

FROM NASHVILLE TO CHICAGO

JAY DEMARCUS OF RASCAL FLATTS

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Jay DeMarcus seems to have discovered the secret of perpetual motion. When he’s not on tour or in the studio with his own group, pop-country stars Rascal Flatts—he’s busy producing other acts, from country singer Jo Dee Messina and gospel artist Michael English to legendary supergroup Chicago.

The Nashville-based bass player and keyboardist is currently at work on Rascal Flatts’ fifth album, due in September 2007. “Doing as many projects as I’ve been able to, I’ve learned more about the art and process of what it means to make a great record,” notes DeMarcus. “You’re really exposed when you’re in the recording studio—every flaw, every little imperfection is captured. And because of that, I’ve become a better musician.”

The secret to studio success, DeMarcus says, is experience and careful listening. “I think your ears become better the more you record. The more you do it, the more you know what to listen for. It’s helped me as a producer, too. When I’m on the other side of the glass now, I know what kind of notes to give the artist or the players about what improvements need to be made.”

Jay grew up immersed in music in his native Columbus, Ohio. “I grew up in one of those families where everybody would get together and play and sing all night long,” he recalls. “So you’d pick up whatever instrument wasn’t being played and try to pick something out on it.” When DeMarcus and his second cousin, vocalist Gary LeVox, connected with guitarist Joe Don Rooney in Nashville, the band began its steady ascent up the country and pop charts. Rascal Flatts went on to earn GRAMMY®, Billboard, and CMA nominations and sell more than 13 million albums.


A key ingredient of Rascal Flatts’ success is their dynamic live show. “We all grew up on ’80s rock and roll,” DeMarcus explains. “I used to love seeing bands like Bon Jovi and Aerosmith and Kiss, bands with huge, theatrical shows. You felt like you got your money’s worth. So when we got together as a band, we were very much about entertaining as well as making great music. We use pyrotechnics, lasers, moving lights, and stages in the middle of the arena that we fly out to. It’s very much country music, but it’s very much a rock-and-roll show. I think we’ve married the two worlds together quite nicely.”

Onstage and in the studio, DeMarcus relies on Yamaha keyboards, especially the Motif ES8. “I have a grand piano shell with a Motif inside that I play live,” he says. “I have another one here in my studio, and I also have the Motif Rack. It’s my favorite synth—it’s been the meat and potatoes of everything I’ve worked on and everything I’ve produced. It has exactly what I’m looking for: I can dial up sounds so quickly, and it has all the textures I need, the pads and the other synth sounds. For just about every application I’ve ever needed, the Motif has fit the bill. I also have a Yamaha C7 grand piano in my studio, and the Motif feels more like it than any 88-key weighted keyboard I’ve ever used.”

With his busy schedule, it’s amazing that DeMarcus has time to spare for outside projects. But, he says, “I’m producing stuff more and more. I just produced a new artist named Patrick Wayne, and I’m getting ready to work with a group called the Martins, a brother-sisters trio that’s been very successful in the Christian field. So I’ve got my hands in all kinds of things!”

Jay’s most memorable production gig to date came in 2005, when he was tapped to oversee Chicago’s 30th album, *Chicago XXX*. “It was surreal being in the studio with those guys,” he says. “I’d been a fan since I was ten! I’d become good friends with Jason Scheff, the lead singer who took Peter Cetera’s place in 1985, and we’d cut some demos together. Meanwhile, the band had been thinking of making another record—they hadn’t done one in about 12 years. And when they heard some of the things he and I had been doing together, they called me!”

DeMarcus has come a long way from the family jam sessions of his childhood. But he’s still hard at work perfecting his craft. “My goals for the future are to improve as a writer and a producer, and keep making the best music that I possibly can,” he says. “We’ve had some great success with Rascal Flatts, and I’m really thankful for it. But I think we still have room to surprise even ourselves. I think we can push ourselves to be even better than we’ve been.”

 **YAMAHA**

MOTIF ES8