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Santana 1972-1974, Part 2: The Making of Caravanserai

The previous article in this series traced Santana's trials and tribulations starting in the summer of 1971, a period that led to drastic lineup changes. The band went on to recruit musicians who were interested in jazz and the emerging jazz-rock explosion of the early 1970s. We are now in February of 1972 and Santana is ready to record their fourth studio album at Columbia Studios in San Francisco. This is the story of Caravanserai.



Many influences paved the path that Carlos Santana and Michael Shrieve embarked on during that period. They were mainly musical, but they blended with a newly-found spiritual awareness. Santana was curious about new approaches to music-making and was drawn into the world of spiritual jazz and the intersection of jazz and rock: "John Coltrane and Pharoah Sanders and Antonio Carlos Jobim and Alice Coltrane, with their looser rhythms and spiritual, praising melodies, were inspiring a change in the kind of music Shrieve and I wanted to do. We were looking for Weather Report and for Miles Davis. We were looking for our identities in the same places with a spirit of exploration and the courage to try something new, even if it didn't make sense or we weren't supposed to do it. Caravanserai was the album we weren't supposed to do." We will get deeper into Santana's spiritual quest in the next article, but even without knowledge of that background you cannot escape experiencing a heightened level of emotion and search of new expression when you listen to Caravanserai.



Santana 1972

Like many other progressive albums from that period, Caravanserai is best experienced when you listen to it as a whole, start to finish in one sitting. Ok, you can take a break to flip the LP sides (I'm dating myself here). iPod shuffles and single song downloads do not do justice to this album. Santana talked about the significance of putting the sequenced song list together: "When it came time to figure out the order of songs for the album, Shrieve and I kept making cassettes of different sequences. Then separately, we would drive around San Francisco and listen to them. We would give them to each other and discuss them until we knew exactly how the tunes should run. More than any Santana album, Caravanserai was meant to be a full album experience, with one track connected to the next—a body of work like What's Going On or A Love Supreme." I will respect that order, and will now review the album in the original album sequence.

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Eternal Caravanserai of Reincarnation

One of the albums that influenced the recording sessions for Caravanserai was Thembi by Pharoah Sanders, released in May 1971. This is a great artifact from a period that produced many classic spiritual jazz albums. Thembi is an abbreviation of Nomathemba, an African Xhosa name meaning hope, faith and love. Whether Santana knew this or not, he definitely connected with the mood Sanders created with the opening track from the album. Astral Travelling has a laid back atmospheric mood, with lots of reverb and echo effects on the electric piano. There is a story from the recording session of that tune that is worth telling. Keyboard player on the Pharoah Sanders session was Lonnie Liston Smith, who explained how the tune was created: "I saw this instrument sitting in the corner and I asked the engineer, "What is that?" He said, That's a Fender Rhodes electric piano.' I didn't have anything to do, so I started messing with it, checking some of the buttons to see what I could do with different sounds. All of a sudden I started writing a song and everybody ran over and said, "What is that?" And I said, "I don't know, I'm just messing around.' Pharoah said, "Man, we gotta record that. Whatcha gonna call it?" I'd been studying astral projections and it sounded like we were floating through space so I said let's call it 'Astral Traveling'." Sounds like a story that could have originated in a Santana recording session. Here is the tune for reference:



Carlos Santana was looking for the same mood to start his album, but first he had a request: "I told engineer Glen Kolotkin at the beginning of the sessions that I wanted the album to start with the sound of nature, and he said 'I got just the thing – in my backyard I have a cricket chorus, and you won't believe how loud they get." The result was Eternal Caravan of Reincarnation, opening up Caravanserai with 35 seconds of nothing but crickets before a saxophone intro by Hadley Caliman, a friend of Michael Shrieve who joined the sessions on an invitation by the drummer. Caliman played on Santana's live album recorded in Hawaii in January 1972, Carlos Santana & Buddy Miles! Live!



Hadley Caliman

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The rest of the track takes us into a territory the band lightly explored on Singing Winds, Crying Beasts, the opening track from Abraxas. But here it segues immediately into a jazzier space with Tom Rutley's acoustic bass.



Tom Rutley

Michael Shrieve said of that acoustic bass part introduced 1:45 into the track: "It's the first time that upright bass is introduced. That sound is so important." The impact of that track is immediate on listeners familiar only with the band's previous albums. The sound is much more natural and free than the Latin rock-oriented production on their previous albums.



Waves Within

The album continues without a break into Waves Within, a perfect tune to introduce a critical ingredient in the making of the album, and that is bass player Doug Rauch.



Doug Rauch

Michael Shrieve said of the gifted bassist: "Doug's joining us had to do with the fact that Carlos was getting into John McLaughlin and the Mahavishnu Orchestra and so was Doug. He was really, really good at playing odd time signatures like that band did, and he utilized his thumb technique doing this as well." Indeed, one progressive aspect of Caravanserai is the experimentation with odd time signatures, not unlike many progressive rock artists in the early 1970s. Undoubtedly the Mahavishnu Orchestra influenced many jazz-oriented musicians to explore signatures beyond those based on 4/4 and ¾, and a devoted fan like Doug Rauch did not miss an opportunity to explore it himself. Shrieve continues: "When we went into the studio to record Caravanserai, Doug brought in the song Waves Within, which was in 9/4, I believe. That song is an example of where Doug was going." Adding a comment about the bass player's technique, Shrieve recalled: "Doug had a really unique way of playing. He was one of the first to play with the thumb and popping technique that was later made famous by Larry Graham and Stanley Clarke, and I think that Doug should be credited as the first to really develop that technique into a comprehensive playing style."



Michael Shrieve with Doug Rauch

There are multiple electric guitar parts on this track, with the lead played by Carlos Santana and other parts by Doug Rauch and Doug Rodrigues, a guitarist connected to Doug Rauch when they both played with The Voices of East Harlem and on the album Music with Buzzy Linhart in 1970.



Look Up (To See What's Coming Down)

The next track, Look Up (To See What's Coming Down), is another showcase of Doug Rauch's mastery in playing a funky bass guitar groove. Santana on Rauch: "You can hear what he brought to 'All the Love of the Universe' and 'Look Up (to See What's Coming Down)' – when we heard those tracks, we realized how much we needed Dougie." Shrieve adds: "Doug Rauch was all over this thing with his ideas, which were so inspiring. Doug had a curious mind and would hit on many different moods." Also notable on this track is Shrieve's mastery of the hi-hat and the timbales solo by Jose Chepito Areas.



Just In Time to See the Sun

12 minutes pass from the moment the needle dropped on the leading groove of side one before we hear the first vocals, with Carlos Santana and Gregg Rolie exchanging singing duties on Just in Time to See the Sun. This may be the Caravanserai track that most resembles the style of the original Santana band.



Carlos Santana and Gregg Rolie, Woodstock 1969

Many of the tracks on the albums started with studio jams led originally by Michael Shrieve and Doug Rauch, later overdubbed by Carlos Santana. The guitar player discussed this method of working: "I think it was Joe Zawinul who baptized me and called me 'the melody man.' He said, 'Nobody plays melody the way you do, man. You can play the hell out of a melody. So you are the melody man.' And I was like, OK. So 'I'll just, I'll just concentrate on bringing a nice, heartfelt, soulful melody to whatever Michael brings, you know? And I would come into a room and Michael and Doug Rauch were creating these moving pictures. And I had to find my way to become Aretha, Etta James, Tina Turner, Nina Simone, with that kind of Miles-ish phrasing, in all this rush of feeling. So that's how I think. I think of all these components, but you still have to land on the most memorable melody."

Unsurprisingly Columbia Records, Santana's record label, finding no suitable radio-friendly tunes among all the instrumental tracks on the album, tried to promote this song on the radio.

Unsuccessfully.



Song of the Wind

The next tune was the last to be recorded for the album. After all the other tracks were completed in recording sessions that took place in February and April 1972, this last track was recoded in May. It is also one of the album's highlights. Song of the Wind is a tour de force of guitar work by Carlos Santana and Neal Schon, one of the latter's last great efforts with the band. One after another the two dish out solo phrases that could fill ten songs on any other album. Santana quotes one of his guitar heroes, Gábor Szabó, playing licks from Breezin' from his 1971 album High Contrast.



Carlos Santana with Neal Schon, 1971

Guitarist Neal Schon remembers this song fondly when reminiscing about Caravanserai: "Song of the Wind is amazing on that, which is a song Carlos and I just winged, and I actually play the first solo on that; he played the middle solo and I played the last solo on that, and you know, it's two chords, and we just improvised and played."

Carlos Santana recalled Gregg Rolie's modest but effective contribution on the organ to this tune: "To this day I listen to Song of the Wind and break down inside hearing Gregg's playing on that one – no solo, just a simple supportive organ part that is not flashy or anything but supremely important to that song."



Carlos Santana with Neal Schon. Photo: Gerry Robertson

Michael Shrieve tells another episode related to this song: "They both played beautifully and they were very happy putting their parts. Traditionally, the way it works, is that you get what they call the basic tracks, which is always the drums and the bass and that's that. Then, you don't need to do any drums. But the guitar players or the singer or somebody could punch in and keep making their solo better. And at the end of the evening, in the studio they recorded such beautiful stuff that I thought: 'Wow, I should have played with them'. And I was determined to do that. But you can't do that. Back in those days it was too difficult to do that without Pro-Tools, without computers. If you mess up the basic tracks, if you re-record the drums and mess it up, you can ruin the whole track and keep doing it over and over on the drum set. So, I said to the engineer after everybody left: 'I am going to work on this all night long. I am going to practice the way I want to play it with what they have done now Carlos Santana and Neal Schon. So, be here tomorrow early and let's do it'. I didn't tell any in the band. The engineer was still frightened, because if I mess it up they would probably blame him for it. They should blame me. He said: 'Please Michael, don't do this'. I just said: 'Be here early tomorrow. I will tell you at what time.' I worked all night long and I came back and I said: 'Roll the tape' and I did it. I was able to perform that song with what they had worked on after the basic track is done. And it turned out great." It did.



All the Love of the Universe

The first side of the original LP closes with All the Love of the Universe, maybe Gregg Rolie's finest moment on this album, playing a great organ solo. Also of note are the different bass parts, starting with a beautiful accompaniment on acoustic bass from Tom Rutley's and moving to Doug Rauch's rapid notes on electric bass. Listen carefully and you hear some tasteful castanets just before the vocals come in – Lenny White, a good friend of Michael Shrieve, makes a guest appearance.

Carlos Santana, Mingo Lewis and Rico Reyes share vocals here. Reyes played percussion on Santana's previous two albums Abraxas and Santana III. If you were in doubt about Carlos Santana's quest for spirituality at that time (and ever since for that matter), a quick glance at the lyrics reveals a good amount:

New thoughts

Will purify my mind

And clean my body

New lives

Will fall together like an endless story

All the love of the universe

Will be shared by all that's living



Carlos Santana, 1972

Santana's discovery of Eastern philosophy was evident by the quote he chose to put inside the album cover, from the book Metaphysical Meditations by Paramahansa Yogananda:

The Body melts into the universe

The universe melts into the soundless voice $% \left\{ 1,2,\ldots ,n\right\}$

The sound melts into the all-shining light

And the light enters the bosom of infinite joy



Future Primitive

We flip the LP over and it is time to feature the percussionists. Future Primitive starts with an atmospheric vibe that segues into an energetic congas, bongos and timbales feast played by José "Chepito" Areas and James Mingo Lewis.





Stone Flower

Brazilian music was also on the menu in the list of albums that Shrieve and Santana were listening to. The 1960s and early 1970s was a golden age for Brazilian music and Michael Shrieve was listening with great interest. He related an anecdote about one of his favorite Brazilian tunes: "The most fun Brazilian video is Tom Jobim and Elis Regina doing Aguas de Março. It is one of the most jam packed five minutes of joy. If it were to be sent to another planet they would say 'they're having fun down there!" Santana talked about the inclusion of a tune by Jobim in the album: "It was Shrieve who said 'let's check out Jobim' and we decided to record Stone Flower and write lyrics for it." Shrieve: "Stone Flower was written by Antonio Carlos Jobim as an instrumental, and I wrote the lyrics on acid. Carlos and I sang the song." Antonio Carlos Jobim's tune was the title track from his 1970 album on CTI Records, a label that was certainly in the mix of albums Shrieve and Santana were listening to at the time.



The track features great contributions from Tom Rutley on acoustic bass and Wendy Haas on electric piano, and a rare sharing of vocals by Santana and Shrieve. Notice the introduction of a Cuíca and Agogô in the mix, staples of Brazilian percussion instruments. Santana has a nice solo here, on which he said: "I was thinking Nature Boy, Love on a Two-Way Street. Gábor Szabó licks. They're all on that album. People would tell me later, Whoa – that was a great solo on Stone Flower.' I'd say 'Thank you, man' and be thinking 'I hope nobody busts me for it!"



La Fuente Del Ritmo

The next track, La Fuente Del Ritmo, is a great opportunity to introduce more musicians who played on this album, some of them will continue to make critical contributions to the band for a good number of years. James Mingo Lewis wrote the tune and plays the syncopated piano vamp, or montuno as it is known in Cuban music. He first recorded with Carlos Santana in the concert with Buddy Miles in Hawaii in January of 1972, released later as Carlos Santana & Buddy Miles! Live!

Jose "Chepito" Areas also shines on La Fuente Del Ritmo and throughout the album on the timbales. The energy he fuses into the music with these drums is not unique when you listen regularly to Cuban or afro Latin music, but in the context of Santana and the energy that exists already with rock instruments, it becomes a whole new experience.





Two musicians make their debut here on a Santana recording. The legendary Armando Peraza plays bongos on La Fuente Del Ritmo, and last but not least, Tom Coster plays a wonderful electric piano solo. Much more from both these musicians in the next few Santana recordings and tours, to be covered in the coming articles in this series.



Every Step of the Way

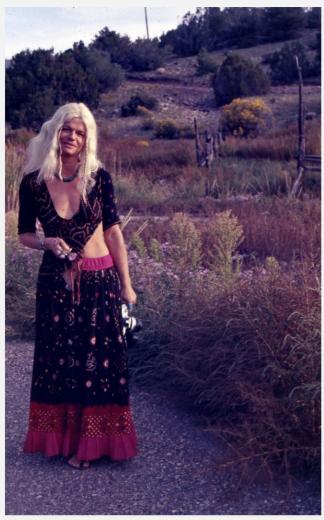
And we come to the crown jewel of Caravanserai, the epic album closer Every Step of the Way. Carlos Santana and Michael Shrieve made the right choice closing the album with this track. These were the times when you could start an album with almost a minute of crickets and solo sax and close it with a nine minute complex instrumental. This is Carlos Santana's favorite tune on the album and I share his opinion. In his biography The Universal Tone Santana says of the tune: "For two reasons my favorite song on Caravanserai is Every Step of the Way – first because it sounds like what we really loved back then: Herbie Hancock's Crossings. The song also reminds me of Shrieve because he wrote it and because of how we played together." Indeed the gifted drummer weaved a track for the ages here. It starts as something out of a late-60s Miles Davis album, a band jam that on a Miles Davis record could last a whole side of an LP, but here shifts to something different after three minutes. What ensues is one of Santana's highest instrumental achievements. There is a great congas solo by James Mingo Lewis, an even greater flute solo by Hadley Caliman and a fine orchestral arrangement by the great trumpet player Tom Harrell, at the time also working with the band Azteca. I remember listening to this album as an LP, and when the needle lifted off the vinyl at the end of this track (I had a semi-automatic turntable) I truly had the feeling that I experienced something unique, and not just musically.



A note about the album name. In the Near East the word Caravanserai means a large courtyard that provides accommodation for caravans, or simply a group of people travelling together. But Carlos Santana found a different meaning for it when he was reading a text by Indian yogi and Guru Paramahansa Yogananda: "The caravan is the eternal cycle of reincarnation, every soul going into and out of life, from death to life and back again, until you arrive at a place where you can rest and achieve an inner peace. That place is the caravanserai." He could not come up with a better title for the album, as it represents not only his personal quest for spirituality at that time, but also the music that the band created for the album.



The album cover was designed by artist Joan Chase, who worked with the Santana band beginning in late 1969 and became their principle photographer. She produced album art for Santana's earlier albums, in addition to design and photography for the band's songbooks. She became famous in the psychedelic San Francisco scene by running the Heavy Water Light Show with Mary Ann Mayer. She also worked on album covers by Paul Kantner, Philip Glass, Jefferson Airplane and The Grateful Dead



Joan Chase, 1972

It is remarkable how the band was able to produce such an amazing album, doing so while going through so many changes. Not all Santana band members were on board with the new musical direction the band took at the time. At the end of the recording sessions Gregg Rolie and Neal Schon $departed \ the \ band. \ They \ were \ uncertain \ about \ the \ direction \ the \ band \ was \ taking \ with \ this \ album.$ When the recording of the album completed and Carlos Santana was looking for even farther exploration into jazz and spirituality, it was time to part ways and go on a different musical Journey (ha!). Neal Schon: "Santana were breaking up left and right. David was gone, Carabello was gone, there were all kinds of new members and that's the way the sound started to change. It wasn't really Santana any longer and Carlos wanted to take a particular direction whereas everybody had different opinions about which way it should go. So as we didn't agree with him, we had to go." Gregg Rolie: "I stayed in Santana until 1972. We just had differences, both musical and personal ones. Maybe it was 'too much, too soon.' I always put it this way: We played with passion, and we broke up with passion. There were differences with regards to the musical direction of the band. I liked the exploration on the album Caravanserai, but I didn't want to make it a mainstay of what we did. I also didn't want to lose the relationship we had developed with our audience. I couldn't see throwing that away for this new musical direction. So like most bands, we fell apart. But when I look at it now, I realize that if we hadn't been the people we were at that time, that music probably would never have happened. So it's okay."



Santana in 1971 with Gregg Rolie and Neal Schon

The band was signed to Columbia Records, one of the major labels of the time, who loved the popularity of the band and was looking forward to their fourth album. You can only imagine the shock on the label executives faces when they first heard what came out of the studio. When label head Clive Davis listened to it, he told Santana and Shrieve, both listed as producers of the album: "This is a career suicide. Clearly there's not one single within a thousand miles of this album. There's nothing here to take to radio and get a hit with. It feels like you're turning your backs on yourselves. The jazz stuff is great, but there's already a Miles Davis. There's already a Weather Report. Why don't you just be Santana?" But like Schon and Rolie already figured out, Santana the man was already far away from other people's perception of Santana the band, as he later said: "Without a radio single, sales went down compared to our first three albums. It didn't matter. We couldn't go back. We had to go forward, and Caravanserai is what we felt was right at that time." Indeed there was no single forthcoming, but the album did pretty well, likely riding the high of the band's success with the previous albums. It reached no 8 on Billboard's Top 200 LPs list in December 1972. That same week Yes reached no. 5 with Close to the Edge and the list topper was Seventh Sojourn by the Moody Blues. Those were the days.



Billboard Top 200 LPs chart, December 9 1972

Summarizing his experience in making the album, Michael Shrieve said: "We thought it was appealing, to the ear and to the soul. It made me feel good inside. There is a certain purity in the music that is seemed had to be recognized that would touch people if they really listened to it." I'll hand the closing comment to Carlos Santana: "Shrieve was there to complete the journey that became Caravanserai. He was in my corner and I was in his – we helped each other complete it. More than any Santana album, Caravanserai was meant to be a full album experience, with one track connected to the next – a body of work like What's Going On or A Love Supreme."

The following resources were used during the writing of this article:

Carlos Santana's excellent memoir The Universal Tone: Bringing My Story to Light

A chat with Michael Shrieve, December 2022

Santanamigos, a great online resource for Santana's history

