



BOBBY FREEMAN

THE ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS' MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

Not long after the Arizona Diamondbacks joined major-league baseball in 1998, the team began a meteoric rise through the National League ranks, culminating in a stunning win over the New York Yankees at the 2001 World Series. And from the start, the D-Backs' "musical mascot," keyboardist Bobby Freeman, has been there to cheer the team on.

Bobby knows he has an incredible gig. "I've got a great seat," he says. "I'm on press level, right behind home plate, and I'm looking out on the field at all times. I just play whatever I feel like—standard tunes, classic rock, jazz—for about 40 minutes pre-game. Then during the games, it's my job to be the head cheerleader, to lead in the rally chants—things like 'Let's Go D-Backs,' 'Mexican Hat Dance,' and 'Charge!'"

Freeman relies on a Yamaha Tyros keyboard to get the crowd going. "I use it in various modes," he explains. "For something like the 'Addams Family Theme,' I'll use one of the traditional organ sounds. Sometimes I just use the drums or percussion

to get the people to clap along. I've used the Tyros in hundreds of different ways to inspire the crowd to get loud and support the Diamondbacks as they're up to bat. I just try to keep the excitement flowing."

In fact, says Freeman, sometimes the Tyros sounds almost too good: "I try to use the organ as the lead voice—otherwise, people aren't sure if it's me playing, or a CD! If I'm using Tyros voices like the flamenco guitar with the Latin samba beat in the background, it sounds so good that you don't even know it's me!"

In a typical baseball game Bobby plays about 30 different rally chants—but the Tyros has tripled his musical options: "I can do more like 90 different versions," he says. "I can take the same rally chant and change the voicing. Instead of just playing the 'Mexican Hat Dance' with the organ sound, now I can do it with trumpets or guitars. It's opened up a whole new world for me."

Bobby usually gets to decide what—and when—to play during the games. "I'll size up the situation on the field," he says. "If nobody's on base and there's a foul ball, I might play 'Mexican Hat Dance.' But if there are two guys on base and the batter hits a foul, I'm more likely to do 'Charge!' or 'We Will Rock You.'"

Freeman also knows when not to play. "There are major league rules I have to follow," he explains. "As soon as a batter has his foot in the box, the rules say we have to stop making any sort of audio noise or visual movement so he can concentrate on the ball. It's a safety issue."

Before joining the Diamondbacks, Freeman played keyboards for two seasons with the San Diego Padres, preceded by eight years with the Phoenix Firebirds, a now-defunct Triple-A team. But he got his real start as a boy, playing organ in the roller rinks of Cleveland. Eventually he moved on to ballroom dancing and relocated to Arizona. "I did it because I appeal to the senior citizen market," he says. "We have an area here called Sun City and Sun City West that has over 100,000 seniors. I knew they would like my music, so I moved out here to perform at the private country clubs and ballroom dance clubs."

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Bobby still plays ballroom gigs—entirely on the Tyros. "I played a 50th anniversary last week at a country club," he recounts. "And the guy said, 'I'm selling my 88-note piano—I want to get one of these!'"

For Freeman, the Tyros's best feature is its ease of use: "I can just turn it on and play it, and know it's going to sound good. I'm confident that when I select a rhythm, whether it's swing, classic rock, Latin, or whatever, that I'm all set with the proper melody voices and instrumentation. I can just start playing—I don't have to worry that it's not going to sound right. You don't have to change anything. The voicing is the best I've ever worked with. It's just ready to go."

The Tyros also accompanies Bobby on his official Diamondbacks community relations appearances at schools, libraries, and charity functions around Arizona. "Doing this kind of good work in the community is one of the number-one parts of my job," he says. "I make around 100 appearances a year, and the Tyros travels with me. Yesterday I played at a 'cookie walk' with some disabled preschoolers at one of the spring training facilities. They set up about nine bases, and the kids walk around the bases with the players until I stop the music, and then they get a prize. It's just great to bring such happiness to people, from these kids all the way up to the seniors."