



Carlos Santana: Back on Top

Marc Shapiro

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Carlos Santana took the music world by storm back in 1969 with his thrilling performance at the Woodstock festival. He was the first guitarist to skillfully blend fiery rock riffs with Latin, blues and sensuous Afro-Cuban rhythms to create a unique and unforgettable sound. His vision to create innovative melodies has earned him a magnitude of critical praise and acclaim over his illustrious career. But, the road to success has been a rocky, uphill climb.

The middle child of seven children, Carlos Santana was born on July 20, 1947 in a tiny Mexican village where the homes were comprised of brick and mud, and there was no running water or lights. But, what his parents couldn't give in material wealth, they heaped upon their children in love. It was after the family moved to Tijuana that twelve year old Carlos developed his talent for the guitar and his reputation as a formidable musician spread.

In 1968 Columbia Records signed on the Santana Blues Band and they began in earnest to work on an album that would include such popular Latin and soul favorites as "Black Magic Woman," "Evil Ways," and "Oye Como Va". On August 15, 1969, the Santana band was given the opportunity to play Woodstock before the release of their first album and this performance would forever be etched in fans' minds as a key moment in rock history. The Santana Blues Bands went from obscurity to instant recognition. Shortly thereafter, rumblings of discontent were echoed within the group with the volatile mixture of drug abuse, personality clashes, and the frustrations over the musical direction the band, ultimately leading to the demise of the group.

Following the breakup, Carlos Santana delved deeper into the meditative arts and spirituality. The succession of albums that followed were greeted with critical acclaim, but moderate success. In the late 90's, Santana begin working on a new album under the creative direction of Clive Davis, head of Arista Records. In a brilliant union of collaborating with younger artists as Lauryn Hill, Wyclef Jean, and Rob Thomas, the album, Supernatural was a commercial smash. It sold over thirteen million copies, and appealed to both the baby boomers and the teenage crowd. Carlos Santana became the star of the 2000 Grammys, and Supernatural won several awards including, Best Rock Album of the Year, Song of the Year for "Smooth", and Album of the Year. With a career that spans three decades, Carlos Santana has proven that talent, determination, and passion are the keys to longevity in a business that is obsessed with youth and beauty. Against the odds, he has defied the rule of convention and made an incredible comeback. His story is timeless, inspirational, and he has undoubtedly proven himself to be the king of the guitar.

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