



**" I didn't even know
I liked the harmonica
until I heard
this man."**

- Comedian Dave Chappelle
introducing Yonnet.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

When it comes to the harmonica, French-born harmonicist Frédéric Yonnet knows how to turn skeptics into believers. Most people perceive the harmonica as a "side" instrument used in country and blues. However, Yonnet –part of a wave of musicians that emerged from Europe's jazz underground – is one of a handful of musicians to successfully demonstrate the harmonica's versatility as a lead instrument in contemporary jazz, R&B and other genres of music. Yonnet says, "Limitations are not in the instrument but in one's thinking."

Clearly, Yonnet has no limits. Just listen to his sound. It funks. It rocks. It hips and hops. It grooves. It sways. It testifies. It prays. It has a reverence for blues and jazz while appealing to a generation bred on pop rock and hip-hop. He has performed with music legend **Stevie Wonder** generational icons, the **Jonas Brothers**. His current stint with music royalty Prince has exposed him and his powerhouse sound to a

wider, more diverse audience. Praise **Dave Chappelle** and performances with neo-soul queen **Erykah Badu**, Soul prodigy **John Legend**, jazzman **Branford Marsalis**, and Jewish ragamuffin **Matisyahu** have all contributed to his mission to change the way the music industry, musicians and enthusiasts regard the "pocket" instrument.

Born in Normandy, France, to a Parisian father and French Guyanese Creole mother, Yonnet lived in and around Paris most of his life. His father, a part-time theater actor, and grandfather, Jacques Yonnet, writer and author of *Paris Noir* – a memoir that explores the dark heart of the City of Lights – honed the young Yonnet's appreciation for the arts. Yonnet always knew his calling was to the stage but he was not sure which one.

As child, he and his dad performed in French theaters doing comedy. By 14, he decided to literally march to the beat of his own drum. Shortly thereafter, he had performed with organist Jimmy Smith at the Marciac Jazz Festival. At 19, after a short stint as a drummer, Yonnet revisited an instrument he had as a child. The harmonica. "I got kicked out of a lot of bands because I kept trying to play the

melody on the drums,” said Yonnet. “On the harmonica I can play both the melody and the rhythm. Plus the harmonica is much lighter to carry.”

Well, maybe not so much.

These days, Yonnet, now based in the U.S., travels with pedal boards, mixers, amps microphones and over 40 diatonic harmonicas. Even though he has an endorsement with Seydel, the oldest harmonica manufacturer in the world, he still prefers to carry a few backup harps. “I’m pretty intense on the harmonica and I have to have the sharpest ax at all time.”

And he’s not afraid to yield it. They’re aren’t many people that would take on **Stevie Wonder** tête-à-tête on the harmonica but Yonnet proved more than capable when they performed together during several Wonder tour dates. “Frédéric Yonnet — a Wonder disciple — had a crazy harmonica duel that almost sent Stevie flying off the stage in a frenzy”, cited Fox News following their performance at Madison Square Garden. Another fan described the performance at Madison Square Garden like “watching Luke Skywalker and Obi-Wan Kenobi. There was a reverence between the two that was totally complicit and genuine.”

Without a doubt, Wonder’s genius has been Yonnet’s biggest musical inspiration. “Stevie’s mastery of the chromatic harmonica, is what I strive for on the diatonic,” said Yonnet.

Indeed, Yonnet’s ability to play chromatic scales on the diatonic harmonica gives him an unlimited range of notes and sounds, of which he takes full advantage. Yonnet demonstrates his command of technique and skill by masterfully bridging the gap between the diatonic and chromatic harmonicas -- impressing fans of both.