

DRUM MASTER

A Profile of Chi Sharpe

By Greg Sutherland

Harry Belafonte has been instrumental in Chi Sharpe's life twice in the '80s. First in 1981 in Saskatoon when a Belafonte suggestion led Sharpe to Toronto where he joined the Bruce Cockburn band, and next in New York in 1987 when Belafonte hired him as his percussionist.

"When I got the call, I already knew Harry," says Sharpe. "I met him here in Canada actually. In Saskatoon, Sask. My brothers and I were gigging at a club there and Belafonte was playing the Centennial Auditorium. After the show he and his band would come by and hang.

"Anyway, when he offered me the gig, I went down the very next day and firmed it up. The first two weeks was to be a trial basis and fortunately I've remained with him ever since.

"The cat is so deep. I'm learning so much from him, just hangin'. He's a beautiful man. A very intense brother. He has things to say and says them well, and it's great fun working with him."

Born in ██████████ Winston-Salem, North Carolina, Sharpe was surrounded by music right from the beginning. Everybody in the family, cousins included, played. Sharpe started on saxophone, dabbled with the piano, and then in the seventh grade settled on drumming. Listening to a hefty diet of jazz and R'n'B, he was always attracted to

the sound of the congas. "Right from the beginning my older brother Bill had us organized into a band. As other groups would come through town, we'd go and check them out. We were always learning something. My sister is actually the one responsible for me learning to play the congas. She'd say, 'Hear that sound?' And I'd say, 'Yeah.' She'd say, 'Can't you play that?' And I'd say, 'Yeah, right on sis!' Because of that, I took it seriously right from the start."

The Sharpe brothers band, Hell and High Water, hit the club circuit early on. Comprised of family and friends they covered the Carolinas and spread across the U. S. and Canada with a three month stint in Japan. The band, which played top-40, funk and R'n'B, was a regular visitor to Western Canada and it was on one of these trips Sharpe met Belafonte for the first time. "When we met Harry and his group, he really inspired us. He told us we needed to get a place, settle down, rehearse and then come back out. We were already kickin'. In fact, we were kickin' hard, but Harry can really edit stuff you know. He'll tell you, 'Start doing a little of this. Do a little less of that and so on.' He's got such insight.

"So we did what he told us. We moved to a little farm in Stayner just outside of Toronto and we practised. We rehearsed five days a week for about three months and then went to Toronto and hit. It was great, we played the

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