



**" 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, 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 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** and recently recorded with 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 from **Dave Chappelle** and performances with neo-soul queen **Erykah Badu**, Soul prodigy **John Legend**, jazzman **Branford Marsalis**, and Jewish raggamuffin **Matisyahu** have all

contributed to his mission to change the way the music industry, musicians and enthusiasts regard the "pocket" instrument.

Yonnet, born in Normandy, France to a Parisian father and French Guyanese Creole mother, lived in and around Paris most of his life. His father, a civil engineer and 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 a 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 50 diatonic harmonicas. Despite having an endorsement deal 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 times."

And he's not afraid to yield it. There aren't many people who would take on **Stevie Wonder** "*tête-à-tête*" on the harmonica but Yonnet proved to be more than capable when they performed together during several Wonder tour dates in 2007-08. "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 a performance at **Madison Square Garden**. Another fan described the performance 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 wider range of notes and sounds, of which he takes full advantage. He masterfully bridges the gap between the diatonic and chromatic harmonica -- impressing fans of both.