LISTENING IN WITH ... CARLOS SANTANA

CARLOS SANTANA has been a student of spirituality for most, if not all, of his adult life. So has his wife, accomplished drummer CINDY BLACKMAN SANTANA.

The legendary Latin-rock guitarist, who came to the U.S. from Mexico as a teenager in the mid-1960s, has also been very active in philanthropy and social justice. His nonprofit Milagro (Miracle) Foundation, begun in 1998, benefits children around the world. Blackman Santana’s cover of “Imagine” from her 2020 album Give the Drummer Some benefits world hunger exacerbated by COVID-19. With each recording and each concert, the couple hold the intention for their music to inspire others to reclaim their own divine light—and then to share that light with the world.

They recently discussed the intersection of their music and their spiritual lives with Unity Magazine editor KATY KOONTZ.

CHOOSING DIVINITY

CARLOS SANTANA PHOTO BY ROBERTO FINIZIO | CINDY BLACKMAN SANTANA PHOTO BY JIMMY BRUCH
KATY KOONTZ: Congratulations, Cindy, on your latest album, which includes your version of “Imagine.” John Lennon wrote that song in 1971 as a vision, maybe even a plea, but you’ve made it a celebration. Did you choose that song specifically for these challenging times?

CINDY BLACKMAN SANTANA: I chose it because I’ve always loved the message, from when I first heard it as a child. It was completely synchronistic that I released the song at this time, with all that’s happening. We need that message now.

KK: That type of synchronicity is just one example of how you and Carlos have long used music to heal others. How did you each discover that you could channel your energy in that way?

CARLOS SANTANA: It’s all done by grace, being in the place to receive the inner reality that we chose our parents, we chose this time to be on the planet, and we choose our lives. And there’s just something that gives you confidence of spirit when you know you were created in the likeness of something so miraculous. That compels us to play music and to live for principles that can elevate and inspire people to be better humans.

CBS: Think about what this universe and all people in it are made of: frequency, vibration, electricity, magnetism, and light—photons. Those are the elements of the universe. Music is a frequency—every tone, every note, and every space. That means every time I’m playing, I am sending out energy that turns into a physical thing. That frequency can touch somebody’s heart, so it can actually touch their body, as well. It’s going to make them feel better. I like to focus on that when I play because then I know that I’m doing something that will help uplift the consciousness of humanity. When we play, we have universal love in mind. We have universal consciousness in mind. We have the upliftment and the salvation of humanity in mind, and you know, you can’t help but put out good energy when the source of your energy is good too.

KK: From your description, it sounds like when you play, it’s a physical, emotional, and spiritual experience.

CBS: Absolutely. It’s all of the above. We’re physical, emotional, and spiritual beings, so we need to affect all of those elements in order to make lasting changes. We have to understand that every time we think a thing, we’re creating something. So, if we’re thinking of a negativity, then there’s going to be a negativity that’s created, and when enough of those elements gather, it’s going to have a greater effect. Transversely, the same will happen when you’re thinking of positive and loving thoughts. You will then be creating positive and loving things, so what we focus on is very, very important.

KK: I would imagine when you perform, you’re lifting your own vibration as well as also lifting the audience’s, right?

CBS: Yes, absolutely. It’s healing to everyone, including ourselves, because we are also made up of the same elements. Every other person is just another you because we’re all one, so what you do to somebody else, you’re actually doing to yourself, as well.

KK: Spirituality has been a big part of both of your lives for a long time. What spiritual path or resource has stood out the most for each of you?

CS: Gratitude and acknowledging the power of grace in everything inside you and around you, and knowing that we are made in the same likeness as God. That’s important because this planet is infected with fear and with the lie that everyone’s a victim because we were dismissed from the Garden of Eden for doing something bad. But to that we say no way, because we believe with clarity of spirit and clarity of mind that we are ready to create miracles and blessings.

CBS: Seeing the divinity in myself and others is one of my main sources of inspiration. So when I look at other people, I have to look at them in the same way that I would look at myself and my loved ones. I’m going to treat them with the utmost care and the utmost love because that’s how we should treat each other, and that’s how I’d want people to treat me. We have to do unto others with that same kind of energy.

We’re all made up of photons, or light, and light is what God comes from, so we are all made up of sparks from the Divine. Once everyone recognizes the divinity in everyone else, then we will have a utopia that is beyond our wildest imaginations—like a beautiful garden where all the plants are flourishing and everything’s well-tended. We need to really review and change how we see ourselves and how we see each other.
KK: That’s a powerful practice—one that needs to be a constant process.

CBS: Yes. It’s something you have to keep at the forefront of your mind and live by, and it’s something we have to teach our children, because if we teach the next generation to do this, it will be part of their DNA. There won’t be other choices because we will have helped them weed those out of society. We will still have free will, but we will only want to do things that are for the good of everyone. Once we’re able to raise a community of people who have that as their core thought process, then we’re going to see some beautiful changes in this world.

KK: What you’re describing sounds a lot like Carlos’s concept of the Church of the Holy Choice.

CS: Yes, exactly. This is the power of free will, and everyone has the choice. We can live in light or we can live as a victim. It’s more exciting to live in light instead of being predictably boring or being a victim because then everything’s a miracle and blessing. You can manifest a higher frequency of love with compassion. I don’t like being around people who are bent and twisted and constantly trying to convince me that they’re victims. I can tell by the way they look and the way they walk that some people love being victims. But for me, that’s boring, so that means my light will be boring to them, and their darkness is going to be boring to me.

My choice is being the highest and the deepest I can be and to present it at God’s speed. Cindy and I happen to play drums, and we happen to play guitar, but when you strip all of that away, we are benefactors and lightworkers, and we came to this planet to inspire people to wake up to their own illumination.

KK: Sounds like a utopia. I wish it could happen soon.

CBS: When we live channeling God’s energy, then things can happen in the blink of an eye, at God’s speed. When the majority of us realize this change and understand what to do, then we can tip the scales for those who don’t realize it yet and lift them up. I truly believe with all my heart that this can happen in a second, or even less. It just depends on whether or not we, as a society, are willing to accept this truth. But recognizing the divinity in yourself and recognizing and appreciating the divinity in everyone else will certainly help quell a lot of the fear that people have of the unknown.

KK: I think we’re getting closer at least—maybe this is just the dark before the dawn.

CBS: I think you’re right. This is a time to reset, a time to refocus, a time to really understand that we can never, ever achieve something different by doing things in the exact same way that we did before. We can only change things if we change. So I’m with you a thousand percent.

John McLaughlin recently asked Carlos and me to play on a song called “Quarantine Blues.” He also

Carlos Santana and Cindy Blackman Santana are offering the streaming proceeds of their cover of John Lennon’s “Imagine” to fight global hunger. To participate, listen to the song via the SongAid collection on your preferred music platform (such as Spotify, Pandora, Apple Music, and Amazon Music, among others). All of the proceeds then go to the Rapid Response Fund at WhyHunger, a nonprofit organization cofounded in 1975 by the late singer/songwriter Harry Chapin and radio DJ Bill Ayres to recognize nutritious food as a human right and mobilize musical artists in becoming social activists for the cause. Santana and Blackman Santana were among the first artists to participate in the new SongAid playlist, which is updated weekly with offerings from a variety of performers. For more information, visit whyhunger.org and songaid.com.
EXPERIENCING
SANTANA’S
‘UNIVERSAL TONE’

BY REV. JACQUIE FERNÁNDEZ

Attending a Santana concert is a transcendent experience. The songs individually deliver messages from every decade of Carlos Santana’s career,yet collectively reveal so much more than time can contain. The Latin rhythms surely call to the ancestors as the audience dances a mix ofancient and modern moves complete with massive air guitar solos. Some audience members are soaked in Woodstock nostalgia, but Santana forces you to take him just as he is in this moment. His riffs are fast, his melodies soulful, with every note delivered in what he calls the universal tone. And without knowing exactly what he means by that,you somehow know exactly what he means in the moment.Unmistakably Carlos.

If you choose to take the ride with him,you agree to give in to the seduction of Latin rock rhythms, to flow with lyrics changing fluidly from English to Spanish, and to trust his soul-penetrating electric guitar as your constant companion through the variety of song styles. It’s an easy ride to take, and like any spiritual experience, it will change you to the degree you allow.

I took the ride myself on August 13, 2010, when Santana played at the Greek Theatre in Los Angeles as a benefit for activist Dolores Huerta’s 80th birthday year. Huerta is my great aunt, and I was able to attend with many family members. At that concert, Santana described in his music a “resonant vibration that will remind you that you are made of light and love and that you can create miracles.” He told the crowd that as an immigrant from Tijuana, Mexico, he is a miracle and that by the grace of God, the best is still ahead. Each song was a demonstration of light and love and a living miracle, an invitation to be your own miracle-maker.

This is how Santana chooses to live as the embodiment of light and love on this planet with the talent he has been given. He creates a resonant vibration reminding his audience of their own inherent divinity. While many are just there to listen to a legend play familiar songs and to have a good time, Santana stays true to his soul song and delivers the deeper gift of inviting all present into a greater demonstration of their own miracle-making lives.

Rolling Stone puts Carlos Santana at No. 20 on the magazine’s most current list of the 100 all-time greatest guitarists. Together with his band Santana, he’s won 10 Grammy Awards (including eight for the 1999 album Supernatural) and was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 1998. Even before his wife Cindy Blackman Santana joined his band, she was an acclaimed jazz drummer who toured with Lenny Kravitz for more than 15 years and had also led her own band. On her 2020 solo album Give the Drummer Some, which features her husband on eight of its 17 tracks, Blackman Santana also showcases her vocal talent. The couple have been married since December 2010. Visit santana.com and cindyblackmansantana.com.