

Michael W. Smith



Michael W. Smith may be the brightest star in contemporary Christian music. But despite having collected a truckload of Gold Record, Platinum Record, GRAMMY®, and Dove awards during his 17-year career, Smith shows no signs of complacency. His 13th album, *This is Your Time*, finds the singer/composer exploring new musical territory and his next release promises even bolder departures: It's an all-instrumental collection highlighting Smith's cinematic-sounding compositions. We recently spoke to Smith about the secular side of his songwriting process.

You usually collaborate with lyricists.

Yes. First and foremost, I'm a piano player, so the music usually comes first for me. It inspires what I want to say, and then I collaborate with a lyricist to help me articulate those feelings. But I've just started my first instrumental album. Most of the music sounds like the type of thing you'd hear on a movie soundtrack. Don't be surprised if I look at opportunities to score movies in the future.

"There is no company that makes so many fine products in all areas: keyboards, guitars, pro audio, you name it."

What are your favorite instruments to compose on?

Most of the time I start at the piano, just letting whatever is in me come out. Yamaha digital pianos have always been my favorites because they just sound more real to me, maybe because Yamaha makes great acoustic pianos and knows great piano sound. Once I have a good idea, I develop it with a sequencer and MIDI instruments.

Do you ever compose away from the piano?

Yes. My last two albums were actually written more with guitar. And sometimes I write with no instrument at all. One example is my song "Hope of Israel." I'd gone to a holy place outside of Jerusalem, expecting to find a quiet retreat in an amphitheater on the side of a hill. Instead, I found a rehearsal for a traditional Jewish ceremony. The girls were dancing with these beautiful lavender and scarlet scarves and sashes. I began a song in my head, composing as I watched. I was so afraid I'd forget part of it that I went straight back to the hotel to write out what I heard. I finished it on the flight back to the States.



Can you get the same sort of inspiration from sound as well as sight?

I'm always inspired by new sounds. Sounds are like smells and tastes. They can instantly transport you to places you've been or to places you've never been. I like going to new places.

Your band seems to favor Yamaha instruments as well.

All the drums on *This Is Your Time* are Raymond Boyd's Yamaha Absolute kit, the same one he plays live. My bandleader and guitarist Chris Rodriguez uses Yamaha DG100 amps live, because their digital modeling faithfully emulates all the different tones of my music. And keyboardist Jim Daneker and I both use S80 keyboard controllers.



Smitty at the GT-7 Piano

How about recording gear?

This is Your Time was recorded and mixed on Yamaha O2Rs. We'd originally intended to use a mix of analog and digital, but between the O2Rs and our Otari, we never even turned on the analog 24-track. My technical assistant/front-of-house engineer Eric Elwell also uses two O2Rs to mix my live show. He convinced me that the sonic quality we use in the studio could be incorporated into our live show, thanks to the precision of the recallable settings. He approaches my show like a record mix, but with a bigger pair of reference monitors! I have used Yamaha gear for most of my career, way back to the early days. There is no company that makes so many fine products in all areas: keyboards, guitars, pro audio, drums, you name it.

New Sounds for New Times



MSW plays the CPX-15W

Anything you wish Yamaha made that they don't?

Do they have a "radio hit box" in the works? [Laughs.] We could always use one of those.

Anything else you'd care to add?

"Yamaha, and their Artist Relations Director Chris Gero have been a huge part of my musical process in the last couple of years. The support that this company provides, along with great musical instruments and great people is what makes this relationship such a pleasure.

"Yamaha and specifically Chris Gero have had a strong vision to support developing artists, not just the 'big names'. Several of the artists represented by Rocketown Management (a management company that MWS started in 1997) are in a relationship with Yamaha. Forefront recording artist Stacie Orrico along with Rocketown Records' Chris Rice and Ginny Owens are fortunate to be involved with Yamaha and have the ability to create music with these incredible tools, in the early stages of their careers, just as I did.

"We are grateful for partners in music like Yamaha."

Rocketown Artists



MWS on tour with S80

