

# Phil Upchurch



# A

prolific guitarist whose distinctively funky, blues-steeped jazz style has graced well over a

thousand recordings across the popular music spectrum, the legendary Phil Upchurch has also recorded 27 albums of his own leadership, as well as movie soundtracks. Jazz enthusiasts love and respect Phil Upchurch for his singular approach to composition. In developing his sound, Phil demonstrates no allegiance to any of his contemporaries and is indisputably one of the best in his field. He goes from classical to jazz to contemporary funk as easy as walking from one room to another. He is also an amazing electric bassist. In honor of Upchurch's instrumental mastery, D'Angelico Guitars is soon to release a Second Edition of his signature Phil Upchurch Guitar. Adding to his media profile is Phil's newfound second career as a fresh face for television advertising. Phil's most recent on-camera commercials have been Secured Horizon, "AARP," Tropicana and Verizon Wireless. He also has had, Cameo filmappearances in, "His Eyes Are Watching God" and White Men Can't Jump" to name a few.

Phil Upchurch has been a prominent figure in the blues, soul, R&B and jazz circles for more than 50 years. In addition to his work with the legendary Jimmy Smith, Upchurch has performed and recorded, in the United States and internationally, with some of the music industry's biggest names. His talents have teamed him with musical legends such as Quincy Jones, Bob Dylan, Julio Iglesias, Ray Charles, Ramsey Lewis, Carmen McRae, George Benson, Donny Hathaway, Chaka Khan, Michael Jackson, Carmen McRae, Marlena Shaw, Eddie Harris, Brother Jack McDuff, Joe Williams, Stan Getz, Cannonball Adderley, Herbie Hancock, Grover Washington, Jr. and Wynton Kelly, among many others.

Phil Upchurch is a native of Chicago, IL, where he first appeared on stage at 8 years of age in a piano recital. He began playing professionally at age 16 in 1957. Immediately upon graduating high school, he pursued this path with a passion. Self-taught as a musician, Phil started touring with jazz, gospel and rhythm & blues artists of the day. Gaining widespread recognition and acclaim, Phil furthered his early career by recording with major R&B artists at Mercury, Chess, Vee-Jay and Brunswick - all major Chicago record companies. These sessions led him to become a first-call studio musician for two decades.

In 1961, he scored a Top 20 hit with "You Can't Sit Down," later played by President Bill Clinton during his first inauguration at a "Jam Session" on national television. From 1965 to 1967, Upchurch served in the United States Army as part of the Special Services Unit in Germany. Throughout this time, Phil stayed connected to his music but began to hone his skills as a photographer, capturing some of his most admired images during this period. After completing his military duty, he returned to music in earnest, recording and traveling with the phenomenal spirited gospel-soul ambassadors, The Staple Singers.

Thereafter, Phil began an important association with Chicago's legendary R&B, Jazz, Blues and Rock & Roll record company, Chess Records. He recorded two albums as a leader there (Upchurch and The Way I Feel, both in 1969), worked as an in-house session guitarist with label greats such as Muddy Waters, Etta James and The Dells, and was a member of the final incarnation of producer Charles Stepney's progressive psychedelic soul-rock band The Rotary Connection, recording the now-classic "I Am the Black Gold of The Sun (a vocal version of a Stepney instrumental, "Black Gold," that Phil first recorded on his Upchurch LP). Phil later recorded for two other internationally renowned jazz labels: Blue Thumb Records (the double LP Darkness, Darkness in '72 followed by Lovin' Feeling in '73) then a one off collaboration with keyboardist Tennyson Stephens on Kudu/ CTI in '75.

Phil Upchurch also had a special relationship with another Chicago legend of Soul, Curtis Mayfield, who featured Phil's sweet weepin' blues sound on his top-selling soundtrack to the film's, "Superfly," "Claudine," "Let's Do It Again" and "Sparkle"

In 1974, Phil began a 7-year association with George Benson on the album Bad Benson (which included his standout compositions "No Sooner Said Than Done" and "Full Compass"). Two years later, Upchurch was a key component to Benson's multi-platinum-selling pop breakthrough album, Breezin'- to this day one of the largest selling jazz albums in history. And once again, Phil was showcased as a composer with the lively "Six to Four." Upon the success of the album and subsequent tour, Upchurch moved to Los Angeles in 1978 to expand his musical talents

and collaborations. He resumed studio work, toured in Japan with producer/bandleader Quincy Jones' Orchestra and also did road and session work with jazz greats The Crusaders.

Upchurch continued to tour and record both as a leader and sideman during the 1980's and 1990's. In the 1980's, he traveled extensively with jazz organ king Jimmy Smith and recorded with singers Carmen McRae and Joe Williams, among many others. During this time, he also learned to read music by studying the transcriptions of the great Andres Segovia. The 1990's saw the release of his 20th album and the creation of the first Phil Upchurch Guitar, made by the Vestax Corporation of Japan. Also, Mel Bay Books released Upchurch's first book, "12x12," a collection of twelve Upchurch solos.



In 2006, Phil Upchurch married actress/songstress Sonya Maddox and, for the first time in his career, recognized his bride as his writing partner. "The timbre of her voice and her style of language rings perfectly with my intricate combination of chords," he states. "Sonya completes me." Phil & Sonya share a Christian Music Marriage Ministry, assisting gifted young musicians in realizing their objective of studying music at a college of their choice through the Jimmy Smith Foundation, which Phil founded, partnered with The Jackie Robinson Foundation. Phil & Sonya are devout members of the Crenshaw Christian Center under the spiritual leadership of Apostle Frederick K.C. Price, D.D. Through their WONDERVISION company, they are also producing a book of Phil's photography, a book and documentary on his life, and a solo CD for Phil.

For the first time in Phil Upchurch's career, he is devoting more time to his original music, putting aside the "Sideman" and standing in his own light. He is soon to release, his new CD, Autobiography and Film of his life.

His first love of photography has come full circle. His first national exhibit – with Sonya as curator - was November 17, 2005-January 21, 2006 at the California African American Museum: "Honoring the Photographic Works of Legendary Guitarist Phil Upchurch."

**Past Exhibit**  
**"BEYOND EXPECTATIONS"**



*"I have had a love affair with the camera and photography since I was 8 years old. To my way of thinking, the camera "Gives Pictures" -- it doesn't take them. It was my dream as a young man to attend Brooks Institute of Photography and shoot for National Geographic Magazine. I attended The Art Institute of Chicago by way of a special scholarship when I was in grammar school. I was quickly discouraged at the high level of artistry of even much*

*younger students than myself. I discontinued my studies there for that reason. Other than that, it was a real joy to be surrounded by that environment. It definitely had a permanent, positive effect on my life. If it were not for music, I know I would have pursued a career in photography. It is a very competitive occupation, but so is music and so is life. This is why I prefer to maintain a high level of spirituality and commitment in all of my undertakings. One must truly be passionate in order to maximize one's potential. I also believe that faith gives one the ability to overcome all obstacles. I have lived by this creed all my life.*

***For Personal Appearances and Bookings Contact***

*WONDERVISION Entertainment & Music Management  
Attention: Sonya Maddox-Upchurch, CEO  
[www.wondervisionentertainment.com](http://www.wondervisionentertainment.com)*