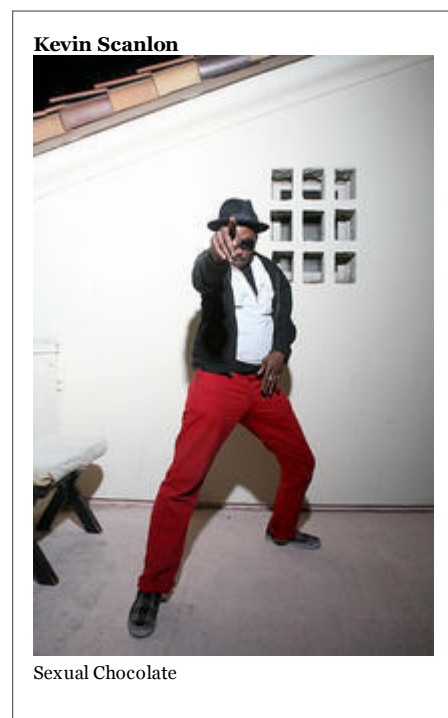


LA People 2009: The Re-Percussionist — Sexual Chocolate

The Crystal Antlers' drummer and wingman might be known to his mother by his birth name, but everyone else calls him Sexual Chocolate

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Sexual Chocolate's parents call him Damian, but they're pretty much the only ones. Everyone else calls him "S.C.," or "Chocolate," or "Chocolaté." Spanish speakers know him as "chocolaté de sexual." One dude calls him "Choco-Chicken."

He plays percussion for Long Beach's Crystal Antlers: tambourines, melodica and hand drums. But saying Sexual Chocolate plays percussion is like saying Dennis Rodman played basketball — they're both role players with visual flair and showmanship. Put them in the right situation, they're vital cogs in a championship machine. Place them in the wrong situation and they're marrying Carmen Electra, divorcing Carmen Electra, and missing games to take weekend jaunts to Vegas.

His previous band, defunct Anaheim punk outfit Geisha Girls, was not the right situation. Despite co-founding the band, Chocolate was unceremoniously fired after a show at Costa Mesa's Detroit Bar. "They'd been trying to kick me out for three months. They said I was an egomaniac who stole the lead singer's thunder," Chocolate says matter of factly. "We'd play shows and everyone

would scream out, 'Sexual Chocolate!'"

That's the thing. Watching Sexual Chocolate flail in lime-green fun-glasses and Trojan helmet basically dictates that he siphon attention from the rest of the band: twirling drum sticks like batons, crushing snares with holy-rolling fervor, pirouetting like Prince in Purple Rain. Consider him a cross between Keith Moon and Eshu, the Yoruba trickster god.

Imagining the Crystal Antlers sans Sexual Chocolate is like picturing Public Enemy without Flavor Flav. But originally Chocolate was just a fan, until a fateful set in Oakland. On vacation from a catering job at Disneyland, Chocolate told the band he'd be their road manager, mostly as a ruse to get drunk and party. But at the show, Crystal Antlers frontman Jonny Bell demanded Chocolate play. So he did. Complete with rain sticks, bongos and tambourine that he'd brought along. That explains much about Sexual Chocolate: He's the type of person who regularly carries bongos and rain sticks.

Except that it really doesn't. Behind the outrageous showmanship, the Salem-smoking soul born Damian Edwards speaks softly, humbly, admitting he wears sunglasses partly out of stage fright. Behind the tinted frames, his alluvial eyes reveal a pathos you might not expect from the helter-skelter histrionics.

After all, the Anaheim-raised, Canyon High School graduate is 36 years old, more than a decade older than anyone in Crystal Antlers. Seventeen years after he baptized himself into the punk-rock world, he's finally able to make music for a living. Even his nickname, ostensibly an act of semi-ironic braggadocio, was bestowed at 21 during a stint volunteering at a café in Santa Ana following a run of bad luck that found him getting a DUI, and kicked out of his band and his mom's house in short order. Deciding that if he was going to stick around, he needed a nickname, his co-workers selected Sexual Chocolate, a testament to an uncanny resemblance to Eddie Murphy.

Chocolate might be a jester, but he's one closer to the Shakespearean ideal, with a puckish wit and a slyly concealed wisdom. After all, few people, let alone musicians, can match his essence: "If Crystal Antlers is a four-star dinner with prime rib steak as the main course, I'll be your sour cream, your salt and pepper, the ice with your Coke. I'm the fixings on your dinner." Or the chocolate for dessert.