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Playing to Praise

Fred Hammond’s praise and worship ministry just keeps growing. The Fred Hammond Band has released ten albums, including 2004’s *Somethin’ ‘Bout Love*. He’s also become a well-known producer with his own F. Hammond Music label, whose roster includes such artists as the Singletons, Joann Rosario and Shea Norman.

FRED HAMMOND

HAMMOND, WHO GREW UP LISTENING TO EVERYTHING from gospel to Lou Rawls to heavy metal, began singing with his church choir at 12. “I also took a lot of school music lessons,” he says. “I was in the school chorus and the band. The first instrument I was attracted to was the drums, then guitar and bass. I’d walk through the music stores as a kid, just plinking on the guitars. I’d pick out little songs that I’d heard, like this.” He sings the signature riff from “Smoke on the Water,” then continues, “I just understood the instrument—I instinctively knew how to get a good tone out of it.”

After graduating high school, a music career seemed natural. “I was always

playing in some sort of band,” Fred explains. “I played trumpet in one group—I couldn’t really play that good, but I just knew how to do it, how to make my way around the instrument. I also played drums and bass and sang.”

In the early ‘80s, eager to move his career to the next level, he auditioned with Detroit-based gospel group the Winans. “They turned me down,” Hammond recalls. “They didn’t know anything about me, after all. But then the younger brothers, Daniel and BeBe Winans, asked me to be in their group. From there I went to a rehearsal for a big Winans family concert. And the next thing I knew, Marvin Winans, the elder

brother, pulled me aside and said, ‘Okay—you knew what you were doing in the first place! So come on, we want you to be a part of it.’” Hammond ended up playing bass and singing with the group for two years.

In 1982, Hammond started his own band, Commissioned. “When I went out with the Winans, I saw an area that I thought could be filled,” he says. “So I just pulled the guys together, named it and got it going. And that band went on for 20 years.” In 1994, after more than a dozen albums with Commissioned, Hammond left the group to launch his current solo project.

Of all the records Hammond has released with his own band, two are closest

to his heart: *The Spirit of David* and *Pages of Life: Chapters 1 & 2*. “Those records changed the game in gospel,” he says. “They brought about a new wave of what they call ‘urban praise and worship music.’” The innovation, he says, was combining R&B, pop, and hip-hop flavors with traditional gospel: “We have pop instrumentation on a lot of the stuff, but we also flow with the traditional gospel sound. I do a bit of all those styles—a little bit of old-school traditional gospel, then something a little more hip-hop, R&B, and pop.”

Hammond relies on Yamaha instruments onstage and in the studio, including a Motif ES8 synthesizer workstation. “The Motif is my workhorse,” he says. “It’s my go-to key-

board. It’s got a combination of all the sounds I ever wanted to use: the solid pianos, the traditional Rhodes—it has everything. I can’t tell you how many keyboards I have, things I used to use. But since I got the Motif, we rarely use anything else. It’s cool.”

Yamaha drums are also a cornerstone of the Fred Hammond sound. “Being a producer, there’s a certain sound I require,” he notes. “And Yamaha drums have that sound. I’ve used Yamaha drums since I was in Commissioned—we tried out a lot of different drums, until we got to Yamaha. And I’ve been sold on them ever since. I always trust them for recording because they have a very

distinct, solid, rich sound. I use a maple kit in the studio, and that’s the one I travel with as well.”

According to Hammond, all his music serves the same goal: “I want to lift people up and give them hope. I want people to see that no matter where their life is, God really cares about them. I also want them to see my love for God. I tell my guys, ‘Play as though you were playing just for the Lord’. With that in mind, the sound of what I choose is extremely important. It’s important how my music sounds, because I care what He hears.”