

Santana Is Alive And Well

By *Alexander Baron* - Oct 2, 2015



Carlos Santana in the element on New Year's Eve 1976 at the Cow Palace in San Francisco

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Word is that a man named Carlos Santana died last week. Not *that* **Carlos Santana** fortunately for the world of music, although that appears to be how the rumour started. If you are not a fan of Mexico's greatest export, chances are you've heard him or at least heard of him, although if you are a rock fan, no need to ask the question. Four years ago he was rated at number 20 in the *Rolling Stone* list of **100 Greatest Guitarists**.

My first memory of a Santana guitar solo is from around 1975, a bar in Charing Cross was playing *Black Magic Woman*, a song written by Peter Green of Fleetwood Mac. I was so impressed that I dug out what information I could in that pre-Internet age, and in 1976 when he played Wembley, I had to see him. He was supported by Journey, whose lead

guitarist Neal Schon had played second guitar with him briefly. He played Wembley again in 2006, and if I'd had my priorities in the right order I would have bought a ticket for that concert instead of keeping what I thought was a more important commitment.



Like that other icon **Ritchie Blackmore**, who is two years his senior, Santana has a unique style, his use of sustain, and those long, clear notes are music to a deaf man's ears, or a tone deaf one in my case. Santana produced his finest music way back in the 1970s, including *Europa*, which I remember him introducing as a new song at Wembley. As might be suspected, this instrumental is even better live. For my money, *The Third Album*, the double album *Moonflower* and most of all the 1972 masterpiece *Caravanserai* are his outstanding works, but in recent years he has been enjoying something of a resurgence and has been working with younger artists. Recent? Did he really record *Smooth* 16 years ago? More to the point, what is he doing today?

Check out the **official site** for full details, but if you live in or near Arizona, you are in luck from the end of the month. You can also check out the stories behind some Santana recordings on **SongFacts**, and find some excellent footage of the man and his band on YouTube.