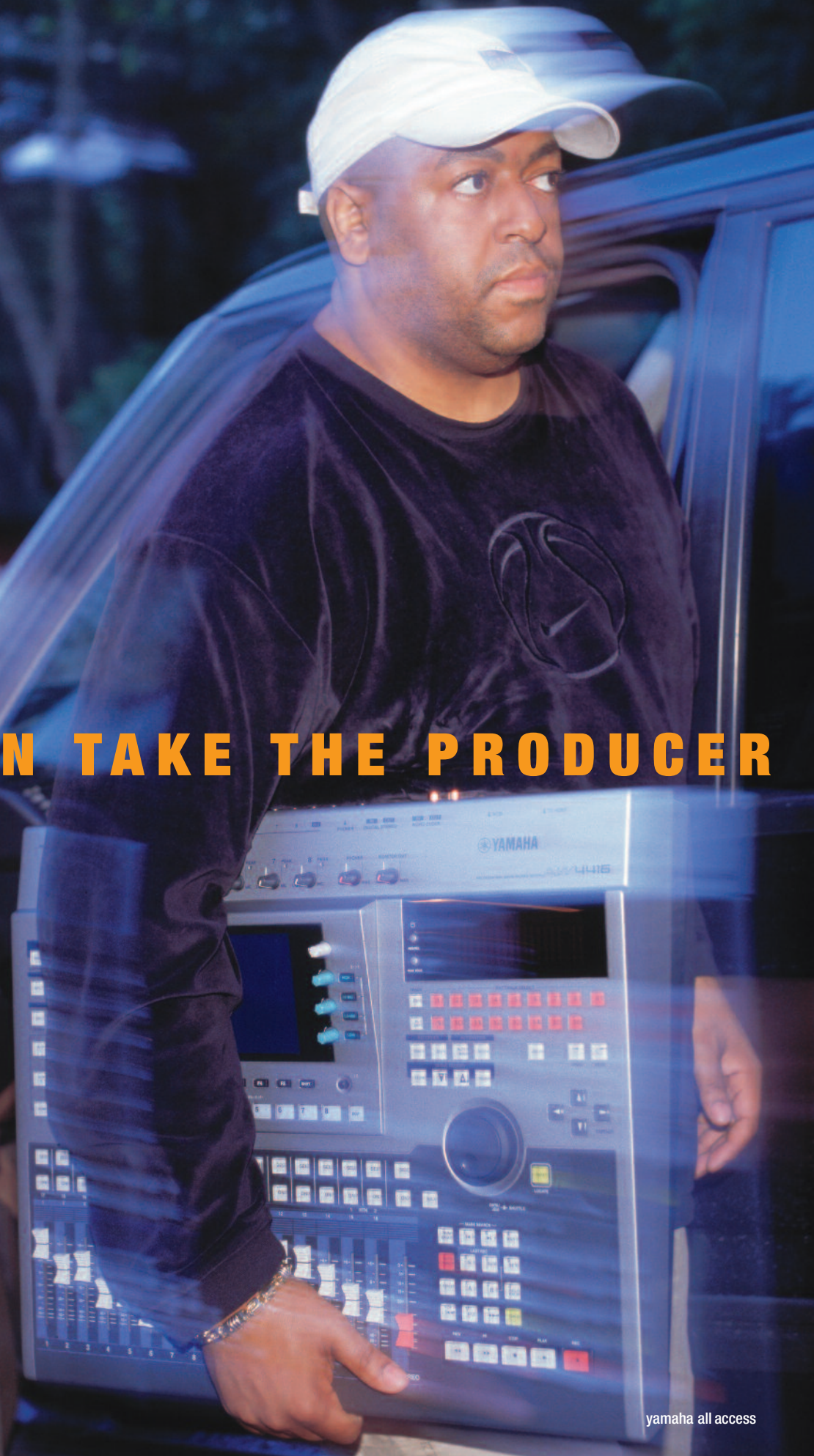


MARC HARRIS

YOU CAN TAKE THE PRODUCER



yamaha all access

BEFORE HE WAS PRODUCING AND WRITING WITH SOME OF THE BIGGEST NAMES IN GOSPEL, pop, and R&B, Marc Harris was a church organist in his native Indiana. And he still makes music with the heartfelt directness of a sermon.

“That’s my advice for any songwriter/producer,” he says. “Whenever you’re given the opportunity to express and exploit your talents, make it count. Remember, in that opportunity lays the chance to change hearts, minds, and lives through the gift of music.”

For Harris, music and message are inseparable. “As a songwriter,” he says, “I find it crucial to understand the message you’re generating. When I write a song, I look for the message to be my hook. I want the verses to be my map to the hook, and I want my bridge, should there be one, to reason with my hook.”

Harris’s first big-time gig was accompanying gospel greats BeBe and CeCe Winans. “I began touring with them shortly after their *Different Lifestyles* CD crossed over from the Gospel and Christian Charts to Urban Adult Contemporary and R&B,” he recalls. “A few years later I became musical director for their live show, which quickly led to studio arranging work. Most of my credits since then have been in the gospel/Christian genre—the Winans, Kirk Franklin, Yolanda Adams, Amy Grant, Michael English, Carmen, Fred Hammond, Donnie McClurkin, Walter Hawkins, Vanessa Bell Armstrong, the Clark Sisters, and Darryl Coley.” Harris has also written with Babyface and Michael McDonald.

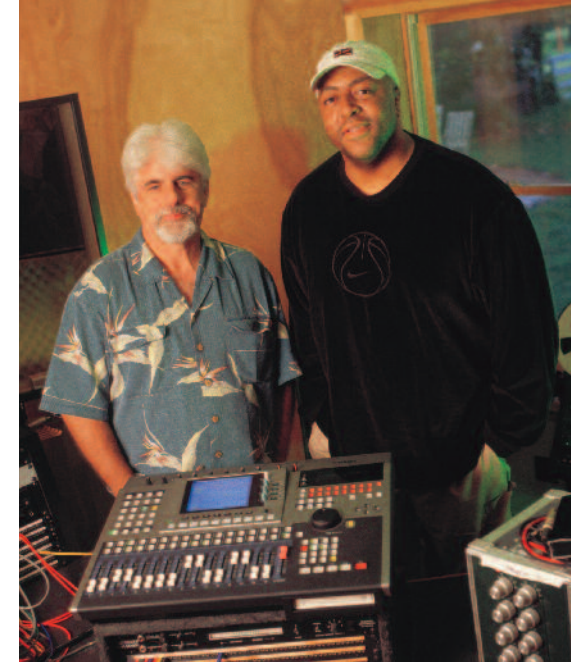
The way Harris sees it, songwriting and production are not separate skills. “The craft of songwriting,” he says, “is in and of itself a form of production. A well thought-out production treatment can perpetuate a song’s message—the image of the message within the music. The best approach to producing songs is to understand clearly what the songwriter is trying to convey and the feelings that inspired the song. Then I try to build upon that inspiration. A song will always have impact if you locate the inspiration and use it to color the song.”

OUT OF THE CHURCH, BUT...

Harris is similarly philosophical about working with sometimes-temperamental artists. “Each artist has his or her own idiosyncrasies, and you just have to deal with them,” he says. “I can’t quite imagine Little Bow Wow and David Foster hooking up for an entire record, but luckily we’re blessed with a vast array of producers. The best approach for me is simply to present myself as nothing more or less than who I am. However, I think that one should not judge a book by its cover and assume that the artist you’re dealing with is necessarily the person they might seem to be on a particular day. Life is tough, and you never know which side of a person you’re going to experience at any given moment. Sometimes something as simple as a phone call can change a mind or a mood.”

Harris’s current project is Michael McDonald’s upcoming Christmas album, which he’s tracking on a Yamaha AW4416 Digital Audio Workstation. “It’s the best piece of digital recording gear on the market today,” says Harris. “Yamaha always seems to think of the user’s mind when designing their equipment. I’m having fun learning the product. In fact, I find myself in more discussions regarding the 4416 than most people would want to entertain. The automation and recall are fantastic, and the internal effect processors are killer as well. It’s a great piece.”

Even though he currently spends more time in the studio than onstage, Harris believes that audience reaction is the ultimate measure of how successfully a song lives up to its intent. “Live situations are the ‘tell-tell’ of the listeners’ emotions,” he says. “When you play an intro and the response is pandemonium, you know you’ve connected. And when an artist sings a great melody with a great lyric and couples begin to hug and cry, you know you’ve made that inspirational connection.”



Marc Harris (right) with Michael McDonald and the Yamaha AW4416.

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