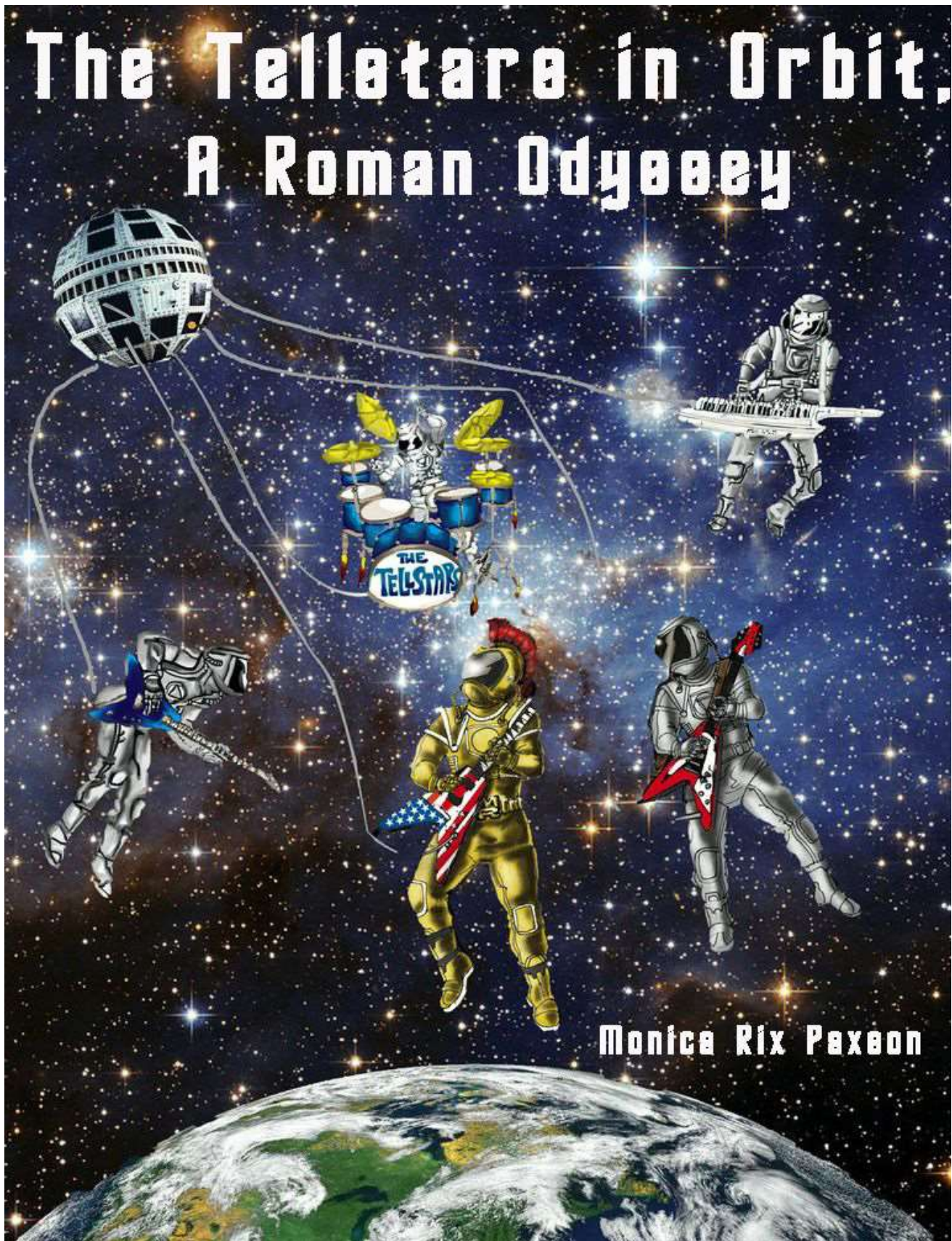


# The Tellatare in Orbit, A Roman Odyssey



Monica Rix Paxson





## CHAPTER I “LIFT OFF”

On March 15, 1966, also known as the Ides of March, a Roman Odyssey began with The Tellstars satellite being launched into orbit around the musical galaxy of instrumental Rock Stars exploring the ever-changing frontier and expanding universal language of music. The band’s original line-up of “musical astronauts” included Mike Roman, leader-founder on lead guitar, Joe Torres, co-founder and rhythm/lead guitar, Peter Fernandez, drums, Louie Esquivel, lead vocals, and Kenny Schreiber on bass.

Before long, with the management skills of Jimmy Hernandez, bass player of the popular South Chicago group The Revells, and the tutorial assistance of Joe Torres’ older brother Tony Torres and his Trio Los Altenos, the five-piece “pop rock” group was playing at neighborhood basement and yard parties as well as sidewalk sales and grammar school dances where they performed many of the top hits by Rock pioneers Ray Charles, Chuck Berry, Lil’ Richard, Bill Hale & His Comets and Ritchie Valens.



The Tellstars’ song list also included classic hits by international instrumental groups such as Santo and Johnny, The Ventures, The Surfaris, The Shadows and The Tornadoes, whose smash hit “Telstar” Roman named his band after. (The influence of

the Surf sound can be heard on “Tsunami, 911,” which fused Surf with Latin Rock on The Tellstars’ “Cha Cha Time!” CD featuring Carlos Santana’s original percussion section and Rock n’ Roll Hall of fame members, Jose “Chepito” Areas and Michael Shrieve).

## CHAPTER II

### “JETTISON”



Just like space rockets that jettison spent fuel tanks at the split second it starts to slow down the spacecraft, The Tellstars jettisoned two of the original “musical astronauts” and the second-stage line-up kicked in giving the group an even greater boost of musical velocity and rhythmic progression.

Indeed, in April 1966, the band experienced its first personnel change with the replacement of Peter Fernandez by Steve Missal on drums and vocals and two months later Joe Fonseca replaced Kenny Schreiber on bass and back ground vocals. This new line-up began performing for Chicago Public Schools and suburban high-school dances. Salvador Ramirez, Torres’ brother-in-law and new band manager, booked the group to perform at summer festivals in southern Illinois where big crowds cheered them enthusiastically at every stop.

In the fall of 1966, The Tellstars acquired a new sound and a fresh new look with the



departure of the lead singer and the arrival of Luke Pillarella on the organ and second lead vocals. After several vocalists auditioned for the lead singer's part, but none met Roman's expectations, Missal, still on drums, became the new lead singer after Roman and the others realized that Missal was the lead vocalist they had been searching for. They encouraged him to develop and synchronize his percussion skills and vocal talents that he indeed solidified, mastered and perfected as time went on.



The Tellstars' musical repertoire, in addition to the instrumentals and Johnny Rivers' hits, now included the latest hits by groups from the 1960s'

"Music Revolution" such as The Rolling Stones, The Monkees, Mitch Ryder & The Detroit Wheels, Sam The Sham and The Pharaohs, Tommy James & The Shondells, Question Mark and The Mysterians, The Outsiders, The McCoys, The Kingsmen, Paul Revere & The Raiders and many other international and national recording acts. This expansion of their versatility helped The Tellstars become more appealing to both, young and older audiences.

## CHAPTER III

### THE BRITISH INVASION & THE VIETNAM WAR

Since the advent of the British Invasion spearheaded by the Beatles, the Dave Clark Five, the Rolling Stones, the Kinks, the Animals, Herman's Hermits, the Zombies, Gerry & the Pacemakers, and Freddie & the Dreamers, every aspiring musician wanted to be in a Rock n' Roll band. Local bands appeared and disappeared almost as fast as the Top 10 songs on the hit parade. One of the reasons most bands did not last was the lack of appreciation for the hard-working commitment and personal dues musicians had to pay and that most Rock n' Roll musicians sought to transcend.



Tony Zamudio

Some South Chicago musicians needed space for rehearsal and others needed tutorial assistance to master the latest hits on the Radio. Music teacher Tony Zamudio, the lead guitarist with The Revells, filled this need. Zamudio had converted his third-floor apartment, located on 90th and Burley, into a rehearsal loft that he rented to local groups.



The Emotions



Robert Lamm



Narcis Cruz



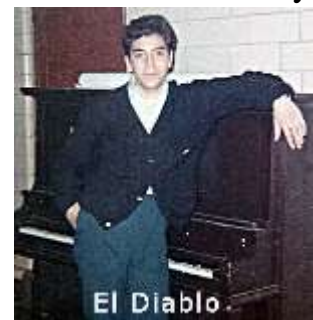


Some of these groups included The Trondells, with Roland Gomez on drums, and featuring piano prodigy Robert “Batman” Lamm who would become one of the cofounders and the best vocalist and song writer for the super group Chicago; The Entertainers, a band that featured Xavier Cruz

on the B-3 Hammond organ and Bob “cat eyes” Rodriguez on lead guitar; The Fortunate; Frank Torres and his band, The Emotions; David Saenz and his popular group, The Royal Rhythms; and also The Lords, one of the earliest Rolling Stones tribute bands fronted by young music-school teacher Victor Zavalza. Zavalza, a promising and talented fifteen-year-old lead vocalist and lead guitarist, was fatally stabbed in the back while acting as a Good Samaritan trying to stop a street fight after a teen dance on 91st and Burley Avenue in South Chicago.



Another reason for the breakup of bands could be directly attributed to the military draft for the war in Vietnam. During the cultural rebellion and hopefulness of the legendary '67 “Summer of Love,” Rene “El Diablo” Guajardo, The Tellstars’ manager at the time, was trying to avoid military service in Vietnam by obtaining recruits, including Mike Roman and the rest of the band, to volunteer for the U.S. Marines on the “buddy system.” Unfortunately, for “El Diablo,” the “buddies” were still minors and their parents refused to sign the authorization documents.



“El Diablo,” who had promised the band they would make it “big” in Saigon, was seriously wounded during the Tet Offensive. Upon his return to the States, he informed the group that the “Real Diablo” had appeared to him in the hellish jungles outside of

Saigon and that they were lucky not to have joined the jam in Vietnam. He urged them to join the anti-war movement that was gaining momentum every day in its quest to end the Southeast Asian war. For “El Diablo”, like many Vietnam vets surviving the war and suffering the peace of the conflict, someone described as “the unwilling doing the unnecessary for the ungrateful”, became one and the same; an inescapable reality relieved only by the power of music.

Indeed, South Chicago’s Our Lady of Guadalupe Church suffered the most Vietnam casualties than any other parish in the nation. The names of these decorated Hispanic Americans, including White Sox batboy Eddie Cervantes, are engraved on a memorial monument, and their military pictures enshrined on a mural wall located across the street from the same church where some had served as altar boys and the school they once attended.



## CHAPTER IV

### “THE NEXT STAGE”

Meanwhile in June, 1967, The Tellstars’ rendition of the late Richie Valens’ “La Bamba” and Trini Lopez’s “Cuando Calienta El Sol” (Love Me With All of Your Heart), both contributed to the scoring of their first national TV appearance on WGN TV in a variety show called “Charlando” (Chatting). Soon after, the group was booked for a third tour of towns in Southern Illinois in mid-September 1967.





The Tellstars, fresh from their popular television appearance, were looking forward to going back on the road again. Unfortunately, the driver of the vehicle carrying their musical equipment took a wrong turn on the way to Chicago's Rock Island Union Station, and the band missed the train. Upset

over the incident, Pillarella and Torres both quit the group later that evening leaving a demoralized and diminished line up. That same night, Missal informed Roman and Fonseca that he was getting out of the music business and wanted to sell his drums so he could purchase a motorcycle instead. Fortunately, Roman convinced him not to turn his back on music and subsequently Missal emerged as Roman's new right-hand-man and confidant.



For Roman, Missal and Fonseca, this turn of events presented a difficult challenge especially the loss of Torres who had also been the band's co-founder and Roman's right-hand-man, but the vacuum also opened up new musical opportunities.

Indeed, with the addition of talented organist and vocalist Rich Weber and gifted Scott



Grann on rhythm guitar and second lead vocals, the group could now perform more intricate material from luminary bands like The Doors, which featured the unique talents of Jim Morrison on lead vocals and Ray Manzarek on keyboards and the British Spencer Davis Group featuring Steve



Winwood's amazing talent on the B-3 Hammond organ and lead vocals.

The Tellstars' new line up also made it possible for the group to make a second WGN TV appearance on the same show in May 1968. The band's TV performance of the Doors' mega hit "Light My Fire" and The Buckingham's top-ten hit "Don't You Care," contributed tremendously to The Tellstars' resounding success and gave the group more popularity in the Chicago land area.



Since none of the musicians had a car or a driver's license at the time, Steve's older brother Bill Missal, a Vietnam era veteran and Rich's father, WWII Army veteran Mr. Roy Weber, provided the transportation

for the band and their musical equipment while the Grann family provided a place for the band to practice until Scott left the group a few months later and volunteered to join the U. S. Air Force in Vietnam.

## CHAPTER V

### "ORBIT CHANGE"



In the fall of 1968, Roman decided to change the musical direction of his group by adding a three-piece brass section. This alteration of the band's trajectory propelled The Tellstars satellite to alter musical orbits from "pop rock" and "surf" to "soul music," which not only changed the group's style, but the sound as well.

Indeed, it was Roberto “Birdman” Colon, The Tellstars’ equipment manager and musical guru, who turned the group onto the Soul Music explosion unleashed by the Motown Sound. In turn, this new brass-enhanced line-up became a “first” on the Southeast Side as the



Tellstars introduced Soul Music to many public and private high schools, including Washington H.S. and St. Francis De Sales, Mount Carmel and Mendel.



The band now featured standards by James Brown, Smokey Robinson and The Miracles, The Temptations, Little Anthony & The Imperials, Stevie Wonder, Booker T. & The M.G.’s, Sam & Dave, Wilson Pickett, Jr. Walker and The Allstars, Jackie Wilson, Isaac Hayes, Brook Benton, Rufus Thomas, Arthur Conley, Brenton Wood, Edwin Starr, Clarence Carter,

Jerry Butler, Eddie Floyd, Joe Simon and many other top acts of the time. In addition to the rhythm section of Roman, Missal, Fonseca and Weber, this “soul music” line-up now included skillful John Castro on first trumpet and

lead vocals, clever Mike Dietrich on sax and lead vocals, and the artistic Bob Ceriale on trumpet, lead vocals, percussion and featured “psychedelic dancer.”



## CHAPTER VI

### “MUTINY ON BOARD”



Pressure was the key theme for Mike Roman's life in 1969, a year during which he would find his musical concepts repeatedly questioned, and his leadership of The Tellstars challenged. Indeed, in March 1969, during his high school junior year, Mike Roman came down with a serious bout of pneumonia along with severe constant nasal hemorrhage, finding himself bed ridden for three weeks and missing school as his band waited. Steve Missal, Birdman and the rest of the group tried to keep him amused with visits, bringing with them WWII books and a tape player on which he could listen to music while he considered his future and the band's.

Meanwhile, the group almost fell to pieces as one member, in a Machiavellian move, tried to take control of the helm. However, the majority remained loyal and refused to perform without their Roman Fuehrer until his recovery. (Ironically, Carlos Santana had also been bedridden for three months in San Francisco with tuberculosis two years earlier. Unable to play gigs, the group Santana almost fell apart.)





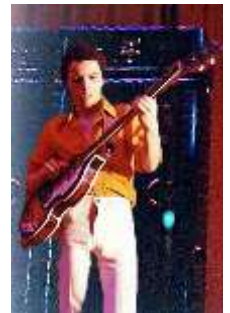
## CHAPTER VII

### “CRUISE CONTROL & INSTRUMENTAL ROLES”



The personal experience of having survived the perilous illness and the attempted takeover of his group had a lasting impact on the young band leader, and consequently, on the rest of the band and equipment crew. Upon his recovery, he established a new business-like hierarchy commanding loyalty, respect and professionalism and designed to solidify his control and exert more discipline on his sidemen and roadies.

Thus, two months later, two band members were displaced and the group took on a whole new sound dimension with the arrival of the brilliant Eli Rios, Jr. and his B-3 Hammond organ and a new funky and polished bass player, Rick Lucchetti.



That summer, The Tellstars recorded their first record at Chicago's famed Universal Studios on Rush Street featuring three soul-music covers. On the same day, the group celebrated the recording session with a boat cruise on the Chicago River. However, the record was never released since their manager and producer, Bob Paxton, had intended



to use it for audition/demo purposes only. Indeed, as a result of this demo, the group obtained many more bookings, which also included homecomings and high school proms, along with gaining a reputation as an excellent

cover band. The rare demo record is considered a collector's item and has been auctioned on eBay.com and at several record memorabilia shows.



Like any other troupe of young musicians, The Tellstars had two main needs: a place to rehearse and money for more and better equipment. The former was provided by Missal's mother and stepfather, WWII Army veteran Jr. Nystrom, along with Army veteran Mr. Eliseo Rios and

Mrs. Rios, Mr. and Mrs. Eusebio "Chevo" Castro, WWII Navy veteran Mr. Mario Lucchetti and Mrs. Lucchetti, and also at Karen James' basement, one of Missal's neighbors. Music gigs and summer employment in restaurants and private country clubs supplied the money for the equipment.



But that wasn't all the support the band received. All of the mothers, including Mrs. Roman, cooked for the hungry group and the equipment crew, too.



It was a busy life for everyone involved. The band members attended school in the day, practiced in the evening two or three times a week, and performed on weekends around town. On Sunday evenings, the band members held their weekly business meetings.

Every summer, the band practically lived together like communal hippies playing music, pool and monopoly at Missal's home (a.k.a. Animal House) while his parents were on vacation. This created very tight bonds of brotherly love within the band and also resulted in an atmosphere of "Rock n' Roll all night and party every day" along with serious rehearsal time, which served to mold the group into a truly polished and artistic ensemble, despite the use of alcohol and "weed" smoking by some members.

However, Roman always maintained a strict anti-drug policy with zero tolerance for hard drugs like cocaine and heroin, which kept the group "in line" and from getting into trouble with the law. He even fired crew members who had failed to adhere to his policy. Luckily, most members, including the crew, had total commitment to the band that was expected and demanded of them. Years later, some of these members would acknowledge that Roman's anti-drug policy had been part of the reason for having succeeded in life.





## CHAPTER VIII

### “DANCING WITH THE TELLSTARS”

The group performed sold-out shows at many of Chicago’s Catholic and public high school dances, including at Mendel H.S. featuring live appearances by famous Chicago radio disc jockeys of the era including Dick Biondi, Bob Dearborn, Larry Lujak, John Records Landecker, Fred Winston, and Peter



Fugitive, where the D.J. would announce the winner of a teddy bear raffle from stage during the band’s break. The presence of local luminaries would amplify the excitement of the crowds.



The Tellstars had their fair share of wild groupies who were at their “beck and call” and who “entertained” the band and crew members after the shows. There were several “gangs” of groupies who competed for backstage passes or after-show party invitations, and some who pushed and shoved one another for space inside the equipment crew’s party-bound U-Haul truck. Unfortunately, they also attracted a bad element.

Women were often interested in dancing with “Birdman,” who was an exceptional “funky chicken” dancer and the winner of several dance contests. Sometimes they wanted to party with the boys in the band, instead of paying attention to their boyfriends. This generated bad feelings, and sometimes fights would break out between jealous boyfriends and the members of the equipment crew who mingled with the crowd while the band played on.



During one concert at Washington High School, one of the jilted boyfriends rushed the stage and assailed a band member, setting off a melee of flying chairs and igniting a violent brawl into a near riot, bringing the concert to an abrupt end.

Another night, after a St. Francis De Sales High School homecoming dance, a street fight broke out outside the school sidewalk and turned into a rumble with racial overtones between the band crew and a disgruntled group of guys who resented the band’s musical success and popularity with the ladies.

The following Monday morning, the school principal issued a statement vowing never to have the band back. But The Tellstars would return within a short time due to popular demand. The school’s administration knew that The Tellstars could pack the

gymnasium with loyal followers. Bringing in a big audience would ultimately translate into big profits despite the risks of unruly crowds or fanatical young females.

Rumors about the band ran rampant. A frequently told tale was that one of the teachers at De Sales objected to Roman's non-conformance with the student dress code by



being the first student to wear "bell bottoms" and long hair at school and that he was planning to cut off Roman's Beatle mane. But, the rumor also suggested that a female teacher, who allegedly had an affair with Roman, had come to his rescue. Neighborhood gossip suggested that someone from the East Side

Enterprise motorcycle gang was planning to shoot Roman, Missal and Birdman after a Serbian Hall dance. Undoubtedly some of the rumors were over-blown, but served to keep the band's controversial "playboy" image intact and fed the band's popularity, which in

turn  
fueled  
even  
larger,  
wilder  
and  
crazier  
crowds.



Eli John Steve Mike Mike Rick Bob



## CHAPTER IX

### “ANGELS & DEMONS”



Although their performances on Friday nights at Catholic and public high schools certainly contributed to the underage group's musical progress and personal maturity, the group received their “street wise” education at Chicago's mafia-owned nightclubs where they performed as adults with the knowledge and consent of the bar managers. One night at a Southeast side club, some band members and a few roadies, along with the bartender, were arrested for remaining inside the premises after closing time. However, the charges were dismissed in court after Roman offered a justification for their presence inside the club after closing hours: The club owner hadn't paid for the group's musical services. The judge agreed with Roman's defense and scolded the owner for taking advantage of the young musicians and for having hired minors in the first place. The club owner was ordered to make full restitution of wages to the band.

At another popular nightclub, where The Tellstars were performing five nights a week, and the place where Birdman found, Mr. William H. Byrd, a “used sox salesman” and a “dead ringer” for his “long-lost father,” the club's owner, Kenny Hansen, became the group's manager. Hansen was a show-horse breeder, and a mob-connected character who took special interest in the band, buying the guys several sets of expensive uniforms as



he was planning on booking them in Las Vegas. Hansen promised to showcase the group on the elite horse-show circuit and also to produce a recording of their first album.



It seemed everything was going according to plan, exactly as the band hoped for. However, Roman did not fully trust Hansen, partly because he was too persistent, but also because he reminded Mike of a Chef who Roman and Missal had met at Chicago's Covenant Club where both had worked as bus boys a few summers before.

From Roman and Missal's first day at work, the kind and generous Chef had been giving them the best choice of meals in the menu. So when the Chef asked Missal to help him move from his North Side apartment during the 4th of July weekend, Missal readily agreed. However, Missal changed his mind after Roman raised a "red flag" by warning Missal that the Chef had inexplicably turned down additional moving help from Roman and two other bus boys. The following Monday morning, the FBI came to the Club and arrested the Chef charging him with kidnapping, sodomy and aggravated battery for the brutal beating of a fifteen year old bus boy who had been found bound and gagged inside the Chef's apartment after the boy's mother reported him missing to the police.



Hansen had been insisting that Roman and Missal to go horseback riding with him at his Tinley Park "Sky High" stables. But when Roman called Hansen and told him that

they would accept his invitation only if their girlfriends could also come along, Hansen

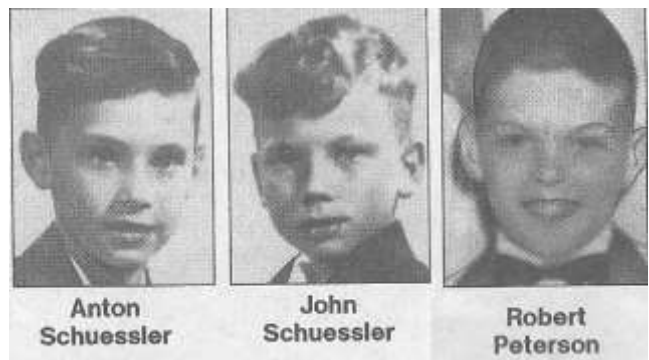


inexplicably withdrew the invitation. The following week, the bass amplifier mysteriously disappeared from the club. Consequently, upon the completion of the group's six week performance contract, Roman decided to terminate the band's association with the owner of the appropriately named "That's Life" show lounge. Hansen claimed he had named his nightclub in honor of his friend, the legendary Frank Sinatra and the Mafia.

Hansen, who loved what he considered to be the glamour of the Mob, wanted for people to think he was connected to underworld figures whether it were true or not.

As things turned out, declining the horseback riding invitation and severing business ties with the "thug-of-all trades" had been a wise decision. Indeed, years later Roman and Missal would recall their escapes from the Hansen labyrinth and the evil clutches of the sadist Chef as nothing short of miracles. As an adult looking back, Missal marvels that the journey with The Tellstars turned out so well since they had lived "ten lifetimes more than most people," including, it would seem, surviving a number of highly risky and potentially life-threatening situations.

In 1995, Kenneth Hansen was convicted and sentenced to 200-300 years in prison for the 1955 Peterson-Schuessler triple murders of young boys, one of the most haunting and brutal crimes in Chicago history. The crime took place after Hansen picked up the boys outside a movie theater by luring them with offers of horseback riding at Silas Jayne's horse stables known as the "Idle Hour," in Park Ridge, Illinois. Jayne had



been an accomplice of Hansen, helping him dispose of the bodies. (Jayne, also a show-



horse businessman and mob operator, was convicted of conspiracy to commit murder, having ordered the 1970 execution of his own brother, George Jayne, in a bizarre “Cain and Abel” type of blood feud that the media dubbed “the saga of the swank show-horse circuit.”)

Hansen’s name also surfaced in relation with the still unsolved 1977 disappearance of candy heiress Helen Brach, and in connection with arson, fire-bombings, and insurance fraud based on the destruction of show-horses. In all three cases, Hansen’s name, along with his reputation for picking up young boys, runs like a rotten thread in a tangled knot of interweaving murder mysteries highlighting the classic conflict between angels and demons.



## CHAPTER X

### “SPACE TURBULENCE”

These were indeed “wild and crazy” times for the group, but it was also difficult and dangerous to navigate and survive in the gang-infested alleyways on the South Side of Chicago. On one occasion, late at night, some band members were the victims of an assault and attempted robbery in the alley behind the

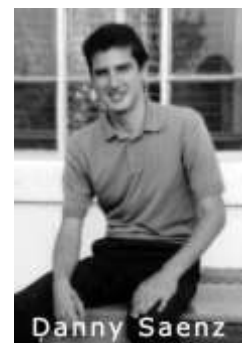
Roseland YMCA. This was a venue where The Tellstars frequently performed with some of Chicago’s most talented groups such as REO Speedwagon, Percy Katt & The



Night Walkers, Four Days & A Night, The Miserable Times, The Royal Blues, The One Eyed Jacks, Jerry & The Intruders, The Classics with Bob Kemock, The Forbidden Kind, M & R Rush, TW4, which later became nationally known as Styx and The Knights of Daye, which featured keyboardist Ed Walsh who would eventually

record on John Lennon’s last album “Double Fantasy.”

All of these incidents, including the fatal shooting of high school teen Danny Saenz after a dance outside South Chicago’s Union Hall spoke of the dangers involved in live performances. It was a “fast moving” crowd with frequent Mustang drag races and Chevy car chases, a.k.a. “Roman Chariot races,” and the need to get away quickly prompted the group to learn how to get in and out of a moving vehicle and to travel in convoys, together with their SS protection squad and their

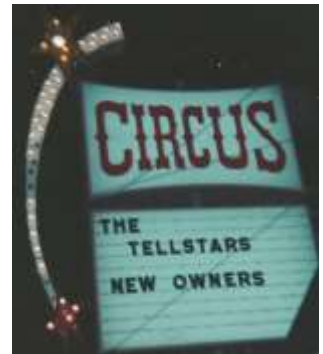


security chief, Eddie “Lefty” Maydon, and his sidekick “Righty,” just about anywhere they performed.



“Lefty,” who had befriended Roman and hung around just to rub shoulders with the musicians and their accommodating groupies, was a middle-aged steel worker who provided cash and armed bodyguards for The Tellstars. One night during a high-speed chase on the Chicago Skyway, someone took a shot at Lefty’s vehicle, and although no one was hit, the other vehicle’s “shot-gun” passenger was killed in a fiery crash when the driver lost control and hit a guardrail causing the passenger to be ejected from the vehicle.

At the Romanorum parties, “Righty” played the Roman soothsayer providing an omen of events to come, forewarning the group about the Ides of March and reading the romantic fortunes for groupies. “Lefty,” with his unique, outlandish personality, played the Roman Court Jester telling dirty jokes and wild tales. For an encore, he always recited erotic verses from his favorite poem, “Choo-choo train, don’t stop now, ‘til you get to my caboose hometown,” as he “warmed up the hug and stepped on the heat,” dancing the “Mambo 69” while simultaneously moving so that his unbuttoned pants slid down as he danced.





## CHAPTER XI

### **“MAROONED: FROM WRONGFUL CONVICTION TO “EXONERATION”**

The next stage of unfolding, like the band’s previous descent into the underworld, proved to be a long and perilous set of tests and ordeals that nearly pushed the



Tellstars’ satellite into a space abyss. But along with the trials were life-lasting moments of experience, illumination and understanding, especially for the band leader.

Like Odysseus and his crew, who conquered the monster Cyclops and thwarted the ever-tempting sirens in Homer’s Odyssey, The Tellstars also battled underworld demons and faced down treacherous groupies, the modern-day “Backseat Delilahs,” they encountered along their own Roman Odyssey.

It was a scorned groupie, along with her personal gang of band followers, that set out to prove, “Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned, nor hell a fury like a woman scorned” by attempting to destroy Mike Roman and his group. After being rejected by the band leader, and being denied entrance to “Romance Planet,” a private Tellstars’ New Year’s Eve Party, the disgruntled groupies took revenge by filing false assault and battery accusations against Roman. This ultimately resulted in



Roman's false arrest and wrongful conviction by a Cook County judge who sentenced him to one-year misdemeanor probation.

The criminal charges against the band leader threw the group and crew into a whirlpool of anxiety that morphed into an emotional limbo when the wrongful conviction was announced branding Mike Roman with a permanent criminal record and charting a dismal future.

Roman's wrongful conviction had devastating emotional and financial consequences as he faced additional challenges and implications such as potential expulsion from school, denial of his pending citizenship petition and possible deportation from the U.S.

Fortunately, a few months later, while Roman was in the process of pursuing an appeal, the complaining witness wrote him a letter recanting her trial testimony and begging his forgiveness for all the harm and anguish that she had caused him, his family and his band.

Upon receipt of the exonerating letter, Roman, who had maintained his innocence all along, immediately filed petitions to terminate his probation and expunge his wrongful conviction. The same judge who presided over the case originally granted both petitions.



The false-witness episode, along with having personally experienced housing discrimination a few months earlier, served to further reinforce Roman's

resolve to pursue a legal career. In a twist of fate, years later he tried several criminal cases before the same judge who would sometimes jokingly remind attorney Roman of his “infallible powers” in rendering criminal judgments. (Over the years, attorney Roman has filed several Civil Rights cases in federal court on behalf of clients who have been wrongfully arrested by the Chicago Police Department. He has also lectured law students at DePaul University and Valparaiso Law School on the topic of “Actual Innocence: From Wrongful Conviction to Exoneration” and he participated in Northwestern University School of Law’s “Innocence Project” and “Know Your Rights Program.”)



Eli Ries, Jr. Steve Missal Mike Roma Bob Lesniak



## CHAPTER XII

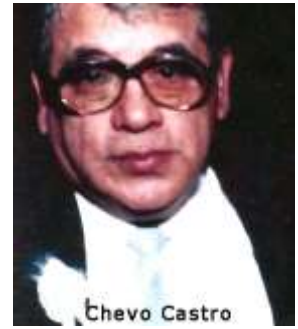
### “A NEW CHALLENGE”

Although The Tellstars were very much in demand and played at high schools, private parties, and weddings every weekend around the Chicago metropolitan area, the group's next goal was to play for bigger audiences and for more money at college concert venues. However, the group did not get the chance to do so until after they began to interpret the music of The Doors, Chicago, Blood Sweat & Tears, Three Dog Night, Sly and The Family Stone, Grand Funk Railroad, Sugar Loaf, Crow, The Guess Who and also The Rascals' "groovy blue-eyed soul" radio hits while still playing the "soul music" medleys which had been arranged by Roman since the addition of the brass section. This new playlist featured a style of music that was more challenging to The Tellstars, and without a doubt helped improve and further develop their individual musical skills and paved the way for the group as a whole to meet their next musical challenge.



Indeed that new challenge arrived with the release of Santana's first album in October 1969. Santana's Latin-Rock sound originated from San Francisco's Mission District and had been brought to The Tellstars' attention months in advance of one of the most eagerly awaited albums of all time.

Political organizer and music aficionado “Chevo” Castro, the lead trumpet player’s father who had previously arranged for The Tellstars to play at Alderman “Fast Eddie” Vrdolyak’s Golf Day and at his controversial campaign fundraiser, “Las Vegas Nights,” had seen Santana perform live at the Fillmore West in San Francisco. He bought a bootlegged copy of the album and gave it to the guys, who immediately began dissecting it and quickly discovered that Latin Rock was “right up their alley.” From this pivotal point on, with few minor alterations, the Tellstars’ satellite would orbit the Latin Rock Stars and pay tribute by interpreting their musical repertoire.



Carlos Santana’s lyrical style and melodic intensity fit Mike Roman “like a glove.” Steve Missal, with his mixture of jazz and rock drumming, could “swing” behind the “tubs” like Santana’s phenomenal master drummer Michael Shrieve. Junior



Rios, with his gospel style Hammond organ, could jam and wail like Santana’s own Gregg Rolie. And Rick Lucchetti, with his intricate Jazz riffs, emulated David Brown on the bass. In fact, each member of the rhythm section was ready and able to handle his part in a naturally flowing, versatile musical progression of “soul meets Latin.”



Indeed, The Tellstars were the first Rock group in the Midwest to perform and interpret the groundbreaking world-music sounds of Santana.

Unfortunately for The Tellstars’ brass section that now also included trumpeter Carl Oberman, Santana did not use horns at

that time. This meant they were eventually phased out and replaced in May 1970 with a Latin percussion section that included two equipment roadies as sidemen: Roberto “Birdman” Colon and John “The Mole” Lopez. Both alternated on congas with Steve Missal on drums, congas, and timbales, making the transition possible from soul music’s “boogaloo soul party” to the new sound of San Francisco’s Mission District Latin Rock.

## CHAPTER XIII

### “TRAJECTORY ALTERATION”

The year 1971 began with promise for The Tellstars. The alteration of the band’s trajectory propelled The Tellstars’ satellite to gravitate in a more harmonically complex musical orbit. This resulted in the eventual replacement of bassist Rick Lucchetti with the vivacious talent of Bob Lesniak. Bob’s generous father, Mr. Gus Lesniak, had helped several members of the band’s equipment crew obtain jobs at Wisconsin Steel Mill along with Bob’s older brother and future Chicago Police Deputy Supt. Dennis Lesniak, who often transported the band to gigs and parties.



Roman-Missal Enterprises, a business entity, was formed for promotional purposes and music Video production, with Tom “Joker” Curry as sound engineer and Carlos “Lil’ Bird” Colon as cameraman. They now began to film The Tellstars’ concerts for the band and their friends to watch on

“movie night,” and which also served to improve their performance skills.



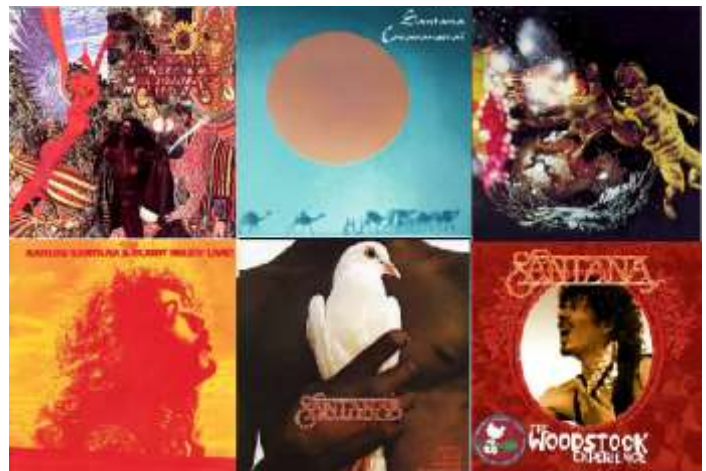
## CHAPTER XIV

### “PIVOTAL REALIGNMENT”



A further change took place in the Fall of '71 when Bob Lesniak left the group to join the Navy and was replaced by bass virtuoso and lead vocalist Mark Davis. Santana sampled Davis' "Stoned Soul Junkie" chant from The Tellstars' "Rock n' Roll Yesterday, Today & Forever!" album and used it on their hit "No One to Depend On" during their 2008 "Live Your Light" tour and also on their 2012 "Shape Shifter" American tour. Sadly, Davis, a Vietnam vet, did not live to see Santana do so since he had passed away in 1993.

For Mike Roman and The Tellstars, it was indeed an honor and a thrill to witness their musical role models perform the chant live on stage, especially on the classic "No One to Depend On," and even more so since The Tellstars had played a bootleg version long before Santana released it on their third album. To Mike Roman it seemed, with the musical convergence of both groups on "No One to Depend On," the song had come full circle and confirming that Carlos Santana enjoyed The Tellstars' recordings.





With the arrival of Santana's Latin Rock revolution—along with its symbol of racial integration—a musical prophecy was fulfilled becoming a celebration in itself.

Santana's signature sound was not only an audacious musical triumph, but also an astonishing fusion of blues, rock, Latin jazz, and soul mixed with Afro-Cuban and Brazilian polyrhythms. Carlos Santana's sensual style, with the innovative note sustainability that he developed, requires plenty of skill in order to find as much "soul" feeling as possible, especially in melancholic melodies like "Samba Pa Ti" with its romantic story-telling in a long flow of engaging melodies, and the haunting "Europa (Earth's Cry, Heaven's Smile)." This sustain technique requires that a guitarist be able to control and manipulate the direction of the sound waves emanating from the oscillating note, as it transposes itself to a higher-octave frequency, ultimately gravitating to the acoustics and ambiance of the venue.



Although Carlos can play fast, full of confidence and expression, very seldom does he play with great speed for its own sake. Rather, his focus is in generating as much expression as possible while

getting “into” and “inside” the note with an emphasis on a tender delivery of each melodic passage. The concept of resonant sustainability derives from the violin that uses the bow as a built-in sustain pedal. This effect was matched by the combination of the electric guitar with the amplifier in the hands of a talented musician, like Carlos Santana, who had played and mastered the violin at an early age and then applied the technique, like a sorcerer, to the electric guitar.



the student.

Perhaps the reason why Mike Roman, who Chepito dubbed “the Carlos Santana of the Mid-West” has the ability to emulate the voodoo that explodes from Santana’s fingers, melodic fluency and sublime sustained tone, is due in part to similar life experiences and cultural parallels that exist between the master and

Both Carlos and Mike were born in the state of Jalisco, Mexico, the birthplace of Mariachi music. Neither wanted to leave Mexico, but came to America in 1963 just before the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Both of their fathers played the violin: Mr. Jose Santana was a virtuoso violin player and Mike’s father, Dr. Miguél Román, was an accomplished violin player as well, but did not teach Mike the skill since he died when Mike was only a year old. Carlos, a child prodigy, played the violin in his father’s Mariachi band and was influenced by the classic Boleros of the era. Mike learned guitar chord patterns from Mariachi players in his Guadalajara neighborhood and long flowing melodies of Mexican folkloric music from Jesus Aguilera, a renowned bolero guitarist and singer. Mike was also influenced by the romantic music of Javier Solis, Trio Los Panchos, and the duet/movie stars, Los Hermanos David and Juan Zaizar. (Mike’s cousin Laura was married to Juan Zaizar).



For both Carlos and Mike, the influence of Mariachi music has been a major factor in



their sound, which has contributed to what some critics have called “psychedelic Mariachi Rock.”

Like Carlos, Mike uses a Mesa Boogie amplifier and plays a PRS Santana model II guitar. Carlos facilitated the expedient delivery of the guitar to Mike from the manufacturer along with Carlos’s personal volume/tone control settings. All of which, according to Roman’s band mates, provided the key to Carlos Santana’s melodic sensibility and solo improvisations intrinsic in his signature sound of gripping sustained notes.

Santana’s music was indeed a defining moment, not only for Mike, but also for his group as well. For The Tellstars, the advent of Santana opened endless prospects and left an indelible imprint, both musically and emotionally, on all of their performances and studio recordings. Musically, they completely embraced and were immersed in Latin Rock.



Every time The Tellstars took the stage and opened with



“Treat,” a cut from Santana’s first album, the college audiences were mesmerized by the group’s ability to recreate and improvise the new sound of Santana that was exploding across America and throughout the world. This was particularly true when Woodstock, the movie and the album, were released in the summer of ’70 at cinema

theatres around the nation.





Like Santana at Woodstock, The Tellstars always played “Soul Sacrifice” for an encore that ignited nine minutes of pure sensual ecstasy driven by a funk rhythm and delivering a collage of Afro-Cuban percussion and Latin jazz-rock solos.

Listeners, joining in singing the “Woodstock rain chant,” seemed to react to the sound in a subconscious, almost primitive sense of animal arousal—as if this explosive fireball of sensual power was a sound that reached the very heart of their being—giving complete body and soul to the primal beat of the drums and the rhythm of the music. It also triggered women’s “wild” dancing to the beat of the congas and the chatter of the timbales accentuating the contour of their sensual bodies, for it was indeed raw music in a rainbow of musical colors, to flirt and make love by.



This rock overture, along with “Black Magic Woman” and “Oye Como Va” from the Abraxas album, captivated audience after audience with the sensual, hypnotic and spiritual power of the rhythmic, driving

thrust of the beat. The embellished razzle-dazzle of melodic instrumentals and exotic passages held everyone spellbound while Mike Roman coaxed



moans of pleasure from his lead guitar, face contorted, ecstatically cajoling his guitar to sing and weep.



The enormous sound was propelled to supersonic proportions by the percussive rock machine of Steve Missal and company with shimmering conga and drum solos, the gospel-blues style of Junior Rios' macho Hammond organ and Mark Davis' thumping solid bass riffs. The Tellstars' uplifting musical delivery and cohesive performance, defined

through the magical chemistry of the group's dynamics and individual styles, including Missal's throwing his giant-sized drum kit off the stage at the end of the performance, added color and texture to the group's showmanship and spiritual musical climax, helping to increase their popularity



and appeal for college and nightclub audiences throughout the Midwest.



## CHAPTER XV

### “TERMINAL VELOCITY & CRASH LANDING”



Soon after, The Tellstars joined Union Local 203, the same musicians' guild that Michael Jackson and The Jackson Five belonged to, and signed with The Don Q. Davidson Booking Agency. By now they traveled extensively throughout the Midwest playing summer resorts and boat cruises as the premier Latin Rock line-up now consisting of Roman on lead guitar, Missal on drums, timbales, congas, and lead vocals, Junior Rios on keyboards, and Davis on bass and lead vocals. The versatile new percussionist, Joe Alderson, alternated on timbales and drums, along with Roberto “Birdman” Colon and John “The Mole” Lopez who still doubled as part-time percussionists and “Latin boogaloo” cheerleaders. This touring line-up truly became a “Band of Brothers” performing and mastering Santana’s classic album trilogy, from the sweaty polyrhythms of “Evil Ways” and “Jingo,” to the soaring beauty of “Samba Pa Ti” and “Everything’s Coming Our Way.”

The Tellstars, one of the few local bands that had their own equipment, lighting and film and sound crews, along with a large, devoted fan club consisting mostly of young women who followed the group around the Midwest, had finally succeeded in achieving many of their goals. They were in the process of searching for a new producer to record their first album project.





The band was tighter than ever before, there were fewer mistakes on stage, and Midwest multi-racial audiences were ecstatically won over by the irresistible power of the music and the charismatic group's delivery, prompting fans to proclaim that upon closing your eyes, you'd think it was the real Santana performing on stage. The Tellstars, with their versatile repertoire, also began to win several first-place trophies and money prizes in "Battle of the Bands" contests even outside their own "sphere of influence."



Unfortunately, with the departure of Mark Davis in early August 1972, the group's musical bond was severed and the core of the band began quickly to disintegrate and drift apart as all the bad feelings and personal conflicts that had been festering for some time came to the forefront.



Missal and Davis wanted The Tellstars to play full-time and to embark on a new musical direction while Roman and the rest of the band wanted to play only on the weekends so they could attend college and to keep the band groovin' on the Santana track. Notwithstanding the problems and disagreements over the trajectory of the group, the band leader felt that for the group that he had created, the "Roman way" was the best way of getting things done.



For the last few months, beginning in March 1972, the Roman-Missal partnership had been drifting apart. Their long friendship was also undergoing volatile change. They had met in the spring of 1966, when they were both still teenagers and fledgling musicians. In addition to their deep passion for





music, the two orphan musicians also bonded by deep and tragic loss: Roman's father, Doctor Miguel Román, had passed away when Roman was a year old, and his surrogate father, Uncle Jimmy Martinez, was killed in an automobile accident in 1964, a year after Roman arrived in America. A train in Chicago had killed Missal's father



while he was employed as a truck driver. Mr. William Missal, a decorated soldier in the European theater during WWII, died when Missal was two years old.

Even though Roman and Missal's friendship had been the band's central force, these kindred spirits had become two mature adults. As college students, they began to develop different socio-economic and political views on controversial issues such as the Chicago Machine, the use of police power, pot smoking and the geopolitics of the Vietnam conflict. They also started gravitating to different types of music and becoming heavily influenced by other musicians' styles along with the plurality of music genres. Eventually, this led to different destinations for each musician's imagination and inevitably affected their personal and professional relationship.



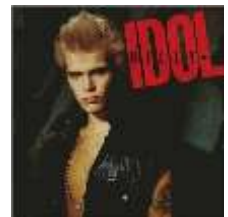
The adventure of The Tellstars was forged by Roman's temperament and needs. He had formed the band as a way to lessen his sense of anxiety, loss and separation after coming to America and having lost his Uncle Jimmy. Roman loved his group profoundly, but he wanted foremost to go to law school and become a lawyer to achieve financial success and aid fellow Hispanics who were victims of injustice, housing discrimination and wrongful convictions like he had been.

Missal, on the other hand, felt he no longer wanted to be confined by The Tellstars' part-time schedule and in late September, 1972, announced that he was quitting the

band, dropping out of college and discarding his dream of becoming a doctor to join a traveling nightclub group playing five nights a week. After Missal left the group, Junior Rios left a month later leaving the line-up, as always, fluid.



A few weeks later, Missal left the traveling nightclub band and started a new group with Rios and Davis. But their joint venture soon came to a screeching halt when the “repo-men squad” from the Continental Music Company interrupted the band’s performance on stage and repossessed the group’s P.A system due to the delinquency of loan payments. In the process the, “repo men” also severely damaged Rios’ B-3 Hammond organ.



Humiliated and embarrassed by the “repo men” incident and feeling betrayed by the band’s failure to make payments from the designated fund, Rios and Davis quit the group sadly regretting their misalliance.

In the mid-1970s, Missal did a concert tour with Vietnam draft dodger and “Gonzo Guru Gone Wild” Ted Nugent and also recorded “White Wedding” on Billy Idol’s debut album in the early 1980s. Missal would also appear with The Allies, as the party



band in the 1989 teen sex comedy, “Fast Food,” starring the controversial bisexual porn queen, Traci Lords. Missal eventually obtained his college diploma becoming an elementary school teacher and high school principal on the East Coast and continued to perform and record there with



local groups. Mark Davis recorded an album with the famous Siegel-Schwall Blues Band and toured with them throughout the U.S. Junior Rios graduated from Washburne Trade School as a journeyman electrician and eventually rejoined The Tellstars emerging as Roman’s new right-hand-man, compadre and confidant.

## CHAPTER XVI

### “REVERSAL OF THE ORBITAL REGRESSION”

Although the schism split the band and was a major blow for Roman, especially after someone stole one of his vintage guitars from the back seat of his car and a



few nights later tried to steal the car itself all in rapid succession.

Despite all, the resilient band



leader and “musical astronaut” reversed the orbital regression and reset the trajectory of the nearly marooned Tellstars satellite by immediately regrouping with a new jazzier line-up. The band still

had a percussion section, but now included the return of the brass section with the talent of Jim Novak on trumpet and the multi-instrumentalist Rich Sowa on saxophone, organ, and flute. Now Joe Alderson, on drums, was joined by Ed Fell as second drummer, brilliant new member Joe Wright on congas and lead vocals and the gifted Pascual “Duck” Sanchez, Jr. on bass and lead vocals.



Exceptional Latin Jazz pianist and lead vocalist John Ramirez, and versatile Michael “Black Mac” Watkins on timbales and lead vocals completed the lineup.



This melting pot of black, white, and Latino musicians, held together by their love of music, was a gifted roster of players, who continued to perform their rainbow magic throughout Chicago and the Midwest at a

time when racially integrated bands were still not readily accepted in some areas.

The guitar thief's identity, along with those of his accomplices, would eventually be unveiled, and Mike Roman's suspicions would turn out to be correct. However, by that time the statute of limitations had long lapsed on the cheap and dirty deed. But several years later, Santos Gomez, a teacher, musician and generous friend presented Roman with another "candy apple red" Fender Jaguar vintage guitar as a birthday gift to replace the stolen one.

## CHAPTER XVII

### "ENCOUNTERS OF THE ROCK STAR KIND"

Ironically, just like The Tellstars, the original Santana band, which had also been formed in 1966, also broke up over musical direction and personality conflicts around the same time in 1972, leaving Carlos Santana, Jose Chepito Areas, and Michael Shrieve as the nucleus for the new Santana band.

Indeed, it was during Santana's 1973 world tour at a Northern Illinois University concert that Mike Roman met all three Rock Stars along with their legendary Cuban percussionist, Armando Peraza. After taking pictures with each of his idols, and exchanging telephone numbers, Mike sensed that something would happen eventually and he hoped for validation to continue on as a band leader and musician.







A few months later, Chepito invited Mike Roman to jam with Santana in a 1973 New Year's Eve concert in San Francisco's famous Winterland Ballroom and introduced him to Journey band



members, Gregg Rolie and Neil Schon, Jorge Santana and his Malo band, Richard Kermode, Janis Joplin's former organist, Herbie Hancock along with John McLaughlin and his Mahavishnu Orchestra. For Mike Roman, jamming with Santana was a matter of fate. "My feelings were of completion, contentment and excitement. What more validation do you need than that your phone rings and it's Chepito from Santana!"



Upon his return in January 1974, Mike Roman, having fulfilled his dream of playing with Santana, full of fresh inspiration and now with a new level of recognition for his abilities in his own right, renamed his group Mike Roman & The Tellstars. The group he assembled

consisted of a brand new Latin jazz line-up of talented musicians including resourceful Al Poskanka on bass, clever Fred Poskanka on drums, versatile blues and flamenco guitarist Harry Hmura, soulful Danny Vazquez on the B-3 Hammond organ, and the brilliant John Barbush on trombone. John Castro returned on trumpet and lead vocals joining percussionist and lead vocalist Joe Wright, along with Jim Novak and Rich Sowa of the brass section, who also stayed on to anchor the fully revitalized line-up.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### “NEW PARAMETERS”



In the Summer and Fall of '74, Mike Roman, as a law student, along with Tellstars' fan club president and lighting manager, Louie “Naomi Beachwalker” Nodal and sound engineer Tom “Joker” Curry, founded Tellstar Productions, Inc., a musical endeavor designed to provide high quality rock groups to the Southeast side of Chicago. Together they promoted a long string of big name acts at former Alderman “Fast Eddie” Vrdolyak’s concert hall, The Club.



These musical acts included; Chubby Checker, Wayne Cochran, The Ides of March & Cryan’ Shames Union, Tufano & Giammarese, (two original members of The Buckinghams), The Shadows of Knight featuring Jimmy Sohns, Kracker (an opening act for The Rolling Stones), Ramsey Lewis, Chaka Khan and also featured the very popular Filipino Disco band, IPO IPO (Tornado).



In October '74, during Santana’s American Tour, Roman and Tellstar Productions, Inc. arranged for Chepito Areas and Armando Peraza to make a national television appearance on “Charlando” on WGN to promote the release of “Chepito’s” first solo album project on Columbia Records. This was the same talk show, hosted by Peter Nuno, where The Tellstars had previously made several appearances.



## CHAPTER XIX

### “A NEW KIND OF PAYLOAD”

In 1975, Mike Roman decided to take aim to uncover the specific causes behind the dropout problem at local high schools. Music and comedy as vehicles to convey the



message encouraging students to refrain from drugs and to remain in school seemed to offer a solution. During a series of free Rock concerts, The Tellstars entertained the student audience with the message that the only future for high school dropouts was becoming “The Mayor of

Drop-Out City.” Tellstar Productions, Inc. arranged for “Two on Two,” a CBS TV weekly program hosted by Bill Curtis and Walter Jacobson, to profile Bowen High School’s high attrition rate along with the band’s concert performance. Its sequel, “Operation Over-Drug-Lord,” an innovative drug awareness music video, was also created and produced by Mike Roman & Tellstar Productions, Inc. and broadcast on cable TV for Chicago high school students.

During the following two years, Mike Roman & The Tellstars played several concerts in the



Midwest and appeared on many live national and local television shows, paving the way for “Tellstar Night,” an exciting 1977 Labor Day reunion concert that revived the group’s apogee and inspired the group to reorganize and prepare finally to record their long over-due debut album.

## CHAPTER XX

### “VINYL RENAISSANCE”



In 1978, as an attorney, Mike Roman along with Eli Rios, Jr. and John Castro founded Tellstar Records, Inc. This new company, along with Tellstar Productions, Inc. produced and served as label vehicles for the group to record their first album titled, “The Tellstars featuring Mike Roman

Play Santana.”

This first album included a talented line-up of new and former members: Roman on lead guitar, Eli Rios, Jr. on keyboards, John Castro on trumpet and lead vocals, Harry Hmura on lead guitar, exceptional drummer and conga player Roman Castaneda, prolific drummer Joe Alderson, Fernando Romero, an excellent timbales and conga player, talented Bobby Aguilera, and Bobby Salinas on bass and lead



vocals, Jazz artist John Jamnik on electric piano, and the phenomenal Xavier Cruz on the B-3 Hammond organ as special guest artist. The radio exposure and audience response was fantastic, especially after Chepito took the time out to fly from “the hills of San Francisco to the streets of South Chicago” on October 5, 1979 to play with The Tellstars for the release of the album and officially to endorse the record.



The album contained a superb interpretation of Santana's music, not just simply as covers, but that of an interpretive ensemble sure of its own identity. The sold-out concert and several TV appearances received uniformly positive reviews, which secured the album's success. (The album is now a collector's item in Europe and Mexico).



Many more concert appearances would follow over the course of the next few months during the time when Mike Roman & The Tellstars were exclusively booked by The Buckingham's original drummer, John Poulos, including two sold-out performances at the famous "Beginnings" nightclub, owned by Daniel Seraphine, the original drummer from the internationally known group, Chicago. Unfortunately, John Poulos passed away in 1980 leaving Roman and company without his business guidance and powerful musical connections.



In June 1982 another "Tellstar Night" band reunion concert took place along with the first "Don't Rock the Boat!" Lake Michigan cruise. Both events reunited many of the band members and motivated the group to record their next album. for the encore number.

## CHAPTER XXI

### "A JOINT MISSION"

In 1985, Roman, along with Tellstar Productions, Inc., produced and arranged a concept album titled, "Rock n' Roll, Yesterday, Today, and Forever!"



which featured a tribute to the 50's music of Elvis Presley, 60's music of The Beatles, 70's music of Santana, and the 80's music of Michael Jackson. The last cut on the album united all four tribute acts, Rick Saucedo and the Ambassadors, Rubber Soul, The Tellstars, and The Jasons, in a Rock n' Roll medley arranged by Mike Roman.

The tribute album, an ambitious and difficult project involving thirty-three musicians



from four different bands, was dedicated to the memory of Elvis Presley and John Lennon, and was released on the Southeast Side of Chicago to a standing-room only crowd at the East Side Memorial Hall

where all four groups performed separately and as an assemble for the encore number.

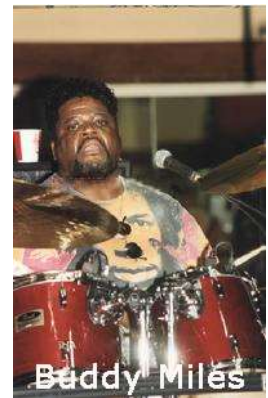
The album recording along with the promotional release concert marked the reunion of The Tellstars' premier line-up of Roman, Missal, Rios, and Davis, which showed that the guys still had the chemistry and seemed like they had only been apart for a short while rather than several years. This diverse and musically mature group included brass and percussion sections consisting of John Castro on lead vocals and trumpet, Marty Gomez on the alto saxophone, Fernando Romero on timbales, and Joe Rendon on congas. The album included The Tellstars' own "Stoned Soul Junkie" chant on the Santana classic, "No One to Depend On" that Carlos Santana would sample later on the same tune. It garnered excellent reviews and sales numbers exceeding all expectations.





the late Mongo Santamaria, Ray Barreto, El Chicano, and Tierra.

The band also shared the stage with Jimi Hendrix's drummer and lead vocalist, the late and phenomenal Buddy Miles at the Holiday Star Plaza Theatre and at Buddy Guy's Legends. (George "Buddy" Miles was the one who introduced Mike Roman to Sir Paul McCartney and his wife Linda along with Eric Clapton and Phil Collins at a backstage party in Chicago's Soldier Field.)



The band also performed at many popular theatre venues including the Radisson Star Plaza, The Riviera Theater, The Apollo, The Congress, The Rialto Theater, Genesee Theater, The Morse Theater, Park West, The Vic Theater, Metro Chicago, The Venue, The Palmer House and the perennial Taste of Chicago at Chicago's Premier Lake Front Petrillo Music Band Shell.

The group also appeared at many college concerts, as well as at the top city and suburban nightclubs, including Dennis Rodman's nightclub "Illusions," The Green Dolphin, the Air & Water Show and Venetian Nights boat cruises on Lake Michigan, corporate private parties, golf days, and summer festivals.



## CHAPTER XXIII

### “SUPERNATURAL RENDEZVOUS”



In June 1999, upon Santana’s release of the mega hit and 2000 multi-Grammy Award winning “Supernatural” album, Mike Roman met again backstage with Carlos Santana and his band, where he introduced his son Michael Angelo to the super rock star.

The meeting with Carlos Santana inspired the production and recording of “The Sounds of Santana” album/CD, by Mike Roman & The Tellstars, featuring Jose Chepito Areas, and Richard Bean, the original lead singer of Jorge Santana’s Malo Band and composer of their top-ten hit, Suavecito. The CD contained a complex musical arrangement by Mike Roman, consisting of twelve medleys of Santana’s greatest hits, from “Evil Ways” to “The Game of Love,” representing Santana’s various musical phases.



“Chepito,” along with Richard Bean, performed at the 2003 album release concert validating the group’s musical effort. He declared, “that no other group came as close to playing Santana like Mike Roman & The Tellstars.”



Chepito had been scheduled to perform in the San Francisco Bay area with Journey and Santana's original conga player Michael Carabello the same weekend. However, Chepito chose to cancel that appearance in order to attend The Tellstars' CD release concert and the "Don't Rock the Boat!" cruise on Lake Michigan, which Chepito said he enjoyed playing "almost as much as Woodstock." To Mike Roman and The Tellstars, Chepito's decision to perform with them in Chicago was indeed a great honor bestowed upon them by the Latin legend and percussion prodigy. These actions and remarks by "Chepito," one of the architects of the Santana sound, helped to make the album/CD a commercial success and reignited the band's popularity in the Midwest.

"The Sounds of Santana" album marked the debut of artistically talented lead singer, rhythm guitarist, and songwriter, Abel Guardiola, along with multi-talented Michael Angelo Roman Casanova playing saxophone, guitar, and bass. He was 16 years old when the album was recorded.



The album also included new and old members participating in various loose musical combinations, Eli Rios, Jr., Al Sanchez and Nick Viveros on keyboards, a masterful percussion section consisting of George Buck on drums, Kiki Ventura, on full-tilt congas, soulful Rich Aldana on lead vocals and timbales, Pedro Valenzuela, also on lead vocals, Jr. "Duck" Sanchez and Alex Perez on bass, and a phenomenal brass section consisting of Fred Cantu on trumpet, Jeremy Callner on saxophone, and Eddie Irizarry on trombone.



The success of the CD and renewed interest in the group re-launched The Tellstars' satellite helping them build a larger fan base as the band experienced a renaissance and providing the vehicle to play at major Midwest summer



festivals as the opening act for legendary groups like the Spinners and the Chi Lites while working on their next recording and first original project: "Cha Cha Time!"

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## CHAPTER XXIV

### "RECONFIGURING THE TRAJECTORY"

In 2004, the group recorded and performed at the Milwaukee Fest and Viva Chicago with Carlos Santana's original percussion section, Latin Rock Legends and Rock n' Roll Hall of Fame members, Jose Chepito Areas and Michael Shrieve who is best known for his fantastic and unforgettable drum solo at the Woodstock Music Festival. The Tellstars, featuring Jose Chepito Areas, was the opening act for Jorge Santana and Malo at the 2005 "Voices of Latin Rock" book release in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and at Viva Chicago Latin Festival, where they performed "Samba Pa Ti" with Jose Feliciano in 2007.

"THE TELLSTARS CRASH R. KELLY TRIAL" read the news headlines on May 30, 2008, giving attorney/musician Mike Roman international notoriety and extraordinary free publicity for his group as a result of his impromptu meeting inside a courtroom with R.



Kelly. This was during the King of R & B's criminal trial at the Cook County Criminal Courts building at 26th and California where Roman gave Kelly a copy of his "Cha Cha Time!" CD.



That same year, Mike Roman & The Tellstars, featuring Chepito and Armando Peraza, opened for the legendary Los Lobos in Grant Park. During this event, Chepito was presented with his long-awaited Rock & Roll Hall of Fame trophy and Armando received a Life Time Achievement Award from the City of Chicago. (Attorney Mike Roman successfully represented Chepito in his quest to obtain the trophy which had been misplaced by the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame Museum shortly after Santana's 1998 induction ceremony at New York City's Waldorf Astoria which Chepito had not been able to attend.)

In 2008, the group had also been scheduled to be the opening act for the legendary group Chicago at the Taste. Regrettably, due to budget cuts, the city was unable to provide the private jet that the headliner had requested and the "Saturday in The Park" concert was cancelled.



In July 2009, the group opened for the internationally acclaimed Los Lonely Boys at Hammond's Festival of the Lakes and in 2010 Roman's group became the first Latin-Rock band to perform at Hammond's new state-of-the-art Music Pavilion at Wolf Lake.



That same year, the band gathered international attention and was booked to perform in Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong. Unfortunately, the tour was called off at the last minute when the promoter couldn't obtain all of the necessary concert permits from the



Chinese government.

In July 2011, the group opened for the legendary group WAR at President Obama's Hyde Park Music Festival. (Carlos Santana and Mike Roman had collaborated on a musical composition and YouTube Video titled "Obama, Man of Change" during the 2008 Presidential Campaign. In 2012 "Team Roman" participated on the Obama For America presidential campaign and the Presidential Inaugural Committee where Michael Angelo worked as a staff attorney and Mike Roman was a contributor and volunteer in the campaign's legal department.)

## CHAPTER XXV

### "SOMBRERO GALAXY IN CHA CHA TIME!"



"Cha Cha Time!" The Tellstars' first original CD, released in 2007 contains twelve original compositions written



by Mike Roman, Eli Rios, Jr., Abel Guardiola, Joe "Vato" Guillen, Mike Aldana, and Michael Angelo Roman. Three of the songs feature special guest artists, Jose Chepito Areas and



Michael Shrieve. Chepito plays timbales on “Cha Cha Time!” and also on “Runaround.” Shrieve plays drums on Tsunami 911, which he also produced.

The dynamic duo of Mike Roman on lead guitar and Eli Rios, Jr. on the keyboards, head the lineup that includes the soulful duet of lead vocalists, Abel Guardiola and Joe “Vato” Guillen. The songs are driven by the solid bass of Alex Perez and the versatility of bass soloist “Baby” Joel Valdez.

The master percussion section includes George Buck on drums and timbales, Bill Shary on drums and vocals, Kiki Ventura on congas, Joe Rosso on timbales and Omar Areas, “Chepito’s” son, on bongos and percussion.

The brass section features the amazing talent of trombonist and former music director of the late great Tyrone Davis soul group John Barbush, Eddie Irizarry also on



trombone, John Trimmel and Scott Wiltfang on trumpet, Marty Gomez on alto saxophone and vocals and Michael Angelo Roman on lead guitar and tenor saxophone.



Completing the CD’s musical line-up and adding the icing on the cake are guest musicians, Yolanda Yolie and Nikki G on lead vocals, Rich Aldana and Michael “Black Mac” Watkins on lead vocals and percussion, Dennis Natarelli and George



“Bigalo” Gasca on drums, Mike Aldana on lead vocals and percussion, and last but not least, thirteen year old Brandon Roman on the vibraphone.

“Cha Cha Time!” reveals an innovative and fresh approach to fusing various genres with a potpourri of



Afro/Latin Rock rhythms, Surf sounds, Jazz and Blues. Tight arrangements and concise solos realize the full potency of the music and showcase the latest line-up’s ability for creating a pure melody of rhythms and harmonic range. Over this, a pleading guitar and wailing Hammond organ hold court with every musician feeding off each other in a complex, exciting

weave of musical instrumentation. The recording delivers a full palette of influences that happily play together while staying true to their original sources.

The title song, written by Mike Roman, lays down a party-time feel foundation over an invigorating percussion mélange led by “Chepito’s” dynamic timbale breaks along with a layered horn arrangement that complements the roaring guitar and growling B-3 Hammond organ.

“Runaround,” featuring Michael “Black Mac” Watkins on lead vocals and written by Eli Rios, Jr., contains Salsa and Merengue rhythms that evoke a sorcerer’s wailing Blues and crying guitar along with the



singers’ soulful delivery and the brass’ unique contribution layered on top of “Chepito’s” spectacular timbale solo.

There is energy to spare on “Tsunami 911,” written by Mike Roman and his son Michael Angelo Roman. The phenomenal drummer Michael Shrieve, along with the group, produce a monster “wave” of crashing surf sounds that finds its counterpoint in “Baby” Joel’s booming bass. Eli Rios, Jr. delivers a stabbing organ with driving chords from the heart of the grinding Leslie speaker and compels a dialogue between the dueling lead guitars of Roman and son. This is followed by Michael Shrieve’s masterfully propulsive polyrhythmic bass drum technique during his “Woodstock-like” drum solo and supplemented by a bass excursion with full artillery of esoteric riffs by Joel “Baby” Valdez. This is followed by the arrival of a second wave and culminating in a torrential climax.

Another Mike Roman composition, “Ecstasy and Destiny,” with its romantic and fiery guitar, suggests a dichotomy of impressionistic excursions exploring Latin blues and “Chamba,” or half Cha Cha and half Samba.



“Only You,” written by Eli Rios, Jr. and featuring Nikki G. on lead vocals, has a danceable romantic pop groove along with a brass arrangement and alto saxophone solo, intensely laced with the influence and style of the super group Chicago.



The catchy and vivacious “Alive,” written by Abel Guardiola, contains an earthly canvas of colorful sounds and shuffled rhythms contrasted with “Visions,” a haunting hypnotic tune by Joe “Vato” Guillen and Angel Torres.



“Visions” has an ambience evoking respect for the departed as celebrated on El Dia de Los Muertos (Day of The Dead).



“Rapture Dream,” Mike Roman’s early morning inspiration, is a composition where the sensual meets the spiritual in a collage of Cha-Cha rhythms and Latin Blues and featuring the phenomenal lead vocals of Rich Aldana.

“Destino Cruel” (Cruel Destiny), another Roman composition featuring Rich Aldana, has the feel of a pop-oriented Gipsy Kings’ Rumba derived from traditional Flamenco mixed with Ranchero and Bolero intonations.

The sexy “Reggaeton in Jamaica,” featuring the sensual voice of Yolanda Jolie and written by Roman, Rios, Jr. and Mike Aldana, offers an appealing form of Mambo-Rock and the clever use of Reggae rhythms mixed with the Cuban Montuno spell of the marimbas keyboard and rhythmic Latin Percussion.



“Every Day & Every Night” is a smooth Latin Jazz number with a sultry beat and Bluesy guitar elements written by Eli Rios, Jr. and Joe “Vato” Guillen.



Last but not least, “Day in Normandy,” is a complex atmospheric overture with symphony instruments layered around a “Sambolero” beat, half Samba and half Bolero. Mike Roman composed, arranged and dedicated this composition to the Veterans of WWII. The recording marked the debut of thirteen-year-old Brandon Roman on the



vibraphone and a poetry recital of the same D-Day poem that he had recited to an audience of foreign dignitaries and WWII Vets during the 60th D-Day Anniversary Celebration in France.

(“Cha Cha Time!” is available online on iTunes.com, BestBuy.com and Amazon.com.)

## EPILOGUE:



Since the launching of The Tellstars into “musical orbit,” these curious “musical astronauts” have been studying and exploring the ever-changing frontiers of an expanding musical universe. Throughout their



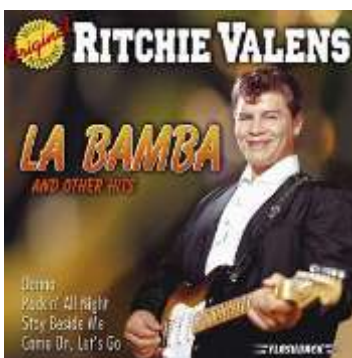
Roman Odyssey, their satellite has traveled many adventures miles, followed many different trajectories and survived several orbit regressions while gravitating closer and closer to the Rock Stars that dominate the universal language of music, not speaking in words, but in emotions. Mike Roman, the nucleus of the group, has been the core around which a succession of musical nomads have revolved and remained “jamming” within the planetary orbit of The Tellstars satellite—combining and blending until the whole became so much more than the sum of its parts.

From “La Bamba to the Samba,” from the British Invasion to the Woodstock Generation and from their first acetate demo record and final vinyl, to iTunes and radio



airplay around the world, the journey of The Tellstars with their temperamental and mercurial changes along with the roller coaster ride of musical direction, with the comings and goings of a musical chairs line-up of new and old members, has certainly not been easy for front man Mike Roman and company to deal with. But easy or not, he has succeeded in keeping The Tellstars playing for a remarkable 47 years now.

The reality is that all these many phases, including “Tellstar Night” band reunions, “Don’t Rock the Boat!” party cruises, live concerts and studio recordings have continued for the better part of five decades. And unlike countless other bands that have blazed across the rock-scene skies like meteors, then crashed and burned, Mike Roman & The Tellstars remained in orbit, visible, above the horizon. And for all the



challenges involved, the group ultimately experienced a sense of musical redemption and the completion of a satisfying professional milestone, with the release of their original compositions in “Cha Cha Time!”

But beyond all of that, their love of playing music for the people has remained a constant. With their unique musical arrangements of Santana’s classic hits, along with their own



compositions from their CD “Cha Cha Time!” Mike Roman & The Tellstars have

evolved into a cohesive and artistically polished ensemble. They have remained true to their Latin Rock roots while fusing jazz with surf sounds and salsa rhythms producing an exotic musical cocktail that explodes in an alchemy of Latin fire in all their live performances.



## IN PRAISE OF SANTANA



According to Gregg Rolie, Santana's original Keyboard player and lead vocalist, Chepito, a luminary expert in theory and practice of Latin music, was the "architect and musical director of Santana's classic



album, Abraxas. Without Chepito's expertise in the foundation of Latin music, Abraxas would probably never have happened."





Likewise, without Chepito opening the “Santana” door to Mike Roman and his band mates, The Tellstars would not have had the opportunity to play and record with the Rock n’ Roll Hall of Fame legends. Nor would they have had the benefit of Chepito’s musical guidance in Latin instrumental breaks, basic phrasing and linking riffs that gave them a polished, professional sound—along with a solid sense of Latin Rock and Jazz dynamics in their musical arrangements, live performances and studio recordings.

Indeed, Mike Roman & The Tellstars are deeply grateful to Carlos Santana, Jose Chepito Areas, Michael Shrieve, and Armando Peraza for their friendship, validation,



and inspiration. As Mike Roman said, “We feel privileged, humbled, and honored to have Chepito and Michael Shrieve appear as featured musicians on our original CD and fortunate and grateful for our musical association with Carlos Santana and Armando Peraza as well.”



In memory of David Brown  
Feb 15, 1947- Sept 4, 2000

By: Monica Rix Paxson



2013