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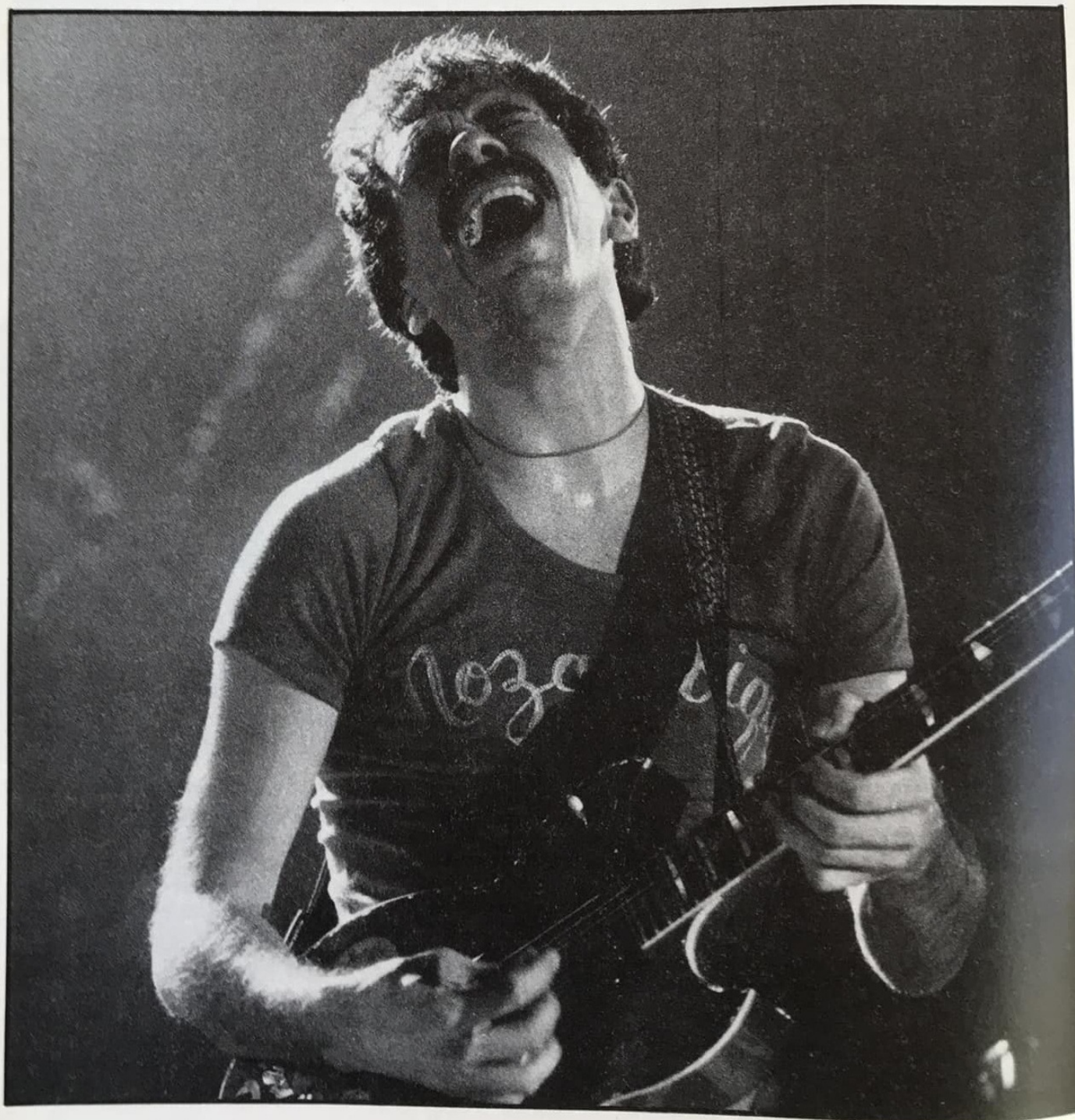


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GUITARS THAT CRY, FINGERS THAT FLY

PART II:
Santana and Dimeola talk about chops



David Hill/Petra

“Jeff Beck and Jimi Hendrix—that’s attitude. What they do to a note is rude and treacherous, and I love it.”

By JOHN STIX

In the first part of this continuing dialogue, Devadip Carlos Santana and Al Dimeola discussed their early days as guitarists experiencing the important musical changes of the seventies. As they listened to a tape compilation of various guitar players, the conversation flowed to Santana’s creative collaborations with John McLaughlin.

J.S. On the album you did with McLaughlin (*Love Devotion & Surrender*), your playing was more harmonically adventurous than when you played with the Santana band. Was that something you’ve always been able to do, or did it come out by playing in this different context?

C.S. When I started playing with Mahavishnu, I had listened to nothing but John Coltrane and Miles Davis for about a year and a half. I even bought a phonograph that would play the music all night, until I started to feel my brain expand with their melody, chord and time concepts. They call it music of the spheres. It’s the way Elvin Jones keeps time. By the time Mahavishnu came along I was ready to try all those kinds of things.

J.S. So there was something different that came out in that album?

C.S. Right, for him, too. I noticed he started playing more melodically. By playing with Al, I’m learning about execution, the way to attack certain moments. Mainly I’m learning dynamism. If anybody would ask me what qualities I like about Al’s playing, I would say dynamism.

A.D. Over the years I’ve felt this tremendous emotion coming from Carlos’ playing through the music. I felt that the music behind Carlos inspired him, which is why I heard his instrument crying all the time.

J.S. Al, you once stated that the sound has to be there or you wouldn’t be inspired.

A.D. I like to feel it in my stomach. I don’t like to feel the guitar in my ears. I like to hear it, but I don’t like to feel it there. When I feel it in my stomach, it makes me want to move on. Without that it’s rough.

C.S. I’m to the point where as long as it’s in tune, I can make the best of whatever circumstances are around me. I have to be in tune with myself also. The thing that I treasure most

about my playing is when I cry. If I don’t cry, I don’t mean it. The worst thing you could do to a musician is to pay him or feed him before a gig. It’s a fact, the musicians you see in old movies, playing the violin outside in the cold, have to play soulfully. The most important thing is the feeling and the cry. If I feel like that, all those other things I can straighten out by bringing my monitors up or down, or getting closer or farther away from the amp. My first discipline is myself. I have to renew my outlook on life every morning, otherwise everything is the same. This way I don’t have to shoot dope or drink liquor to feel pain, feel the blues. When I see winos in the Bowery I claim their pain, and when I play I can express their pain. There’s so much joy in all the percussion players that they take care of that department. I have to cry.

J.S. Do you feel that interplay between musicians is an intellectual process?

C.S. No, it’s the choosing of expression. I can listen to Miles and Wayne ad-libbing and I don’t get tired of it. To me, it’s more enjoyable taking a solo than it is to listen to it. There are exceptions, but there are very few people who I can go all the way with and follow the solo even when they deviate from the melody. With some people I lose interest completely.

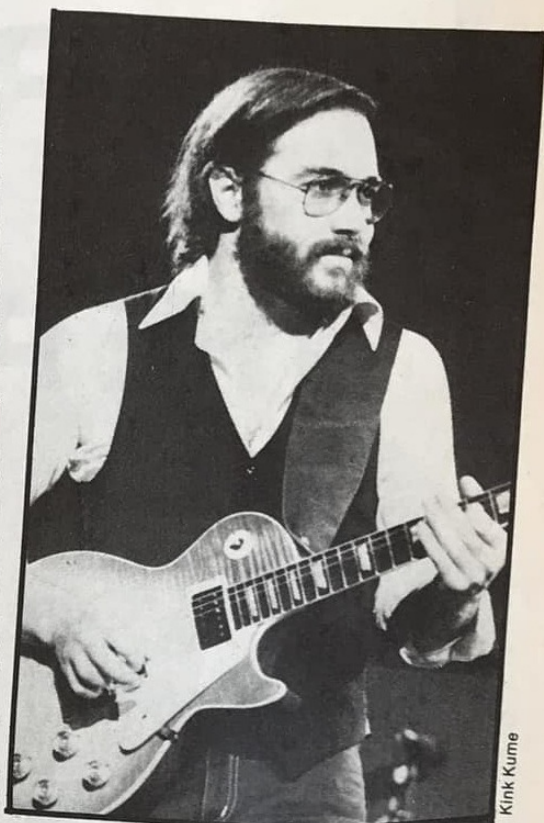
A.D. You have to have a certain consciousness with what you’re doing with a solo. If you get too lost in the solo you lose sight of how you’re communicating to the audience.

C.S. My father-in-law, Sanders King, is a guitarist who played with Louie Armstrong and Billie Holiday. One time he told me that Armstrong said when he’s going to take a solo, he pictures an orchard and picks the fruit that is most ripe. Those are the notes he chooses to play. That makes a lot of sense to me. If you pick the ones that are really juicy, people are going to get off.

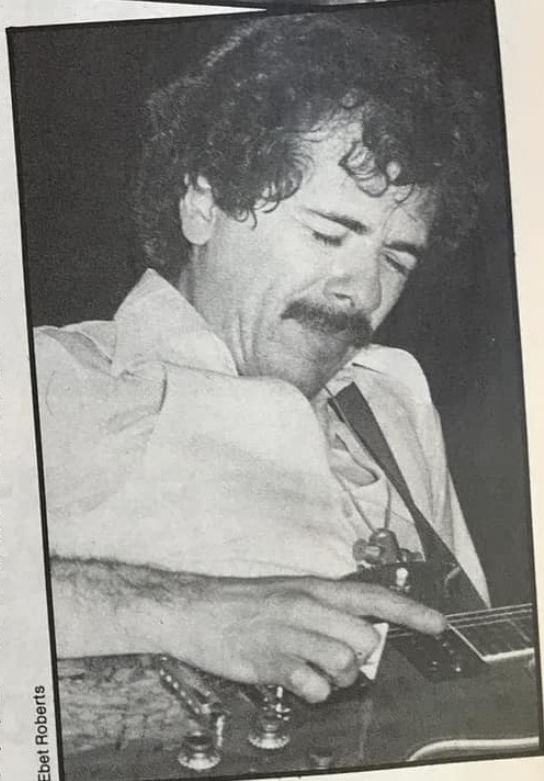
J.S. Do you feel some of your finest solos are on *Swing of Delight*?

C.S. Yes, playing with those guys [Ron Carter, Tony Williams, Herbie Hancock, and Wayne Shorter], they grabbed me by the ankles and threw me right up there. “Twigs Approved” from the Dixie Dregs album *Dregs of the*

(Continued on page 74)



Kink Kume



Ebet Roberts

Al Dimeola (above) and Carlos Santana exemplify precise and emotional approaches to playing.



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SANTANA/ DIMEOLA

(Continued from page 41)

Earth sent us off in another direction.]

C.S. At first it sounded like Ray Gomez and the whole ocean of guitar players that sound like Jeff Beck. But the more he played, the better it sounded. The concept was good, but I like a signature. As soon as you play the first note I should know who it is.

All it takes is some time alone. Lock yourself in a room and set a goal of getting your own sound. It doesn't take long. Not until I learned there's nothing wrong with crying did I find a sound that people can identify as mine. You should be able to take the best from a B.B. King or a George Benson but still sound like yourself. Anyway this song had a good attitude.

J.S. How does attitude relate to music?

C.S. Attitude is the way we execute things. Jeff Beck is the epitome of attitude. Him and Jimi Hendrix, what they do to a note is rude and treacherous, and I love it.

A.D. I think it would be hard for people to pass judgment on me when I first joined RTF, because I really hadn't found myself yet. I wasn't where I wanted to be then. Not to say that I am now, it's just that I saw a style a few years later. I felt confident.

[Larry Carlton's "Mulberry St." from *Strikes Twice* was the last song we listened to.]

C.S. That was nice and pleasant. It sounded like he was having a great time.

A.D. You can tell an L.A. rhythm section right off the bat. It's happy, pop-pish thing. I like it.

C.S. He sounded real good, but a lot of bands from L.A. are boring, especially when you see them live. They don't dig in. They pose a lot, they look cute. I like cats that sweat and go right into a note, right into a groove, and they take you with them. I'm spoiled.

A.D. It's a rock and roll attitude he's talking about, and I think he's right.

C.S. I really like Van Halen. It's raunchy and nasty, and they go for it.

A.D. I like hearing this L.A. music played with more energy. This had a pop sound.

J.S. Do you hear a big difference between New York and L.A. music?

C.S. Yes, are you kidding?

A.D. That wasn't New York to me, that was L.A.

J.S. Who is New York?

C.S. Stuff is New York but not even the kind I like. Miles is the perfect example.

Jimi was New York when he was alive. **J.S.** What are you?

C.S. I like to take some from everybody. But I learned from New York that when you go on stage, you better dive in or they're going to let you know it.

A.D. San Francisco has a lot of the same attitudes as New York. The street is very significant in those two cities, and it's not so much in L.A.

J.S. One thing I've noticed is that guitarists seem to reach their peak either before or on their way to the top. For example, I think Eric Clapton was a better player with Mayall than he is now, on his own. Is your goal to become a better player?

A.D. My goal is to try and find out how I can sell more records. You can always learn. What's more intriguing to me right now is to get my music out to people who haven't heard it yet.

J.S. Devadip, do you have any musical goals?

C.S. My first goal right now is to become a better disciple of Sri Chinmoy. In pleasing him, I become a better person, and automatically a better musician. Pat Martino said something that strikes me as significant for a

"Pat Martino says he learns a lot about music from going fishing or playing tennis, just putting his guitar in the closet."

musician. He said he learns a lot about music from going fishing or playing tennis, just putting his guitar in the closet. Learning other things than music is important to me. I will automatically be able to stretch out and play a melody many different ways if I'm looking at life differently.

A.D. I never saw that years ago, when I first began. Music was everything. Now I'm finding that a lot of musicians at a high level still lock themselves up and are not getting out there. If you don't do other things besides music, you're playing is not going to round out.

C.S. I think styles of playing are like glasses. It's what you put inside the glass that's important, and that's you, your true feelings. I'm learning the validity of all music. One time they asked John Coltrane, "What do you think of those people who don't understand your music?" He said, "If they listen once, twice, three times, and don't get anything from it, I'm still going on." The most important thing is to keep going on.