

# Marvin McQuitty:

## Making a Joyful Noise

AS DRUMMER FOR GOSPEL ARTIST FRED HAMMOND, MARVIN MCQUITTY IS A driving force in the urban praise and worship movement. With a style that combines in-the-pocket grooves with subtle, expressive ornamentation, he's sometimes ranked alongside drum legends such as Omar Hakim and Vinnie Colaiuta.

So how did he get there? "My dad was a drummer," McQuitty explains. "He was into the jazz scene, but he was also the drummer at church. At one point, we had a nine-piece drum set in our living room instead of furniture!" He first gravitated toward the drums at age three and began playing in earnest on his own set when he was four.

Growing up in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in the '70s, McQuitty absorbed a broad range of cultural and musical influences. "It's a college town, so you've got lots of different kinds of people," he explains. "There were a lot of musical genres going on, between jazz and funk and Motown. But what really influenced me the most was the music at church."

McQuitty is quick to point out that playing in church can be as cut-throat as playing in clubs. "I grew up in a really competitive church—there were like nine drummers waiting to play! It's the survival of the fittest. Who has studied their craft enough to be the one that gets the first call?"

Marvin concluded that the best way to secure his position was to cultivate a unique style. "I needed to challenge myself and give myself an edge, so I came up with some different ways of doing things," he says. "For example, my kit configuration is weird: my first tom is the 12" and the second is the 8". It's partly a showman thing, and partly to give myself a different sound. Depending on how you place the toms, you can take a traditional roll, and it doesn't sound traditional anymore."

These days, McQuitty plays a Yamaha Birch Absolute kit. "I have 8", 10", and 12" rack toms, 14" and 16" suspended floor toms, and both 22" x 16" and 22" x 18" kicks, which I alternate depending

upon where we're playing. If we're playing an arena I'll use the 18" depth, but I like the punchiness of the 16" a lot." For smaller gigs, Marvin takes fewer drums. "I've done club sets and taken just one tom," he says. "But hitting that one tom, the way it sings right back to you—man, that's all I need!"

Snares? "I have a ton of them," laughs McQuitty. "One of my favorites is still one of the first ones I bought, a Yamaha Dave Weckl signature model. It's 13" x 5" maple with dual strainers and gold hardware. I've also used the new Steve Jordan signature. It's made of environmentally friendly material and man, it has got so much crack, it's crazy! It sounds excellent on ballads, funk stuff, everything. Another snare I'm partial to in the studio is this 5½" Paul Leim signature chrome-over-brass snare. The side stick on that thing is nuts. It bangs, man!"

McQuitty, who has favored birch drums since 1991, recently ordered a Yamaha Absolute Beech Nouveau kit as well. "Beech has the punchiness of birch and the warmth of maple," he explains. "I'm anxious to play it in a recording setting to see how it sounds, because when I've played live with it, it's great."

"Playing Yamaha drums is like driving your dream car," says McQuitty. "It's that exhilaration of 'it doesn't get any better than this.' They've allowed me to get the best out of my playing; I'm a better player because the drums just sound great. They work onstage, in the studio, everywhere. And these drums are so versatile—you don't have to poke and pry them to make them sound good."

But no matter how perfect the instrument, McQuitty says, man cannot live by drums alone. "When I play, whether it's gospel-oriented music or totally secular pop, I feel like I have to give back the gift that's been given to me. It's about bringing to life the spiritual connection between creation and creator and making it a reality. It might be the last time I get to play, so I make sure I give everything I've got when I get on the kit, every time."

**"Playing Yamaha Drums is like driving your dream car... it doesn't get any better than this."**