



Santana

"Samba Pa Ti"

Abraxas

09/1970

CBS

Witness to Love

Cory Funk

We pick up what is in the air when we are young. One of the things that filled the air of my childhood was music. My dad loves music. He always had the radio on in the house. Being a natural night owl, it was standard that if we got out of bed before midnight we could always find him sitting in the green easy chair wearing his Sennheisers with the yellow foam earpieces listening to something indistinct but audible in the silent house, the glow of the analog tuning dial and VU meters softly illuminating the living room.

Once in a while Dad would be tickled by something in his mind, and he would dig through small pleather cassette holder, and then play something rare and fascinating for my sister and me. This is how I first heard Gordon Lightfoot's "Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald", which he played on the anniversary of the ship sinking. Near Christmas he would play "We Three Kings" and we would sing along but with the alternate lyrics involving an exploding cigar that he had taught us when we were elementary school aged. My mom would shake her head in bemusement. His sharing brought us all closer together.

I asked him how he got these songs. He said, "from the radio" and he showed me how to make my own mixed tapes. I had to stand on a stepstool to reach the JVC tape deck when I started following in his footsteps. I scrounged in the toy box and found some derelict audio book cassettes, put scotch tape over the corner tabs, and off I went! I never thought to ask Dad for one of his blank ones. They seemed to be off limits being kept in the bottom of a hutch and we weren't supposed to touch stuff in there, like Mom's seasonal "Precious Moments" figures. It added to the mystery at the time. It felt like he and I were doing something unique and on the sly.

Though he had fully embraced cassettes (CDs were still a few years off from being readily available), my dad still had a turntable hooked up back then. It was an Onkyo CP 1010A. Dad would tell me occasionally "Your mom bought me this when you were little" and she would reply from the kitchen "It was radio grade, the salesman said", and they would smile at each other. There were a few records that continued to live a vagabond life on the thin metal bookshelf in the living room. Huddled together on the bottom shelf where the first two Boston albums; a budget version of "Best Of Cream," which had sketches of various kinds of fruit on it; a copy of "In A Gadda Da Vida" that he bought off a guy on his dorm floor his sophomore year of college; and the first four Santana albums.

Those Boston and Santana albums fascinated me because of their covers. I used to stare at them in a vain attempt to understand what was going on with the artwork and how it related to the music contained therein, as if they were gatefold Rosetta stones and if I could decipher them I would be able to understand a New Realm of Things. They weren't. They were just art to catch the eye when people flipped through the bins at the Sam Goody or Musicland. Art for buyer's sake. My dad mistook this fascination with intent, and since I was standing there holding the jacket, he would put the record on.

Though I didn't know it at the time, I was learning about love right then. And all the times listed above. These were demonstrations of caring, compassion, and a sharing of interests. It was a subtle code.

There is a specific calculus that young people can't do which is the math of figuring out the years in a person's life who is older than they are. I don't mean doing the simple arithmetic to figure out the calendar years between two people. We know our uncles' and aunts' ages by a single significant digit that reads "Older" and we leave it at that. Every one of us has this natural blind spot. When I was standing in the living room with the two-tone green shag rug recording over my Peter Pan audio book cassettes in favor of the week's "Funny Five" on Dr. Demento, I didn't know (nor could I reason out) just how old my parents were right then, either by number or by position in time. By extension I didn't know how old they were on their wedding day, or how old when my sister came along, or when I rounded out the family. It wasn't until many years later that I was old enough to understand this equation and what brought about my understanding was the song "Samba Pa Ti" by Santana.

On the second Santana album, *Abraxas*, halfway through the second side, there is a slow instrumental track called "Samba Pa Ti". I recall that Dad would play this record when I would take it out to stare at the cover. He would usually start on the B side, and when "Samba Pa Ti" was about to play, he would get a grin on his face, impish, and go to the kitchen. There, he and Mom would dance together, like a couple in high school. Sometimes they would giggle (GIGGLE! Parents don't giggle!) and always, at the end of the song, they would kiss. My sister and I would of course object to this. "Eww! Gross! No smooching in the kitchen!" and then we would all go about our day as the record played on.

This look, this dance, and this kiss happened every single time the song played. Throughout my childhood and up until I moved out of the house after college. It still happens to this day as far as I know.

It's a shame it took me so long to realize that this is my parent's *song*. My dad bought this album when it came out, which was a year before my sister came along. This is what they danced to when they were just past being kids themselves, what they danced to when they were newlyweds, when they were young adults still finishing college now with a family. Every time "Samba Pa Ti" came on, we were witness, for four and a half minutes, to our parents as they were then: young lovers. We were also witness to their still being very much in love with each other. For those few minutes, it wasn't about undone dishes, unpaid bills, Dad having to travel again for work, my sister's grades, the disaster area that was my room, or who had to mow the lawn. The world was on pause while two married folks slipped out of time, danced and smooched in the kitchen, and the house filled with love.