

15 questions with... Brotha Perry

Buffalo is blessed with many talented musicians, and Brotha Perry is one of them. He produced a CD called "Lawd Ha' Mercy," a collection of instrumental inspirational songs, with unique takes on "His Eye Is On The Sparrow," "Precious Lord," and other Gospel classics. If you like smooth jazz, chances are you'd appreciate this album and Brotha Perry, who also keeps busy producing music for other artists when he's not creating his own. BuffaloChristian.com had a chance to catch up with Brotha Perry and find out more about him. Enjoy the interview!

Q) If you had to sum yourself up to someone in two sentences, if they asked, "Who is Brotha Perry?" then what would you tell them?

A) I'd tell them I'm every bit of a Pisces and a hopeless musician that loves the Lord.

Q) Is the keyboard your main instrument? Talk about your musical capabilities-- what instruments do you play and what's your favorite and why?

A) I don't consider myself a keyboard player; I'm a church organist... I know the general term of today is keyboardist. I've been an organist for over 30 years so I guess that a Hammond B3 is my main instrument of choice.

I started out playing guitar when I was 5-years-old. I found an old cigar box and some rubber bands and I made a guitar out of it. I don't remember what it sounded like but I was playin' it everyday. I started playing a trumpet in the 3rd grade. I didn't do good at all with it cause I didn't really understand the concept, so I just never played the right notes with the right fingering.

In 5th grade I started taking drum lessons-- I had a pair of sticks and a practice pad. The teacher gave me a rhythm method book, and I had weekly lessons. I did better at that.

When I got to junior high I started playing tenor sax, and I got pretty good at it, so I made it to the All-City Orchestra back in the 1960s and a few of us kids started an all-brass band-- we knew two songs-- "Green Onions" and "Tell Mama"-- and we played them in the school talent show. Jerry Livingston, a Buffalonian known as a bass player today, played trombone back then, and I played tenor sax in this band.

I went to high school and the music teacher wouldn't give me a sax-- they made me play a trombone. I didn't really care for it, but I played it anyway, and got into the all-high band.

I think I got my first guitar when I was in the 8th grade, and that's when music really started to take shape; I played guitar for many years as my main instrument. When I was 17 I started picking out little tunes on a piano-- we didn't own a piano, so I would sneak into the Salem United Church across the street from my house, and learn to play songs I heard on the radio-- these weren't gospel songs either, but the pastor didn't say anything and they knew I had snuck in. I guess God touched their hearts and they let me practice, now that I think about it. So I played guitar while learning to play organ, and I played drums at a local church during my teenage years. So to sum it up, I started with guitar, then drums, and then organ, which has been my main instrument for years.

Q) Talk about the church you attend in Buffalo and what role you play there.

A) I grew up in the holiness church and so I learned the raw skills of music and organ playing for about 25 years. I started playing for other churches and choirs after that time period. Currently, I attend and play for the Cold Spring Church of God in Christ Jesus on Woodlawn Avenue in Buffalo. I work with the choir weekly and of course play the organ there. I just recently started there, so I'm getting adjusted and praising the Lord there, and they are such nice people-- I'm very blessed to be there.

Q) Your instrumental Gospel jazz CD, "Lawd Ha' Mercy," is unique because?

A) It is Gospel hymns played in an authentic jazz style, not in a Gospel style. I didn't strive to use any Gospel-style chord standards-- I just let the song take shape as if it was played by musicians that had never been to church, but knew how to play jazz or blues.

Q) How come it's pretty rare for Gospel and Jazz to come together? You're more likely to hear Gospel and hip-hop. What's the deal?

A) I don't think it's rare; I think it's more generational. Churches with more younger members embrace contemporary

Gospel and hip-hop, while church with more middle-age to senior members like the traditional Gospel style-- quartet singing, blues/jazz style songs... so in those environments Gospel jazz with a blues flair works better, and smooth jazz Gospel works better in contemporary churches.

Q) What venues or events have you played in the Buffalo area in the past few years?

A) Sad to say... lol... I don't get invited to these big Gospel events in the city, or the Darien Lake Gospel Fest. It's a singer's market, so Gospel jazz musicians have a hard time getting into these concerts. As many people that know I have a Gospel jazz group... I still have never been on stage at Gospel Fest, Juneteenth, or Gospel downtown. The only person that has ever asked me to appear was Pastor Anita Williams for the Taking It To The Streets ministry, and I thank God for her having me at her rally. On the other side, I do church fashion shows, pastor's dinners, or church affairs. I did four dates at Salvatore's restaurant, a few at the Adams Mark hotel... I don't play out as much as I would like to, but I'm happy that when we do play, people enjoy the jazzy Gospel that we play.

Q) You create tracks for other artists-- talk about that.

A) I have been blessed to have my own studio where I produced "Lawd Ha' Mercy," my own project. For the past year, I have been working on a project for a alto sax player from Suffolk, Virginia <http://www.youtube.com/user/TheLadySax> is where you can hear a sample. In this case, I use a keyboard. I use industry standard recording equipment and software. I will compose a song and record the parts, and email them to the client so they can use them in their project, or the client sends me a track they played, and I will arrange music around them, and email them the completed song... I try to help those that have a musical idea, and make it take shape.

Q) What's something you like about living in Buffalo?

A) I like being close to the lake, and the Peace Bridge. I can take a drive and compose my thoughts sometimes... and there's no hurricanes and tornados...other wise... I would be living somewhere past the Mason-Dixon where there's no snow.

Q) How did you get the name "Brotha Perry?"

A) That's funny. In the black church we all broth'a this or broth'a that... they never say brother unless it's in the reading of the bible... lol...Brotha Perry is my name.

Q) Who inspires you, musically, and why?

A) Since I play a B3, I'm very inspired and mentored by the music of Jimmy McGriff-- he is so precise with his improvisation, and the notes just go thru me. He is the only person I know that can "put a leash on a Hammond, and walk it down the street." He is indeed the master.

Q) What's the best way for people to get your CD?

A) You can get a copy of my CD thru <http://www.brothaperry.com/>. Also, it's on Itunes. If you'd like to get it at a store, the Buffalo Christian Center bookstore downtown has it, plus Record Theatre, and Life Resources on Niagara Falls Blvd. in Amherst, New York.

Q) Is there anything new and interesting going on in your life or ministry in 2010?

A) Since I'm almost finished with the sax player's CD, I'm going to start working to finish up my second CD. As far as the music ministry, I look for God to give me more understanding on teaching singing to His people, and the patience, love, and caring to do it with a smile.

Q) What would you say to young musicians just starting out, advice-wise, for playing music for church folks?

A) Well that's a good question... I would say... the church is not a gig; the church is ministry. The bar is a gig-- the church is where God is... keep God first when it comes to your music dealings with the church... these are God's people and one day He will call you into question on how you dealt with His people. Don't be like Moses... a paycheck only lasts a few days... but a blessing from God can sustain you forever.

Q) If you were stranded on a desert island, what three items would you like to have with you?

A) A bible, a fully-charged Verizon cell phone, and XM satellite radio.

Q) Anything else you'd like people to know about?

A) I have played many, many years-- and this is the first interview I have ever had... thank you for taking an interest in my music, life, and career. My heart is touched... God bless you...

To contact Brotha Perry, email brothaperry@aol.com and say you read about him on Buffalo Christian.