



# CHARLIE BENANTE

THE ANTHRAX AND PANTERA DRUMMER ON THRASHING IN HIS 60S, WHY YOU REALLY NEED A GREAT LAWYER, AND HIS ENDURING LOVE OF COFFEE!

## GROWING UP IN THE BRONX

"I appreciate how The Bronx shaped me more today than I did when I was growing up there, because back then it was just where I happened to be. Now, I realise that I don't think anybody in my neighbourhood had ever travelled to Japan like I ended up doing. I may have been the first person in my community to have a passport, because a lot of people in America simply don't have them. They don't venture, they don't go out and explore what's outside of their surroundings. Travelling was really important to me because when you travel you become somewhat worldly. You see how other people live, and that makes you appreciate not only where you come from, but also where you can go. I wish more American people would do that. Go to England, for example, taste the food, meet the people, go and explore."

## EARLY MUSIC

"The Beatles' 'White Album' came out on 22 November 1968 when I was almost six years old. My birthday is November 27th, and I remember getting my birthday money. My mother took me to Woolworths, we had grilled cheese together, and I bought the 'White Album', the first ever record I bought with my own money. I can still see myself sitting on the couch at home, putting that record on, poring over the sleeve, and loving the poster that came with it. It was a really important moment for me. I was always looking to England for my music, with the one big exception being Elvis Presley. I always thought Elvis was cool. I've always said that many Americans didn't appreciate the blues. There was probably something a little bit racist in there, in that these people wouldn't allow themselves to learn from that music. It took the English to do that, and then they exported it back here. Everything that was coming out of England ended up in the mix of who I became, musically speaking. It was The Beatles and the Stones, then The Who, Zeppelin, and Black Sabbath, then the Sex Pistols and The Clash. I couldn't get enough of all that stuff. That was the music I wanted to play. And then Motörhead came out, and then Iron Maiden, and then I realised that *that* music was really what I wanted to do. That was where I wanted to go."

## FINDING THE DRUMS

"I truly believe that people are born with talents. Whether or not they choose to pursue them is another story. So I think I was born drumming. I didn't find the drums, the drums found me. For me it was always about music and art, and drumming was my driving force. It was all I wanted to do, and it came fairly easily to me. I'd play along with records a lot, and that really helped with my timing. I loved Neil Peart when he really started to become Neil. His drumming in the early days of Rush was really good, but it was when he hit the 'Hemispheres' and 'Permanent Waves' era that he took things way further. Neil became the drummer's drummer, and he had a big impact on how I would play. Simon Phillips was another one. When I heard Judas Priest's 'Sin After Sin' album with him on it, that was another breakthrough. Phil Taylor's playing on Motörhead's 'Overkill' record was another one. That was where I first heard fast double-kick bass drum - or at least fast for the time."

Interview by Howard Johnson. Photo: Ross Hallin

Iron Maiden's 'Killers' was also very influential on me because it was almost a thrash metal record. There were some really fast moments, and that, combined with the aggression of Paul Di'Anno's vocals, was just great. I'd come home from school so excited that I was going to play something by Maiden or Rush and I'd learn those drum parts note for note. That was my homework, and I loved it because already I pictured myself in an arena playing drums for a living. Playing was all I wanted to do, and I really worked my ass off to do it as well as I possibly could. I tried the school orchestra, but I knew straight away that I didn't like it. So by the time I was 15 years old I was in a band playing clubs."

## SKATEBOARDING

"I wasn't that big on skateboarding to be honest. I dabbled in it, but there wasn't much of a scene where I grew up. That was more in California. Even though I did read *Thrasher* magazine, I could never be the athletes that I saw in the pages and admired. And I really didn't want to break my arm either. Bad for the drumming!"

## JOINING ANTHRAX IN 1983

"I saw an opportunity. I knew I'd need to have a big locomotive in front to pull me along if I was going to make it in music, and I felt that Anthrax might be the train that I could hook up to. I was in art school at the time, and when I told my mom I was going to throw my lot in with the band she didn't really like the idea, but she knew it was what I'd been working towards my whole life so she backed me. And the one thing I swore was that if the band ever made it, then I'd try to bring all my friends along with me. So when Anthrax started to gain popularity, I got my nephew in the band. I got my friend John Tempesta into the business. I got other guys involved. And to this day all of them have careers in music. I love that."

## GRAPHIC ART

"I've always loved art, but the way it works is this. I won't do anything for maybe six months, and then all of a sudden something will inspire me and bam! Then I'm glued to paper and pencil, or to my iPad, and I'm creating. When I come up with concepts for Anthrax album covers, I never really have anything until we're about seven or eight songs in. Then I get a feel for it, and something just happens. If I really had to choose between art and music, it'd have to be music... but it'd be a tough choice."

## BEING A DRUMMER WHO WRITES MUSIC

"I've written since day one with Anthrax. [Guitarist] Scott [Ian] took over the lyrics, and I took over writing the music. I write on the guitar, and I can play pretty well. I can do a lot with a guitar. The only thing I'm not good at is shredding, but I don't care to do that anyway. I love the writing process because there are times where I'll be playing guitar by myself with a tape recorder going. I'll totally forget where I am, and then I'll listen back and there are three songs in amongst the things that I've just put down. It's why I'm an avid guitar collector, because I believe every guitar has songs in it. You just have to play it and get those songs to come out. There'll be days where I'll grab a Les Paul off the wall, or my

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