

Interview with Santa Lucia LFR by Sleeping Bag Media and Studios.

#1 SBS: Before I even get into the questions Santa Lucia, thank you so much for being here with us on our internet-page and being a part of our journey. Totally stoked to talk to you about the wild-infusion and exotic sounds of your music.

German: Thank you! It's a pleasure to be here.

Before I give anything away, what would you say the defining characteristics of your sounds are? Describe the music, the vibe, and maybe a little history for us. For anyone out there that might not be familiar with the music of Santa Lucia yet.

Byron: Santa Lucia blends punchy horns, playing off funky bass grooves, spiced up with some vocals from the locals. It's a combination everyone can get down to, it's upbeat music, and seems to evolve on its' own sometimes!

#2 SBS: As far as I could tell, Santa Lucia has been around since 1999. Just before the ol' turn of the millennium and all that. From where you started back then, to the music you make now, what would you say has changed along the way?

German: The whole industry ha-ha. Well! A lot of things have changed I mean, time changes and you have to change with it. Right? You know, adapt or die, from the way you conduct business in the industry to what you present musically to festivals. It's a constant and revolving change.

There's a ton of versatility and variation in style & sound as far as I can tell, but on the inside how did the band grow throughout the years?

Byron: I feel progression of sound is bound to occur, short of some busier horn lines we have stayed true to our vision. That being said, the beauty of playing in a fusion band you never know where our music will go next as far as vibe.

German: When I started this band I had a set vision and that was to bring to Canada the US Latino sound. In the early 2000's there were a few bands making the trip up here from LA and San Francisco to play gigs. These bands will come up here and perform songs with a message that was irrelevant to the Canadian market. We worried about different things in a different way up here, our concerns are more tied to the Canadian identity and how we view the world. Those early days gave me a lot of insight and I was able to change the format, the vision, and how to present it to my Canadian fans. Living up here is a lot different than living in the USA, and you have to change the way you choose your topics, and the message has to be slightly differently.

What do you know now that you wish you had known when you first started to record and make your music?

German: How incredible you can sound on a bigger stage such as the Vancouver Jazz Festival, how our music has been the perfect fit at Canada Day festivals in downtown Calgary and Vancouver. These are big-budget national-level festivals and having been part of it on a national level it's a fantastic experience, a platform booking agents and festivals co-ordinators saw it all works really well.



Byron: Yeah, I wish we would have known that major festivals were so eager at eating this music up. At the time we just didn't know what their acceptable formats were.

#3 SBS: Is the current line-up of seven the same one that originally started it all?

German: Surprisingly yes! The core members anyway in this day and age this is a rarity. The friendship and the bond is strong among the members, our horn section varies depending on the gigs and availability of players. At the moment we are working with a set of horn players who spice things up pretty good on live shows.

German – tell us about the talents that each of these players in Santa Lucia bring to the music! What makes them the perfect fit, perfect choice, perfect sound to bring the music you write to life and how did you find each other? What makes the current bond between you all an unbreakable one now in the present-day?

German: I think the attitude we all take towards music and a genuine desire to make this work. I mean, there's not a whole lot of the bands playing this genre right here in Canada so I think most of the guys in the band feel that they are a part of something they don't get to do much on a regular basis. For the Canadian market this isn't your run-of-the-mill kind of band, the challenges are enormous, and I think that's the one thing that make us bond. Musicians are a bunch of misunderstood visionaries, with a common cause to bring something to a level that has never been on the musical radar in this country. It is quite a common goal we share.

Byron: I feel that we are always open to every player's own style. We lay down what our vision is, but we are never afraid to see through another's eyes, that's how growth occurs. Not to mention keeps our live shows fresh. I think this comes from a no BS "let's just have a good time" philosophy. We're like a family that can put up with each other, ha-ha...

German: I never had trouble finding good talent, my challenge was to convince people in the beginning to play this kind of music and that they could have a good time doing just that. Byron was playing with his jazz band years ago, someone told me, there is this kid in the valley who plays a mean sax, and he's amazing. First thing I thought was, huh! Saxophone player, second was, is he sexy enough to play this music? Ha-ha. So I went to see him, when I met him that night I told him right away, "Look man, I got this project I want to get it off the ground"., I went on, when I finished my pitch he looked at me and asked me "what kind of crazy person are you?, you want to play what?" before I answered he looked at me up and down and said "but I think I'm crazier" and the rest is history.



#4 SBS: With some of the band coming from as far away as Nicaragua and Latin America – how in the world did you end up choosing Vancouver as the place to base the music from?

Byron: I live here already, German just had to come and find me (laughs).

German: Well, first and foremost it was the other way around. I tailored it to be around the members' lifestyle, outside the band everyone was building their own lives around family, jobs, etc. I came here via San Francisco under political asylum. I lived in Winnipeg and Toronto for a while but it was not where I wanted to build my life. I came west because I've always been a west coast boy, meeting all these guys here to form the band closed the deal. I mean Vancouver, is a really great place among mountains, the ocean, and all the outdoor activities you can possibly do; it adds a certain attitude to the music.

#5 SBS: Aside from the Latin influence which we mentioned, there are also a massive number of elements to the music of Santa Lucia that create the sound, funk, rock, salsa, even world-music. World-music itself tends to catch my eye and attention for what sounds to be an 'all-encompassing' type of music, it typically has one of the hardest to attain fan-bases and struggles to gain acceptance often. Why do you think that might be?

German: I think because it's always associated with African music when it's more than that. What I found out about us when we play live is that our fans tend to be loyal rock followers with a sophisticated taste of world music.

Byron: I think being a fusion group can work for or against you, I think that comes down to how you market yourself. I mean, how do you? We're a like a buffet of musical styles, one thing is certain once fans catch on they are loyal to the end. We love our fierce fans.

German: It can be dangerous for us on stage sometimes because we've notice that those fans and even new fans tend to demand not just a rock feel for an AC/DC tune we might be playing but to have an exotic twist to it.

I can't imagine people associate it with anything bad per-say, but what do you think the factors are that lead people to decide what to play next are, and why does that seem to keep them away from world-music on a global-scale?

German: From my experience having a so called world music band, Canada has never invested in creating a world music institution like Australia has with The Cat Empire and Blue King Brown. Germany with Corvus Corax or the UK with its rock music influenced by Indian and Jamaican sounds like Super Heavy which featured Mick Jagger, by the way. You could say a lot of music industry people get lazy they would rather bring someone from abroad at a loss, put a lot of muscle behind it than support the amazing Canadian pool talent we have here.

#6 SBS: Tell me about the current album, your recent release called Suppressed Anthems. As far as I understand, this is the third official album for Santa Lucia, correct?

German: Yes, it is.

How did the music evolve this time around for the latest recording sessions?

German: The music evolves with your experiences, and maturity and in my case coming from a political background, not from the sense of belonging to a political institution. Rather being the victim of politics it really reflected on my writing for this album. This was the best platform for me to write some of my experiences and views because financing my own record gave me free range to do so. If I were to sign to a label I probably wouldn't have done so.

What kind of themes or storylines run in the music, and what made the recording of it all a memorable experience for you?

German: I set the theme for this album around my own experiences, as a young boy living in a poor country bombed by the U.S. Army. A good example telling instead with the song "War" "they're dropping bombs in my hometown. People skip them while shopping around, the army

pilot in the sky above claiming he is only doing his job". It's sad to think that it is a job for someone to go and kill people. This became a turning point in my writing because for the first time I have the chance to talk about an issue that haunted me for so long. Just like what the Syrians are experiencing right now. This doesn't hurt me in the least to watch it all go down on TV. Like a goddamn good reality show pick up the phone and text your vote. The song concludes pointing out how we take on things for granted thinking it's just a reality show.

Now at the same time explaining how memorable this was for me has another different explanation altogether. Larry Anshell was the producer for such bands like Pearl Jam, Sum 41, and Sarah Mac among others. I had this ballsy feeling that if I get to convince someone of Larry's caliber to help me do this record I would cut a lot of stereo types in half, right then and there, and have a good quality product to present to the market.

Lucky, for me Larry understood what I was aiming at, I can drive people a little crazy with my ideas. He was studying psychology at the time we were making the record. I think that's why, (laugh). Larry and producer Brad Graham guided me through the challenging combination of music and lyrics for this record. Secondly, for a poor refugee kid from Nicaragua it was a huge deal to go into a studio like Turtle you know, a huge dream fulfilled.

Was there anything you had learned from your experiences recording the previous records that helped you get a better head-start when recording the new one this time around?

German: Yeah, for sure. When you're going into a studio like turtle and have Larry working on your record you have to be really organized, you have to have your shit together you know. It's like you're not in Kansas anymore.

Byron: you definitely learn a lot.

#7 SBS: Album titles aren't always the most interesting thing to me, but yours definitely caught my attention. Suppressed Anthems it almost seems like a pretty heavy-statement, but maybe I'm confusing suppressed with oppressed when it comes to the meaning behind the album's title. So help me out a little Santa Lucia...who or what suppressed these anthems of yours and what made NOW the right time to break'em loose and put them out into the world?

German: Oh yeah brother, you're dead on. The songs on this album are mini statements, the message it's a lot stronger in this album than previous one. I felt these little anthems where restrain from expressing themselves in part; because at the time I was frustrated with certain council for the art organizations and the Harper government not supporting funding for artist, and creating a lot of hurdles, and fucking red tape, to go through to get a record done. In my mind this became the driving force to go and worked three jobs to save up money and record these songs. You know, it felt like being put down by authority, kept from public knowledge, and excluded from consciousness and the masses. So in a way they became suppressed in my consciousness. Like! How you say it! To break 'em loose and put them out into the world that's what Suppressed Anthems is.

#8 SBS: What are the plans for supporting the new record from the live-stage?

Byron: Yes indeed, for our up and coming show we are playing the evil twin version of the band, a bit meaner, crunchier rock with the exotic sounds our fans love to dance to of course. A Halloween show and all. (Laughs).

I've heard a rumour that you'll be onstage in Vancouver at Studio on Granville this October on the 29th, pre-Halloween jamming! Very cool, I just went in there for the first time the other day, or, well, what I thought was the first time. I didn't realize it was the old Joe's Apartment, so technically, I guess I've been there before. But! It's an awesome venue and seems like it would be a great place for Santa Lucia to play in for sure; what about beyond that?

German: We have a couple of corporate gigs towards December. Yup! That's right, we also play those, and we are also going to the island for a fundraiser for the Diabetes society.

Heading into the final quarter of this year...it's going to get COLD here as you know, and no doubt, you've got a worldwide fan-base all-over the globe. Have you got any plans to take your music to somewhere warmer in the winter this year or are you staying local?

German: Ha -ha -ha, I wish I could be playing in Hawaii or Brisbane Australia, the whole winter; but no, we are staying local. Winter is a good time to record, and pitch new ideas. I have three new songs we are trying to fuse them into Latin funk beauties.

How far travel-wise has the music of Santa Lucia made it to anyhow?

German: The whole Western Canada all the way to Toronto and back, including Yellowknife to Haida Gwaii and to the Western states in the USA.

With all the worldly-experience of the players in the band, I'm assuming the music has also made it to some pretty exotic places, yes?

German: Did a couple of gigs in Melbourne Australia last spring, not the whole band tho! A stopover in Seoul, South Korea at a karaoke bar, had the album's karaoke tracks and went into this bar presenting and singing Santa Lucia songs (Laughs). I guess it doesn't get any worldly than that! I had a lot of beer that night too, and was sure not good for my vocals.

#9 SBS: Would it be fair to say that Suppressed Anthems would be your 'best' album to-date?

German: Well you know you always striving for the best! My brain works differently and doesn't compare albums. Instead, focuses on individual songs. I have a couple songs that I'm very proud the way they turned out on the previous record. A few on this one, so I measure success of individual songs rather than whole album projects.

Obviously I wouldn't want you to trash your own music by comparison, but there's no doubt a few things here and there on this record that are possible now, that perhaps weren't before. Now, that factor alone might not be what makes it the 'best' – but I sincerely believe that an artist's or band's current work should reflect their 'best' – do you agree?

Byron: OK so here's the deal really just comes down to a prospective thing. I mean some days you're in the mood for one; some you're in the mood for the other right? So I don't think we really play favorites between the two albums I think there are elements of the previous one I know I like. Some element of the second that pops, so really just comes down to what kind of mood you're in at the time I mean. At the end of the day they're both are babies' man and we love them equal.

Looking back and listening to the previous records in comparison, do you still feel the songs hold-up today as strongly as you did then when you first recorded them? What's the key in great song-writing that leads to songs or albums truly lasting throughout the years?

German: Some of the songs on The Street/Las Calles album like Muchacha, Cuento and Lupita still hold their weight in gold those three in particular have had tremendous pull. Even after playing them for a few years at clubs and festivals. On the SA album, which by the way we went a little bit traditional with cumbias and salsa feel rock tunes. 5 out of 11 tracks have become our party anthem at festivals. Hey people out there, go buy the record and see for yourself which ones I think you know I'm talking about.

Key in great song writing! Huh, just don't plan on it. Let it happen.

#10 SBS: German, as lead song-writer for Santa Lucia, how do you ensure that all the musical-needs of the band get met along the way?

German: Well, by bribing them with a good cigar and the best rum I can find. Just kidding, seriously, I give it to these guys for sticking around with such an experimental project like this. When we go on the road I'll try to make the experience as much stress free as I can. I mean we don't need to Drive 20 miles off the road just to go get an organic latte and drive everybody insane.

Byron: Being stuck in a van driving for hours is punishment enough to test someone's insanity.

Everyone needs input at some time or another, and people need to actively contribute in order to stay involved...or at least I've always assumed so. I would think it would be extremely tough to coordinate and drive the will of six additional players otherwise, that's for sure! So hopefully everyone is onboard and enjoys playing the music that you write for the band...but I'm curious as to how you kind of going about keeping that in-check. How do you know they play a large enough role in the band for what they'd like to contribute...is there discussion on that?

German: Let me put it this way, playing live is a democracy when making records it's a dictatorship. We record live versions of the songs, and when performing them onstage everyone has a feel for it where and what should change in a song and stuff like that. Ideas are

exchange and notes are taken, once at the studio, recording the final product I'm the official dictator.

Byron: "el jefe" sort of speak, ha-ha.

German: Making sure we stick to the plan otherwise it becomes very chaotic. Making records isn't my favorite pass-time, they are very budget driven and very exhausting.

When it comes to difficult decisions on which songs should make a record or not, who do you trust with input on that and what made them part of that inner-circle of support?

German: I would say Byron plays a good role in this, he knows his instrument very well and he's very compatible with other horn players including the challenging characters we have had in the past. Not to mention his kyokushin style in Black belt he's got. (Laugh). Players don't want to mess around if they get the wrong notes if you know what I mean (more laugh). He's got a good feel for what sounds good and feels good, and I trust him with that.

Over the years since 1999...I'd assume there had to be ups and downs and members being more/less involved on certain songs and albums. Jeez German, I suppose what I'm asking is how do you keep 'em all happy?

Byron: The first five years were a very inactive stage for us but yes, we had our ups and downs. As I mentioned earlier we're always open to different perspectives when it comes to input but to be honest there never seems to be discontent among the members. We're too busy having a good time, and we got no time for negative energy. There is enough of that in the world, if you surround yourself with positive people then you can expect happy vibes will follow.



#11 SBS: Was there anything you felt you had accomplished differently at the end of recording Suppressed Anthems than on the other records?

German: Yes, for one, we broke the vicious cycle of being a one record band, and second financing our own records which is not easy. Accomplishing that is a huge personal achievement for everyone involved. Musically speaking, I feel the songs in this record were slightly complex than in the previous record, challenging everyone's ability to do their best.

Anything in particular that you set out to do, maybe even a song you weren't sure was going to come out as well as it did, something that surprised you in how the songs came out on this record?

German: The song writing was another challenge, as I needed to keep the songs dance floor friendly without losing the strong message, yet keeping songs compatible enough to be festival material.

Obviously a lot of time was spent on both the music and production – it came out sparkling! So what put the magic into Suppressed Anthems and compared to how you play these songs live, did they come out how you thought they would? Why/why not?

German: There were small details that brought some of the songs to shine, from its darker state, songs like "War" a surf rock feel kind of tune that by adding Latin percussion elevated the song to be more upbeat. Taking it out of a monotonous two chord progression. In others like "Lupita" Byron's sax touch gave the song the soul it needed.

Byron: "I Will", was the most challenging song on this record, and I would say even though, it's one of the easiest songs live though.

German: Yeah, the vocals were a pain to nail, the horns were having a lot of frustrating moments laying the tracks. On paper looks great but laying it down physically was a headache, it took a toll on everyone. I'm still not happy with it. A song with a life of its own for sure!

Who has been in your corner the entire time and supported you throughout your career in music?

German: There are a few people on the list, but one that's at the top of my list besides family and friends of course it would have to be, Koat at Worldbeat Canada.

If those people weren't part of the picture, is a reality for Santa Lucia even possible?

German: Yeah, I mean. You couldn't build anything without the support of those involved and the people you meet along the journey.

What key roles of support have been played by others surrounding your music? Tell us a story or two about some of these amazing people that have helped you along the way!

German: Cal Koat is a pretty good candidate, his support right from the start has been extraordinary. He has always embrace what I've done as a band, always believe in us, in the form of an interview or making us part of his yearly events like the Dragon Boat Festival. He has been terrific.

Topping that list would be Mick Williams and German Silva, they are my Aussie connections. I've been going to Australia for a few years now, and I've always received such a warm welcome and these two mates display awesome attitudes. Mick, helped me introduce the music to the Aussie audience through his radio station at 106.7 PBS FM in Melbourne. Granting me a few interviews, and German my pal from Chile setting me up with a couple of gigs down under and introducing musicians for a future tour.

#12 SBS: Websites my friends...we better get those from you so the people know where to find you online! What's your favourite way to connect to the fans through social-media – are you online often and accessible to the average fan looking to reach out? Not suggesting ANY of your fans are 'average' for the record. I'm sure they're as extraordinary as the music you make! You know what I mean!

<http://www.santaluciamusic.com/>

<https://soundcloud.com/santa-lucia-lfr>

<http://www.cdbaby.com/Artist/SantaLuciaLFR>

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/album/suppressed-anthems/id393854818>