

PHILIP ANSELMO



Photo: Metal Dave Media

I DON'T THINK THAT I'm Philip Anselmo's favourite person this morning. Despite him being led to believe that today is a day off, nevertheless here he is at midday at his home in New Orleans having to spend precious time talking to me. That would be enough to annoy anyone. But it gets worse...

"We were in Europe for six weeks and when I got back home I went directly into Down rehearsals," Anselmo tells me. Down, in case you didn't know, is one of a number of other band projects that the singer is involved with besides Pantera. "[Guitarist] Kirk [Windstein] and I were hanging out as we do, shooting the sh*t. Well it got late into the evening, and just as he's about to leave he goes, 'Oh man, I've been sick as f*ck.' And I'd been hugging the man! Sure enough the next day it was awful, and two weeks later it's still not great, man."

He's not kidding either. Anselmo's speaking voice sounds like a road drill today. No wonder he's not too happy about conducting a 90-minute interview with me. It sounds *painful*.

But then again, pain is something Philip Anselmo knows all about. He turns 57 this month, but by his own estimation he's been suffering chronic back pain since the age of 24, the damage being done by his explosive early onstage performances with Pantera.

"We don't really need to get into that," he tells me, but then over the course of our interview he returns to the subject again and again. It's clearly been the cause of many of his problems. But after various operations – the first was back in 2006 – and rehabilitation over a number of years, here we are in 2025. And despite the lurgy that he can't quite shake, Philip Anselmo is finally in a decent place.

"It's more often better than it's worse, if that makes sense," he tells me. "There are a lot more good days than bad days."

You could apply that not only to Anselmo's health, but also to where he is musically right now. In July of 2022, 19 years after Pantera broke up amidst no small amount of acrimony, the band announced that it would be returning for a first major tour in 22 years. Anselmo would once again lead from the front, with stalwart bassist Rex Brown alongside him. The Abbott brothers, guitarist 'Dimebag' Darrell and drummer Vinnie Paul, who had completed the classic Pantera line-up, had both passed. Darrell was shot and killed onstage in Columbus, Ohio on 8 December 2004 at the age of 38 while performing with his post-Pantera band Damageplan. Vinnie died on 22 June 2018 aged 54 of heart disease. Their replacements for the new Pantera were announced as Black Label Society guitarist Zakk Wylde and Anthrax drummer Charlie Benante.

Despite some pathetic initial vitriol on social media about the ethical validity of this move, Pantera's return to live performance has been an unequivocal success. 2025 isn't slowing down any either. US stadium shows supporting Metallica will be followed by a special appearance at the final Black Sabbath show in Birmingham, England on 5 July, and a US headlining tour that runs right through to September.

"My favourite thing right now is checking out the new Pantera audience," Anselmo tells me. "And I do mean *new*. The old timers, the old-school folk like us, are bringing the kids out, kids that have been raised in

a house where they've listened to Pantera their whole lives. A Pantera show is a family event now, and that's my favourite thing. That's what I like the most."

PHILIP, HOW MUCH ARE YOU ENJOYING THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING BACK PERFORMING IN PANTERA?

"In so many regards it's 10 out of 10. The good completely outweighs any little negative thing I could even dream of right now. So maybe let's just say nine out of 10, so that I can be a little bit picky."

IS IT WEIRD FOR YOU TO IMAGINE THAT YOU'RE AS BIG A HERO TO PANTERA FANS TODAY AS BLACK SABBATH WERE TO YOU WHEN YOU WERE A KID?

"Big time. I was too young to see the heyday of Sabbath, so I guess that a 14-year-old kid today will see us in the same way as when I saw Sabbath and Priest in '80 and '81. Those guys were well into their careers by then, but it didn't stop me loving them. But I'm not better than Ozzy Osbourne. I'm not better than Ronnie Dio. I couldn't hold their f*cking jockstraps, as Larry Holmes said about Rocky Marciano. In my mind I'm still the kid, still the fan. But I also happen to be a lead singer."

HAS THE FIRE TO BE A FRONTMAN ALWAYS BEEN THERE FOR YOU?

"I don't think there was any moment in my life where I wasn't going to be a rock singer. I can remember being two years old standing on the goddamn kitchen table,

singing to friends and family. And yes, I *do* have memories from that early on. For some reason I've got this vivid kid imagination. So I always had

suspicions. I started out with [singer and pianist] Dr. John, New Orleans Mardi Gras music. Jazz is what it is, really. Then it was The Beatles and Hendrix, and as much as I'd like to blame it all on Kiss, I was into a lot of other stuff too. I was into Queen. I was into The Beatles, Scorpions, even Ted Nugent. I liked it all. And then I heard Eddie Van Halen. Oh, and then I guess Sabbath snuck in somewhere. All those dudes were definitely larger-than-life, definitely heroes. But bizarrely I never thought, 'Oh, there's no way I could do that.' I was thinking, 'I would most certainly *love* to do that.'"

YOU AUDITIONED FOR PANTERA IN 1986 WHEN YOU WERE JUST 18 YEARS OLD. WHAT WAS GOING THROUGH YOUR MIND?

"I wanted to be in a band, a popular band. I wanted to be one of those dudes on stage playing shows, the bigger the better. I was in a New Orleans group at the time, and we would play a similar circuit to Pantera, who were based out of Fort Worth, Texas, an hour flight away, seven or eight-hour drive. I think everyone knew they were a great band, and I think everyone thought out of all the local bands in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas they for sure would be the ones who were going to make it. Those guys had had records out since '83 or something on [the band's own label] Metal Magic. Everybody saw their drive to make it. While the rest of us had these little demo tapes, they were making *vinyl*, trying to push the envelope. Back in the day a big part of making it was getting signed to a major

"THE COSMIC CHIPS JUST FELL INTO PLACE. AND I FEEL LIKE THAT HAPPENS A LOT WITH ME. COSMIC CHIPS DROP AND I'M JUST GETTING SHOVED ALONG. KEEP GOING, KEEP GOING. THERE'S SOMETHING AROUND THE CORNER."