

# Christ's return rocks Painters Mill

Leslie Rice

Gathered in the pit area last Saturday at Painters Mill Theater in Owings Mills were several hundred teenagers - and a few adults - dressed in various combinations of black on black. While roadies finished up sound checks, teens with mohawks and tattoos pushed their way up front to get close to the stage.

The show at Painter's Mill Theater was a homecoming for John Christ, lead guitarist for Danzig, the underground heavy-metal band whose nationwide tour stopped in Baltimore for the weekend.

Christ, who grew up in Catonsville, was able to visit with family and friends before the band moved on to finish the tour. Danzig will leave after Christmas for a tour of Europe.

Danzig is making its second sweep through the nation this year, promoting its second album/compact disc release, "Danzig II: Lucefuge." So far, the album has sold more than 300,000 copies.

"We want the record to go gold, and we're halfway there," says Christ, whose surname is a stage pseudonym. He asked that his real name not be published so the band's fans won't harass his family, which still lives in Catonsville.

Christ says "Danzig," the group's first release, "was powerful but basic. It wasn't overproduced. It had a real eerie sound to it, a lot of dark colors and dark tones."

"This second record is a lot more polished," he says. "We're now fully a band and we have a really tight sound. On this album Glenn (lead singer Glenn Danzig) sings a lot more and really uses his full vocal range. The biggest difference, though, is that this

album has a real bluesy sound to it."

Christ was a junior at Towson State University studying jazz composition when he joined Danzig. He has been playing guitar since he was 14.

"I heard Ted Nugent and Aerosmith and I was hooked. My first band was called Blind Ambition. I played with one of my sisters' old boyfriends. We had a great time," Christ says.

He played in garage bands until he was a senior at Catonsville High School, and his free time went to classical guitar courses he took at Catonsville Community College.

In 1986, Danzig, based in New York City, was signed by record producer Rick Rubin, who has produced albums of the Beastie Boys, Andrew Dice-Clay, Run-DMC and the Cult.

Rubin told Glenn Danzig, formerly of punk bands The Misfits and Samhain, and bass guitarist Eerie Von that the group had to replace the lead guitarist, who was, in Christ's words, "adequate."

Christ heard about auditions for a new guitarist and drove to New York during his Christmas break to try out. After two auditions, he was offered the job.

As soon as he joined the band, Rubin told him to dye his hair black in keeping with the band's persona. So Christ dyed his long brown hair an inky black and grew a goatee.

Three weeks after Christ joined the band, Chuck Biscuits, formerly of DOA and the Circle Jerks, auditioned for drums.

"We had our first jam session with the four of us and right away we knew. We could feel it. It was rough, it was raw, but we could feel that it was right," Christ says.

Danzig is a hard band to

categorize. Its music is loud with a heavy guitar sound, which is why most people tend to classify it as heavy metal. But the music has a deeper rhythm than most metal bands.

"I like to describe it as heavy rock that's blues-influenced," says Christ.

Danzig is something of a controversial band. Some critics have said the lyrics border on Satanic, a claim Christ disputes.

"Some of the lyrics Glenn writes, you can take two ways. Well, you can take them a lot ways, actually. Glenn is fascinated by old religious things."

MTV watchers can sometimes see a Danzig video during "Headbangers' Ball." According to Christ, "Her Black wings" and "Killer Wolf" are requested and played regularly. MTV, however, refused to play "Mother" because of some of the symbolism in the video.

"There were crosses and pentagram here and there," says Christ. "MTV couldn't accept it. Meanwhile, of course Madonna is dancing around in front of burning crosses in her video and it's played all the time. 'Mother' is a teenage rebellion song. We're not advocating Satanism, we just put the symbols in there for effect."

It would be difficult to miss the symbols. The huge sculpture of a ram's skull with fangs envelopes the stage at Painters Mill and purple lights pulsate from its eyes. Glenn Danzig's songs "Devil's Plaything," "Snakes of Christ" and "Long Way Back From Hell" are heavy with icons and symbols of the fall of man and of the supernatural.

And then, of course, there's Christ's name.

"Christ is a nickname that stuck. I used to go to church a lot and Glenn would call me

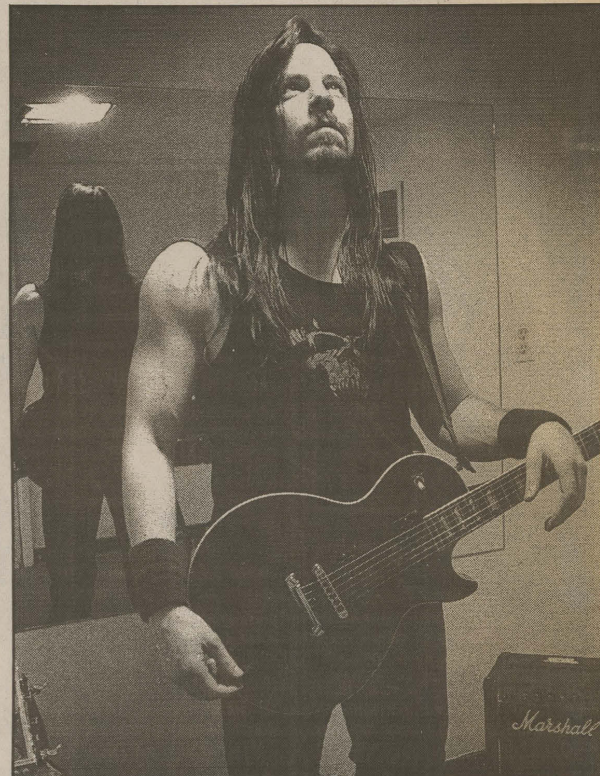


Photo by Molly McAllister

John Christ of Danzig prepares for the group's concert last Saturday at Painters Mill Theater. Danzig, which recently released its second album/compact disc, and Christ, originally from Catonsville, are finishing up a nationwide tour before moving on to Europe in December.

'Jesus,' 'J.C.,' 'Christ.' Christ just stuck for some reason. I don't know why. Nicknames are like the lottery that way."

After touring Europe, Danzig will start work on its third album. During a break after recording, Christ would like to do some solo work.

"I have a whole catalogue of my own songs. They're not in the Danzig style, they're more a mixture classical/jazz guitar and rock and roll," he says.

Christ frequently tries some of his classical music on the Danzig crowds. At Painters Mill, he played a haunting classical piece that lasted about two minutes.

The crowd stopped slam-dancing and throwing people in the air for a minute and became quiet. People held their lighters in the air. When it was over, Christ flicked his pick into the crowd, which screamed its applause.