



Carlos Santana

Guitar Heroes, 40 Years Late

It's been nearly 40 years since Jimi Hendrix' death, 41 since Carlos Santana's eponymous band (virtually unknown outside the San Francisco scene) riveted the Woodstock festival. Mick Taylor joined the Rolling Stones that same year, and a year earlier Jeff Beck toured behind his first solo album after leaving the Yardbirds.

And in 2010, all four guitar greats have new albums out — though the definition of "new" isn't the same for each.



Valleys Of Neptune (Experience Hendrix/Legacy Recordings) is not a "lost" Jimi Hendrix album; it's a patchwork quilt.

Stitched together from recordings by a guitar genius, granted, but still a quilt.

The dozen tracks span February to September '69, not counting some May '70 overdubs — or "Mr. Bad Luck" (later renamed "Look Over Yonder"), cut in 1967, with Noel Redding and Mitch Mitchell overdubbing new bass and drum tracks, as they also did on "Crying Blue Rain" and "Lover Man," in '87.

That period encompasses Redding's departure from the Experience and the introduction of bassist Billy Cox. With Redding still onboard, there are rehearsal tapes of warhorses from the trio's live repertoire ("Fire," "Lover Man," "Sunshine Of Your Love," and an extended "Red House"). Also recorded during the original group's last session is a reworking of "Stone Free," with

Cox' bass replacing Redding's a month later.

Jimi Hendrix released only three studio albums in his lifetime, and none (repeat *none*) of the countless posthumous releases, authorized by the estate or not, live up to the standard they set — *Valleys Of Neptune* included. In his liner notes, Experience Hendrix curator John McDermott notes Jimi's love for recording and his "passion to create and explore," saying, "We are fortunate that he preserved so much of his work for posterity."

Well, who's to say what Hendrix would have wanted released or not? As a collector, I've got countless recordings that weren't released during an artist's lifetime — up to and including the recordings that Dean Benedetti made of Charlie Parker's solos (and only the solos) at various club dates. But as a guitarist, I wouldn't want my demos and works in progress to see the light of day any more than, as a writer, I'd want a half-finished novel I abandoned to be published.

Is there great guitar playing here? Of course. But it would be a shame if this were a Hendrix neophyte's introduction

to the man, instead of those three original albums.



Eleven years may seem a tad soon to issue a "Legacy Edition" of an album, but 1999's *Supernatural* (Arista) set such a high bar (racking up sales of 25 million while garnering a record nine Grammy awards), fans will be intrigued to check out the newly re-mastered version (supervised by Carlos Santana) and even more anxious to hear the new companion CD.

The concept of teaming an established artist (sometimes gratuitously) with a bevy of guests was nothing new, but *Supernatural* succeeded artistically as well as commercially. That it introduced one of the guitar world's true originals to a younger audience was just icing on the cake.

In addition to two dance mixes (of "Maria Maria" and "Corazon Espinado"), instrumental versions of "The Calling" (with Eric Clapton) and "Smooth" (karaoke-ready sans Rob Thomas' vocal), and "Olympic Festival" (from the soundtrack to *Girlfight*), the bonus disc features seven songs that didn't make it to *Supernatural*. They not only stand on their own, but hold together as a separate album — in fact, sounding *more* like a traditional Santana album, since Carlos' touring band (with singer Tony Lindsay) is utilized.

"Rain Down On Me" features co-writer Dave Matthews on vocal and incorporates the spiritual "John The Revelator." Santana continues his practice of including cool covers, with "One Fine Morning" (by the late-'60s horn-band Lighthouse) and a medley of Bob Marley's "Exodus" and "Get Up Stand Up."



Of course, the indelible stamp on both CDs is Santana's guitar — its crying tone and the tangible passion behind it.

It's as inexplicable as it is ironic that Mick Taylor isn't held in as high esteem as his guitar-giant peers. He joined John Mayall's Bluesbreakers when he was only 18 and improved by leaps and bounds with seemingly every gig; yet his name doesn't elicit hushed murmurs like the guitarists who preceded him in the band, Eric Clapton and Peter Green.

In '69, he replaced Brian Jones in the Rolling Stones and, for five years, upped the guitar ante considerably, on such albums as *Sticky Fingers* and especially live, as illustrated on *Get Yer Ya-Ya's Out!*. Still, he's more anti-hero than guitar hero.

From "Secret Affair," the opening tune on the live DVD *New Morning: The Tokyo Concert* (Inakustik/MVD), Taylor demonstrates that he belongs in any discussion of the greatest blues-rock guitarists — owing to his tone, taste, and melodicism, rather than pyrotechnics. He never seems rushed, as he squeezes

long, snaking phrases from his Les Paul — effortlessly switching from fingers to slide, often in mid-phrase.

His vocals are "pitchy" in spots, but his guitar work more than makes up for any flaws in that department. A 24-minute bonus feature, combining interview and performance clips, is very revealing.

The 60-year-old acknowledges his associations with Dylan and the Stones, closing with "Blind Willie McTell" and "No Expectations" (which pre-dated his tenure with the band). The entire set is slow-paced — much like his playing, which is never hurried. Maybe it's that reserved quality, along with a total lack of posturing, that makes people overlook what an amazing guitarist Mick Taylor is.



Jeff Beck, on the other hand, is the ultimate guitar slinger. Whether he's blazing through "Train Kept A-Rollin'" or delicately coaxing a whining bend from "Cause We've Ended As Lovers," he's the embodiment of the iconic Guitar Hero. (You didn't think Nigel Tufnel's uncanny resemblance was just a coincidence, did you?)

Considering that he set a new standard when he joined the Yardbirds in '65 (more than filling the shoes of his predecessor, Eric Clapton), what's even more remarkable is that such a distinct stylist from the get-go has continued to evolve, stylistically and technically.

On *Emotion & Commotion* (Atco), his first studio album in seven years, that evolution finds him backed by a 64-piece orchestra. A slow, almost rubato Christmas piece, "Corpus Christi Carol," opens the CD, segueing into the wah-wah intro of "Hammerhead," with a pumping riff supplied by the orchestra and Tal Wilkenfeld's bass.

Originals by keyboardist Jason Rebello (and co-writes with Beck) are interspersed with beautiful renditions of "Somewhere Over The Rainbow" and Puccini's "Nessun Dorma."

The program is all instrumental, except for "Lilac Wine" (James Shelton's ballad, which has been covered by such diverse singers as Jeff Buckley and Eartha Kitt), featuring Imelda May, and Joss Stone on "There's No Other Me" (which she wrote with Rebello) and "I Put A Spell On You." Her over-the-top vocals get a bit affected on the latter; an instrumental interpretation with Beck's guitar in place of the vocal would've been more interesting.

As Beck says, "What interests me now is trying to sing through the guitar" — something he has raised to such a level, it just makes you shake your head in wonder.

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