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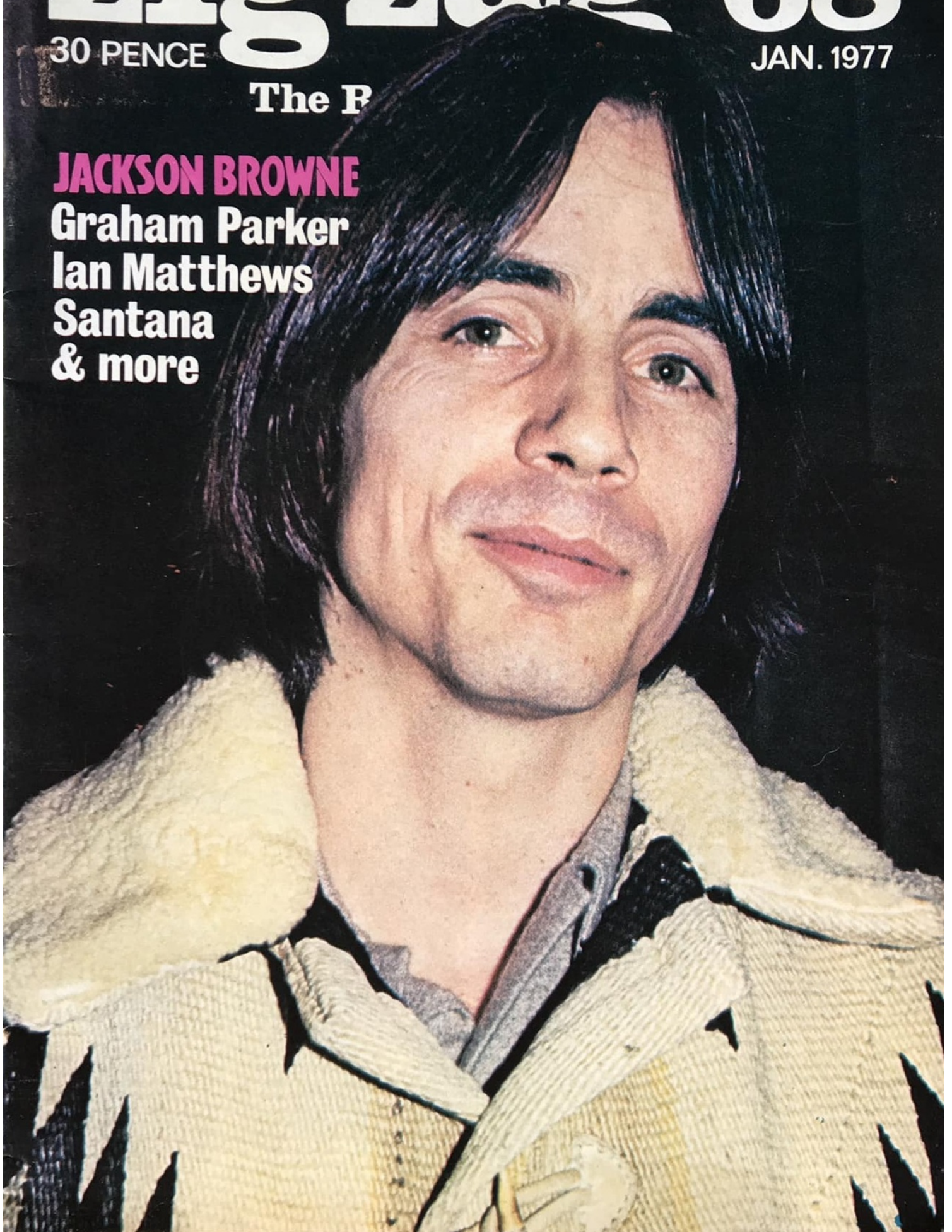
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# SANTANA

## Caught Between the Longing For Love and the Struggle For Legal Tender

Santana are some 90 minutes into the last concert of their European tour at Hammer-smith Odeon, and Carlos gently picks out the familiar opening notes to his best-loved number, 'Samba Pa Ti'. Eyes closed and head tilted back in concentration, he gives a fine, intense rendition of the tune; and the wall-stretching crowd goes predictably ape-shit, acknowledging one of rock's most distinctive stylists.

As the applause dies away, the whole band promptly launches into one of the songs from the new 'Festival' album, a piece of simplistic riffing topped with utterly witless sloganeering called 'Let The Music Set You Free!... a ghastly clinker which is all the more depressing when compared to the heights that Santana are still capable of touching.

Carlos - who is dressed all in white, by the way, which he doesn't always do these days - then steps forward, bows deeply, and gives a little speech about oneness between group and audience, introducing a moment of mysticism which seems completely at odds with the two hours of carnival atmosphere that has preceded it.

It's all a little confusing, and at times not a little embarrassing; but I have a strong suspicion that I'm not the only one who's a bit confused: The boy from Mexico, who moved to the hubbub of San Francisco in the mid sixties, and became the figure-head of one of the world's most remarkable and successful bands, before going off at an abrupt tangent into spirituality and jazz rock directions, has finally come back to earth after four years with his head somewhere up above the clouds.

What he's found, on looking around him, is a huge international audience for his group, but an audience which is fairly firmly split between 'Soul Sacrifice' and 'Welcome!... and hardly ever the twain shall meet.

Those who love the early, very physical Santana had trouble relating to Carlos' move to spacier, jazzier music and odd time signatures; while the people who only picked up on Santana after 'Caravanserai' aren't likely to be impressed by dance music. What can a poor boy do? On the evidence of 'Festival' and the recent concerts, Carlos' answer at the moment seems to be an uneasy compromise, trying to cover all bases at once and please everybody simultaneously. Admittedly he and his band still make some fine music in the process, but the sense of logical progression and coherence that the early Santana and the 'New Santana Band' of 1972/1973 had, is sadly lacking.

The beginnings of Santana were a far cry indeed from white suits, meditation, and talk of love, devotion and surrender. Carlos spent his formative years scuffling round Tijuana and the Mission District of San Francisco, absorbing various influences - many from outside his own ethnic group - and immersing himself in the atmosphere that was in the air as San

Francisco moved towards the summer of love. In fact, Carlos' first encounter with Bill Graham, who was soon to become very involved with Santana's music and career, came when the great man caught him sneaking in through the window of the men's room at the Fillmore West, harmonica in back pocket... a pretty typical street kid.

Santana's early music, too, was a far cry from either John Coltrane or Tito Puente. The Santana Blues Band they called themselves in '67, which is pretty much what they were, and the move to the Latin/rock fusion which brought them 'overnight' success two years later was prompted, not so much by Carlos, as by two percussionists. First of all, a gentleman called Marcus Malone, who introduced an Afro influence to the band before being incarcerated in mid '69 on a manslaughter rap; and secondly, his successor, Jose Chepito Areas, the diminutive Nicaraguan who taught the band, especially young Mike Shrieve who had just joined too, about Latin rhythms.

In a way, that seems to have set something of a precedent, because at every turn, the direction of Santana's music has been instigated, not so much by the man who gives the group his name, as by the people who happen to be exerting the strongest influence on his thinking at any particular time.

Ndugu Leon Chanler, who drummed with the band for two years up to July '76, once said that Carlos himself hasn't changed his personal style of playing in eight years, but instead alters the group's sound by surrounding himself with different combinations of musicians. Now that makes the whole deal sound far more cynical and calculating than it probably is, and it certainly underestimates Carlos' personal musical growth through the years; nevertheless, the basic suggestion that Carlos has relied considerably on his cohorts for inspiration and guidance is not, I feel, without foundation.

The early band, who shot to fame and fortune in the wake of their astounding appearance in the 'Woodstock' movie, was, by all accounts, a very democratic set-up. "It definitely was a democratic band", says Gregg Rolie, who played keyboards and did most of the singing in that original group, "and suddenly he (Carlos) wanted to change it, because someone got in his ear and told him he was the leader, and by no means was that the case".

That "someone" was veteran percussionist Coke Escovedo, who was drafted into the band during 1971 when Chepito was ill. He, of course, denies being instrumental in the group's break-up; but no-one disputes that for a hired sideman he exerted a lot of pressure, both personally and musically. It was he, for example, who decided to use horns on the third album, despite opposition from other members; and he seems to have become quite close to Carlos, who was already getting dis-

enchanted with the dope'n'dames lifestyle and the way Santana's music was headed:

"Musically, the other people didn't really want to go where I wanted to go... I wanted to experiment more with music, and they wanted to grind the same old things over and over. Some of the people wanted to play straight-ahead rock'n'roll, and I wanted to play... I don't know what, I just wanted to search".

So the Old Santana Band, as they came to be known, went down the dust-pipe in a dirty flurry of personality clashes, drug busts, legal proceedings and vituperation, leaving Carlos with righthand man Michael Shrieve and a brand new raison d'être:

"Larry Coryell stayed over at my house twice, and he went upstairs and he meditated in his room, and he had a picture of Sri Chinmoy, and I must confess, the first time I saw it I was really afraid of it... Larry showed me Sri Chinmoy, and he showed me where he was coming from, where he was channeling his music. He taught me, not through words or anything, but just through being himself. He'd stay at the house, and him fighting himself so he wouldn't eat certain foods, he wouldn't think certain thoughts... and I feel that I started to realise that everybody imitates everybody. So why not imitate the Master; and I started reading more about Jesus, and about Paramahansa, which is - they're all windows for us to see the Light which is God, and when you imitate those divine people, then it's just a way of you becoming... like a tree, you know. You grow straight to the sun instead of growing crooked and going back to the earth".

To Carlos it was a case of seeing the Light, but to some of the other people in the Santana organisation at the time, he was merely "getting weird". Neal Schon, who had joined Santana as second guitarist at the age of 16 and is now in Journey with Gregg Rolie, obviously doesn't remember it as a particularly enlightening, tranquil period.

"Santana were breaking up left and right. David was gone, Mike 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 and direct it, whereas everybody had different opinions about which way it should go. So as we didn't agree with him, we had to go. What happened was Michael Shrieve and Carlos really paired off, and we were the enemy. It was like that... Carlos and Michael wanted to produce the album... they didn't want anybody else to do it".

'Caravanserai', the album to which Neal refers, was put together over a period of several months by some fifteen musicians under the direction of Carlos and Michael, and although various people from both Old, New and outside contributed material, presumably much of the credit for the fire and flow of its magnificent music must go



Possibly the most well known Santana line-up (number 3). Left to right (or right to left, depending on which way up it is): Neal Schon; Michael Shrieve; David Brown; Carlos Santana; Gregg Rolie; Jose Chepito Areas; Mike Carabello.

to the Dynamic Duo. A peak among peaks, is 'Caravanserail', and when the band that emerged from the sessions toured Europe in the last months of '72 they more than lived up to its promise.

Tom Coster was one of the new members of the band, having joined just in time to contribute to one number on 'Caravanserail'.

"I went down to rehearsal, and I was really impressed by what the band was doing, because they weren't doing exactly the kind of music that they'd been doing years back. When I heard what the band was into... it was pretty difficult music, with two keyboards... it was very powerful music.

"When I came into the band it was like a whole new thing. Carlos told me that he wanted keyboard players that were more competent, more into the jazz/rock fusion. At that time it appeared to me that he and Michael Shrieve were the strong motivating forces in that band, and they were very much into the jazz/rock thing; and the first thing that I got hit with was that they wanted me to learn to play like Larry Young and Chick Corea and Keith Jarrett... they were really into that kind of music, and the early band couldn't play that kind of music - it was above them. I thought what the New Santana Band did in '72/'73 was pretty earth-shaking, musically. The reviews we got from all over the world were astounding... not from a commercial perspective, but a musical perspective".

That band stayed together for just over a year, recording 'Welcome' and 'Lotus', the latter a triple album recorded live in Japan. Both see the band travelling swiftly down their chosen road. 'Welcome' veers from ethereal Alice Coltrane keyboard piece, through devotional songs like 'Yours Is The Light', to the speed-of-light cosmic guitar interplay of 'Flame Sky' where Carlos is joined by soul-brother John McLaughlin. 'Lotus', on the other hand, plays like one continuous two hour piece, 95% instrumental, with brief snatches of familiar tunes like 'Taboo' and 'Oye Como Va' providing landmarks and launching pads for further soaring voyages into uncharted territory.

Both albums are a little patchy compared with 'Caravanserail', but both also have

many magic moments. Interestingly enough, though, Carlos has at various times said that a) 'Welcome' was a very special album. "I really wanted to do something that would get me respected, to show other musicians what I could do, and there's things in there that I can see any other musician eye to eye with - musicians like Miles, whose judgement I respect"... and b) that he backed off a bit around that time, because of a sudden crisis of confidence in his own technical ability - a fact reflected in the low profile he keeps on much of 'Welcome', after his prominent role on 'Caravanserail'.

The desire for acceptance in the upper echelons of the 'progressive' jazz world was manifested not only in the music Santana played and the people they invited to help them make it, but also in Carlos' activities outside the group, notably with John McLaughlin and Alice Coltrane. With McLaughlin he recorded the 'Love Devotion and Surrender' album in '73 and then toured the States with him; while the following year he teamed up with Alice Coltrane to make the very spacey, spiritual (and soporific) 'Illuminations'.

By Christmas of '73, the Santana band's reputation and critical reception, both on record and on stage, was almost unparalleled at the time; but at the peak of their acclaim, they broke up after another European tour (see Family Tree for details), leaving Carlos and Shrieve still at the helm with Tom Coster as first mate, but once again looking for a new crew.

"The band sounded great for a while", Tom recalls, "But there were strong personal problems, bad attitudes, drugs - Carlos had legitimate reasons to change".

The early months of '74 were spent recording 'Borboletta' in a similar state of fluctuation to the one in which 'Caravanserail' had been made two years previous. When it was released, however, it got a mixed reaction from the pundits, which was a bit surprising, because although there are a couple of pretty duff bits - notably a horrible ballad called 'One With The Sun' - and the vocals sound uncomfortable for the most part (a problem that Santana have been wrestling with ever since Gregg Rolie left), it's a strong album. The instrumental sequence on the

second side concluded by the sublime 'Promise Of A Fisherman', particularly, is vintage Santana music.

Nevertheless, 'Borboletta' continued the downward trend that Santana's commercial fortunes had taken ever since the third album, and whereas the first three albums had sold in their millions, 'Borboletta' apparently struggled to achieve gold status. Ironically, it was far overshadowed by the release of a 'Greatest Hits' compilation and the re-release of 'Samba Pa Ti', which gave the band their first hit single in the UK.

Equally significant for the band's future, perhaps, was the departure in August '74 of Michael Shrieve, who had played a major part in Santana's shift from the streets to the spheres.

Tom: Michael had been contemplating going out on his own for quite some time, and just as we were about to go on a tour of the States, he got very ill with gallstones, or something, and we were either going to have to get another drummer or cancel the tour. While Michael was lying in hospital with a little time to think, he decided it was an opportune time for him to leave and get his own thing together... which at that time was Automatic Man".

Carlos: Michael left because I felt he and I had stopped growing towards the same direction... not because of the direction, but because he couldn't come to terms with what we were doing. Basically I think he needed to find out for himself about so many things... which is OK.

Shrieve left Automatic Man recently, by the way, (which must have delighted Island, who've sunk a small fortune into the band), and is currently working with Stomu Yamashta and Stevie Winwood in the wake of the 'Go!' project.

His replacement was the afore-mentioned Ndugu Leon Chanler; a formidable drummer, as anyone who saw Santana when they toured here in autumn '75 will testify, but also the latest in the line of forceful personalities to pass through the group. By the time he left last summer, Santana was 50% black friends of Ndugu... with almost inevitable consequences, as Carlos explains:

"It's like anything... if you get four

Englishmen, four Mexicans, or four Japanese, then you're going to sound English or Mexican or Japanese. If you get a lot of black guys, you're gonna sound really groovy - like Earth Wind & Fire or the Ohio Players. I didn't want to sound like that, I wanted to sound like... whatever we sound like".

Over a year elapsed between 'Borboletta' and 'Amigos' - the longest ever gap between Santana albums, and when the band, now down to six men, went into the studio in November '75, they completed the recording in what was, for Santana, a very short time - under two months.

'Amigos' was something of a change, to say the least. It's...err...funkier; vocals are far more prominent, and the guitar less so - which is unfortunate, because singing and lyrics have never been Santana's forte, whereas glistening instrumental work has; and they employ an outside producer for the first time since 'Abraxas',... David Rubinson, who had done the abortive recordings with them in early 1969, but whose more recent experience had been with artists like the Pointer Sisters and the new, more soulful (more successful), Herbie Hancock.

"It's like Muhammed Ali needs Angelo Dundee", says Carlos, who's a great one for off-beat analogies. "When you go in the studio, you get caught up, and you get so involved that it's better to have someone from the outside. David Rubinson is one of the best producers around, because he can read, he knows the board, and he's a good psychologist... if someone's feeling weird or frustrated, he can bring the whole band together".

He then went on to discuss the suggestion that the disco-funk leanings of 'Amigos' were a strange sort of progression from 'Welcome' and 'Borboletta'.

"All the albums I've done, I've done with the perception in mind that that's what I wanted to do; but when we did 'Amigos', I realised that I hadn't really kept in touch with the radio, with commercial music... with simplicity, with now music. I was

listening to old albums by Miles, or Coltrane, or Mahavishnu, so I really didn't know what people wanted to hear. But now I know what people want to hear... they want sincerity and joy, period. They don't care whether it's old or new, traditional, polkas... as long as it has joy and sincerity".

By the time 'Amigos' was recorded, Carlos had reunited with Bill Graham, who had managed the band during their mercurial rise in 1969, before being ousted in favour of Stan Marcum. Graham is a fervent aficionado of Latin music, and has never made any secret of it.

"What it is", he's on record as saying, "is an earthy street music when it really gets up-tempo. You want to move and it's physical. I like dancing together, and Latin music... part of Latin music for me always was I would hold a woman, and I would touch her body, and we would sweat, and it's all of that... very sensual, very sensuous".

With that in mind, there's perhaps some credibility in the rumour that when Bill became involved with Santana more closely once again, he was increasingly less enthusiastic about the funkier, blacker direction that Ndugu and his mates were giving the band, and was hoping to see Santana recapture the powerful blend of Latin and rock rhythms that they had pioneered seven years earlier.

Whatever the exact course of events and the precise motivation behind them, Santana went through a whole lot more changes during last summer, and emerged with a line-up of predominantly Latin musicians, and the 'Festival' album, which contains hints of just about everything Santana has ever done, but which owes most to the percussive atmosphere of their first two albums.

As I said, the group's stage performances (at least, the two I saw) were pretty impressive; but I think that owed more to the fact that they were based round strong renditions of the 'Abraxas' album, from which they did almost every number, rather than to the quality of the material from

'Amigos' and 'Festival', which made up the rest of their repertoire.

Most of the critics, who were unanimous in their praise of Santana's 'middle period' explorations, are almost equally in concord about the return to a street carnival. They hate it... and the general consensus of opinion seems to be that it's a direction dictated by commercial expediency rather than creative impulse.

If this is the case then it's been justified, because 'Amigos' was the most successful Santana album since the third one, and the ecstatic packed houses on their last tour suggest that 'Festival' will match it.

I don't think the motivation is quite as callous as that, though. While they were over here, I spent some time talking with Carlos, in his Bournemouth hotel room, and Tom Coster, in a laundromat and an Italian restaurant with a proprietor whose demeanour was even greasier than his food (look out for it if you're down there, it was very funny... he reminded me of Larry Grayson).

Anyway, much of the conversation revolved round Santana's current styles and the thinking behind it, because I'd been agast at 'Amigos' and was anxious to be reassured that it was only a temporary aberration. Well, I wasn't entirely reassured, but both Tom and Carlos were agreeably frank, and although they differed, their perspectives on the band's current situation were mutually complementary; so here - in concentrated form - is what they had to say.

Tom: Basically speaking, Carlos was pretty pleased with his new direction when he went in to it, but when he came full circle, he realised that where his heart is, is where he is now - playing for the people. We've noticed that the happiness we receive as band members is an extraction of what we get fed back from the audience. We play a set, and from the beginning of the set we try to escalate, so that at the end the energy is high. We get a good response and we are fulfilled, because we've given the audience what we

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Tommy Cheyenne

The latest Santana line-up (number 9), photographed during their recent tour. Left to right: Raul Rekow; Graham Lear; Luther Rabb; Jose Chepito Areas (suffering from indigestion); his Devadipship; Pablo Tellez; and ex-Maltese pimp Tom Coster

think they want to hear.

If there are certain tunes in the set that people will listen to, but don't really get off on, then we will put in a tune that we think will get more response. For example, we really like 'Light Of Life' and 'When I Look Into Your Eyes', and we'll play those tunes, but the energy that has been built up dies down in those tunes.

With those earlier albums... maybe I liked them, Carlos liked them, Michael Shrieve liked them, you liked them... but the majority of people who liked Santana did not. The reason we're all here is because all those people love the Santana band and for us to kick them in the face and say "Well, we've made it now, let's just give you what we think you need"... that's not right. We want those kids to get up. We feel good when they dig it and show it by dancing to it. That's what it's all about in this band. Whether it'll change this week or next week, I don't know, but we owe the kids the respect of giving them a good show and what we think they would like to hear from the band. What we're doing now is closer, I think, to what they expect from us than what we were doing two years ago. I think a lot of bands have a very dishonest way of forgetting why they're famous, and forgetting who put them on the charts."

Tom also spoke about the band's apparently autocratic set-up, wherein Carlos is the undisputed boss, and everyone else is a salaried employee - including Tom, who's been an integral part of the band for four years now - to be hired and fired at will:

"In almost every case, nobody gets fired from the band directly... they mostly retire themselves because of negative situations to which the idea of the band is opposed. Carlos is the band leader - he's a very fair band leader, he knows what he wants, and he's successful. If we have people in the band whose attitudes go against what the band is trying to do, then those people either have to change their ways or leave. It's not that they have to lower themselves as musicians or human beings, it's just that when you walk into an organisation that's a household name, you can't come in and try to change it... that's not fair to the band, and it's not fair to the public.

I don't care how great the band is, how great the vocalist is... what the record company is interested in, and what the world is interested in, is Carlos Santana. That is all there is to it. When you have good management, when you have people like Bill Graham or myself who've been with the band for years and know what's good for the band and what the public wants... you've got to work in that direction."

Direction, curiously enough, is something that Santana at this moment seem - to me - to be unsure of; so I was hoping that Carlos would be able to provide some elucidation of where the band was heading, and why he had apparently done a 180° volte-face since three years ago, when he was saying things like: "I think everyone is becoming aware that when a musician plays for people he only reaches certain people, but when he plays for the Supreme he embraces everybody!"

Carlos: It depends on how people see spirituality. I used to make the mistake of seeing spiritual music as music that they play in church, or classical music, or Indian music, and that's not true... there's a lot of spiritual music on the street. If you play from your heart, it has spirituality, whether it's rock'n'roll... no matter what it is. As long as you offer what you have to God and the people at the time you're doing it. To me right now tomorrow I may change like everybody else - but right now the highest form of spirituality for me is joy, and if there's no joy, if it all has to be solemn and your eyes up towards the sky... you can keep it.

You see, those things like wearing white clothes and keeping my hair short, all those things are like forms of discipline. When you first play the guitar, you practice your scales and chords every day, so that when you play you have more command over your instrument. Now that I've been through those spiritual disciplines I have a little more assurance of who I am, and I can get a little loose with it now. Like I told you, I made a lot of mistakes, trying to cram things down people's throats... I don't do that anymore. It's an unhealthy thing, but it's not intentional, it's just that you get so excited with your new inspiration.

I learned from that period when I was with Mahavishnu, and I've incorporated it into my music, but what we're doing now is making a very serious effort to simplify it so people can understand it. You can play music for people, man, or you can play music for musicians; and when you play music for musicians, a lot of people admire it and start yelling how fantastic it is, but eventually they fall asleep.

I like earthy music. I like music that has a lot of emotion, a lot of tears, a lot of joy. Some day perhaps I will totally embrace celestial music, but right now it puts me to sleep... right now my appetite is satisfied more when I can see people's eyes, and their bodies move, and there's a big smile on their face.

The real ambition is the power of Love. A lot of musicians don't know about it, because when they go out there on stage, they don't give no joy to people. When people work hard washing dishes, or whatever they do, to get a ticket to go to a concert,

and when they go see someone who's acting stupid - throwing flames through their mouths, wearing make-up, and all that stuff - they're not receiving anything. That's like a circus, like an elephant standing on its hind legs. That's forced entertainment, and that's not what music's supposed to be. It's supposed to uplift, transform, give strength and joy... all those things; but the main thing is joy... making an audience get up and dance.

'Caravanserai' taps another side of me, but the soul manifests itself through different parts of the body. 'Caravanserai' was strictly music for the heart, but what about about the other parts of the body? (Taps arms and legs). The music we're making now makes everything happy. I find the same spirituality in songs like 'Samba Pa Ti' and 'Europa'... I guess that they're schmalzy, but at the same time they are very sweet. It has the same feeling that Mahavishnu and I had when we were playing together, but just on a different level.

The thing about those albums with the New Santana Band is I was not trying to make consciously commercial music; what I was trying to do was to branch out in new directions. When I was in the studio I wasn't worried about being successful from a commercial point of view but a musical point of view... though Clive Davis told me 'Caravanserai' would not be a commercial success. To me, 'Festival' has the best of all the albums, plus a new fire and a new energy. I wouldn't say it's a new direction... it's just the best of all the directions I've taken. On other albums I like some songs better than others, but on this one I like them all!"

So what is one to make of it? At the time of the interview, I got the impression that Carlos was still unsure how the new line-up (which had only been together for ten days before coming to Europe) was going to shape up, and that all his talk was trying to convince himself as much as me. Six weeks later, though, the band had grown together enormously, and although I'm still not staggered by 'Festival' or the tunes thereon, the band is playing the early Santana material so well that there must be hope of a major improvement when they go into the studio again as a fully-fledged working unit. They might not recapture the glorious innovation of 'Caravanserai', but at least they might emulate the tasteful, controlled aggression of 'Abraxas'. But then again... when I spoke briefly with Carlos after the gig, he was asking about Miles Davis' current activities and saying "That's real music" in respectful tones. Like the man said (or rather, sang): "Above all else confusion reigns, And though I ask no one explains".

Paul Kendall