



Spirits Dancing in the Flesh: Santana and Carlos

BY [JONATHAN PRITCHARD-BARRETT](#) ON 15/04/2016 [MUSIC](#)

It has been 47 years since Santana's eponymous first album was released. In the meantime the band have released 22 more studio albums and been through numerous personnel changes. Now the band's classic early 70s line-up has reformed to release [Santana IV](#), out today.

The new album features Greg Rolie on vocals and Hammond B3 organ and guitarist Neal Schon – both of whom went on to form [Journey](#). The other originals are percussionist Michael Carabello and drummer Michael Shrieve... as well as Carlos Santana himself. Guest vocals are provided by the soul maestro Ron Isley, lead singer of [The Isley Brothers](#). The results should be cosmic.

Originally formed in 1967 in San Francisco as The Carlos Santana Blues Band, Carlos might have been influenced by John Lee Hooker and BB King but they were not your usual blues band. Carlos was born in Mexico to the son of a Mariachi musician and the band incorporated highly percussive Latin rhythms from the start. Having emerged at the day-glo peak of the Summer of Love, their music has always had more than a dash of psychedelia.

By 1969 the band were simply called Santana, they were a fixture on the San Francisco scene but hardly globally famous. All that would change when they performed at the Woodstock Festival that August. Their first album came out the same month and got to number 4 in the Billboard charts. Santana had pretty much created a new genre of music – funky Latin space rock.

Their first three albums [Santana](#) (1969), [Abraxas](#) (1970), and [Santana III](#) (1971) would each go multi-platinum and contain many of the key songs in the band's back catalogue. In 1972

Santana changed direction with the release of [Caravanserai](#). The album moved from a danceable salsa sound to more meditative, jazzier direction.

1972 was also the year many of the original band members left and Carlos met his spiritual guru for the next ten years Sri Chinmoy. The following year he collaborated with British jazz guitarist John McLaughlin and his band [The Mahavishnu Orchestra](#) on [Love Devotion Surrender](#), which was inspired by Chinmoy and saxophonist [John Coltrane](#). Over the next few years Carlos would continue to collaborate with McLaughlin, as well as working with [Alice Coltrane](#), the musician wife of John.

By the mid-70s the two poles of Santana's music were established – wild, groove-laden Latin freakouts and spacey jazz meditations. *Santana IV* is definitely in the former camp, but [Carlos recently told Billboard magazine](#) that he plans to record an album of 'obscure' John Coltrane songs with John McLaughlin in the near future.

Ironically Santana got its second wind – and biggest hit record – with an album that headed in a very different direction from their previous work. Released in 1999, [Supernatural](#) featured a more contemporary sound and collaborations with a host of younger talent including Rob Thomas of [Matchbox Twenty](#) (who sang on the album's main single *Smooth*), [Cee-Lo Green](#), [Lauryn Hill](#), and [Dave Matthews](#) amongst others. The album sold 30 million copies across the globe.

Perhaps it's no irony that the first single off the new album is called [Anywhere You Want to Go](#) because it seems Carlos and his band are unafraid to return to the past as they reach their late 60s. Sometimes the place you want to go is a golden era – we'll have to see if there are still nuggets in them thar hills.

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