

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Charles Connor

PERSON

Connor, Charles

Alternative Names: Charles Connor;

Life Dates: January 14, 1935-July 31, 2021

Place of Birth: New Orleans, Louisiana, USA

Residence: Los Angeles, CA

Occupations: Musician; Songwriter

Biographical Note

Musician Charles Connor was born on January 14, 1935 in New Orleans, Louisiana to Viola and William Connor. He began playing drums at age five. His first professional work as a drummer came in 1950 when he was hired by Roy Byrd (“Professor Longhair”) to play with him at a New Orleans Mardi Gras program.

He went on to perform with Smiley Lewis, Guitar Slim, Jack Dupree, and Shirley and Lee. At age eighteen, Connor became the drummer of Little Richard's road band, The Upsetters. Connor was a drummer for Little Richard throughout the 1950s, on records such as "The Girl Can't Help It", "Keep A-Knockin'", "Ooh! My Soul", and popular feature films as Don't Knock the Rock and Mr. Rock 'n' Roll. He was credited for creating the unique "Choo Choo Train" style of successive eighth notes with a loud back beat used by nearly all subsequent Rock 'n' Roll drummers. When Connor was not working with Little Richard, he worked with James Brown and The Famous Flames. In 1957, he toured with performer Sam Cooke. He also performed with other artists like Jackie Wilson, the original Coasters, and “Big” Joe Turner. He recorded with “Champion” Jack Dupree, Larry Williams, Don Covay, “Papa” George Lightfoot, Christine Kittrell, Larry Birdsong, and Dee Clark.

In 1994, Connor received a Certificate of Special Recognition from Congresswoman Maxine Waters (D-CA). In 2010, Connor was inducted into the Louisiana Music Hall of Fame. Connor released his second album in 2013, “Still Knockin’”, which debuted an original song written and sung by him, "Beginning of Rock n' Roll," including new recordings featuring the voice of Kate Flannery. Connor was featured in the 2015 documentary miniseries for BBC Music TV’s Rock N Roll America “Episode 1: Sweet Little Sixteen,” exploring the genesis, explosion and legacy of rock 'n' roll in America. He published his autobiography, Keep A Knockin the Story of a Legendary Drummer,"

in August 2015 with Waldorf Publishing. Connor is also featured in BBC Four's 2017 documentary Sharon Osbourne Presents Rock 'n' Roll's Dodgiest Deals. Connor's drumsticks are on display at the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame Museum in Cleveland, Ohio.

Charles Connor was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on October 13, 2019.

Connor passed away on July 31, 2021.

Related Entries

The Upsetter [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1953 to ?]

Drummer

The Famous Flames [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Drummer

Broadcast Music, Inc. [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]