

OrganFax.co.uk Spotlight

# JAMES SARGEANT



I guess that it's fair to say that many of the well-known faces within the popular keyboard world are typically known for maybe one or two particular facets of their ability. Some are respected as excellent musicians or performers, some for their tuition, demonstration or teaching skills, some for a clever mastery of registration and some for their programming and technical skills. James Sargeant ticks all those boxes as well as possessing a most engaging and humorous personality making him a true joy to befriend! Hence the spotlight this month turns on the young gentleman who is becoming ever more the face of Yamaha Keyboards.

Born in Hull, James's first introduction to music was listening to his father play guitar.

Richard had learnt his craft well and after a period working as a Butlins Redcoat, had gone on to tour supporting David Bowie, together with the well-known Hull guitarist Mick Ronson. With this background, of course music was always a constant part of home life, and so it was almost inevitable that before too long James was showing a keen interest in playing an instrument.

Starting with a small keyboard at the age of five, James soon progressed to a full size Hammond organ and began an intensive period of study. During this time, he was also fortunate enough to be allowed to practise his pipe organ technique at a local church, which led ultimately to his appointment as organist and choirmaster for a period of twelve years.

During James's time at school, he remained enthralled by the organ and became something of a thorn in the side to the manager of the local music shop, who he pestered incessantly for brochures, price lists, demo records and anything else that would feed his hunger for his hobby. On leaving school he took a job as a demonstrator in the same store, and within three years was managing the shop.

This was the mid 1980s, and the age of the 'orchestral' organ was just beginning to dawn. Having played Hammond organs for most of his life, James now began to discover the new musical possibilities that the latest technology could offer. Around this time, he embarked on his concert career, playing his first professional electronic and theatre organ concerts at the age of 20. Before too long James's diary filled up with organ society concerts in addition to his regular three-night stint at a local working men's club, backing vocalists together with a local drummer.



A stint working for P&O Ferries followed, with James providing backing for the evening cabaret, followed by the 'graveyard shift' of the cocktail piano bar, playing regularly into the small hours each night aboard the two largest cruise ferries in the world.

After leaving P&O, James went back to his first love, with his appointment as Sales & Promotions Manager for Hammond UK. During this time, he became a familiar face on the festival scene, which he still enjoys to this day in his current role working for Yamaha UK. The timing of this article is quite apt since James recently took over the post of senior marketing manager for the company. This promotion now sees him in the unusual guise of diving his time between executive decision making around the boardroom table and mixing with members of the public at the 'coal face' in both his demonstrations and concert performances.

Since joining Yamaha in 1998, the following eleven years have been some of the most exciting James could have wished for, playing the best instruments available, travelling the world and working with some of the world's finest musicians, many of whom have gone on to become personal friends. He has been actively involved in the design and programming of many of the company's most successful products, including the incredible Tyros range of keyboards, which form the backbone of his concert set-up. Since 2001, he has also become a familiar name to millions of viewers as the public



face of Yamaha on the TV shopping channel QVC. More recently, James masterminded the amazingly successful Regi-Stick software concept for Glyn Madden's Yamaha Club, and through this medium brought new enjoyment to thousands of keyboard owners the world over.

James's musical taste is broad, ranging from light classics through ballads, rock and roll and modern pop music. However his 'signature style' is jazz and swing, whether big band, laid-back jazz ballads, or dynamic Hammond organ. In a varied programme, he tries to incorporate as many of his own favourite different styles of music as possible, hoping to incorporate favourites of the public along the way.

James remains something of a true enthusiast with a quite enviable collection of electronic and theatre organ recordings amongst his archives as well as having owned a most prolific number of makes and models of

instruments over the years. It is perhaps this innate knowledge of just about every genre of organ and keyboard ever produced that has given him his unrivalled ability to reproduce both the sounds, registrations and associated style patterns of so many well-loved types of popular music.

Look out for James on both the concert/festival and dealer circuit. His product knowledge will satisfy any curious keyboard customer while his musical magic and humour are sure to delight any of his many audiences!

*Chris Powell, July 2009*  
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