'd played earlier that sounds like Indian singing.

In clips I've seen from the upcoming *Santana IV Live at the House of Blues* DVD, I noticed you were playing one of your custom Fender guitars. Did you bring the same amp and effects from the studio to the gig?

Schon: I brought *exactly* what I played through on the record, and I couldn't hear myself. The Santana band is so freaking loud onstage. We used to crank up Fender Twins—which can be really loud—and I just forgot about that. It has been a long time since I played that loud onstage. I usually let the sound system do the work, and I love to have

the Fractal onstage to blend with whatever amp I bring. However, to make that work, the mixing engineer has to have a grip on the material and know when to bring you up. Then, the Fractal can make you sound monstrous, because it works so well with modern, digital sound systems.

I did have the Fractal at the House of Blues, but I didn't have my big Meyer monitors along with it, so I still had issues hearing myself. Also, I like to have my amp in the center and wrap the effects around it in stereo. Of course, when there's another guitar player, I have to be on one side, and he has to be on the other, and our echoes and so on get panned to correspond to our position onstage. I understand that, but then you're missing half of the stereo sound I originally created in the Fractal. This is one of the reasons my sound wasn't translating very well at the House of Blues. However, we got a few more opportunities to play together when we did some co-headlining dates with Santana and Journey. I

set up all the echoes in mono, and I used one of John Petrucci's new signature Mesa/Boogie amps. That sounded really good.

Carlos, the promo clips show you playing a gold, single-cutaway PRS instead of your usual double-cutaway. Why the change?

Santana: The older I get, the more I become fastidious about staying in tune like Jim Hall. I noticed the double-cut might go a little bit more out of tune than the single-cut. The single-cut feels like a big chunk of wood. The double-cut guitar is more open, and, sometimes, it feels like the neck might move a little bit. I don't like to be kind of/sort of, to be or not to be. That's for Shakespeare. I want to be dead on. If I hear the guitar go a little bit out of tune, it's going to start messing with my psyche. If one won't behave—go stand in the corner, man. So I started playing the single-cut, and it stays in tune like crazy. I don't use a whammy bar, because I don't want to start wondering, "Am I in tune, or not?" Right now, I *know* the guitar is in tune,

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COVER STORY

CARLOS SANTANA & NEAL SCHON

and it gives me more velocity to get to the next adventure of making a new melody.

Do the two of you have plans to play together beyond a couple of California dates when Santana and Journey share a bill?

Santana: It's in limbo, because Gregg is committed to Ringo, Neal is committed to Journey, and I'm committed to Santana—the *Supernatural* Santana. This original Santana can only take form when we can all decide that it's the most important thing to do. We also need to talk with clarity, dignity, and grace about financial distribution. I definitely want to celebrate and compensate. I like equality, fairness, and justice for everybody financially.

Schon: Playing with Carlos and the Santana guys again was completely satisfying. I've dreamt about it, and I helped make it happen, so I'm not about to walk away after coming this far. Journey is bigger than ever, so it's hard to leave that money on the table right now. My manager says we can make both work, and I'm going to remind him of

that when they start cramming Journey dates down my throat.

Also, Carlos needs to know that I'm in 100 percent. I'll keep on going, because *Santana IV* was such a fun, fast experience. I would do *Santana V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, and X*. I love playing with a band that's spontaneous and blues based. There aren't a zillion chords in every song. It's not about reading charts, or getting brainy about trying to come up with a single for whatever radio. It's all about feel, and creating music for people who are going to listen to the record as a whole.

Santana: I'm not really interested in radio airplay. I leave that to those who know about it. I'm interested in creating a

painting with nobody left out. After what we did together, I looked at it like an interior decorator deciding what painting works on this wall. I feel honored and grateful that they trusted me.

At the end of the day, what do you hope players will walk away learning by listening to you?

Santana: How to make a melody come alive. That's what people accuse me of in the most beautiful way. People—including Neal—have said, "You know how to carry a melody." Well, whether you listen to Stravinsky or James Brown, you walk away remembering the melody. So my father taught me to carry the melody with such impeccable, complete passion, that when people hear it, they forget about whatever was bugging them, they stop doing what they're doing, and that melody becomes the resonance for their own forgotten song. I invite all musicians to articulate the language of light through your fingers. ■

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