

VERTICAL HORIZON
By Tamela Meredith Partridge
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When it comes to the concept of musical horizons - that distant melodic vista of lyrical, vocal and instrumental harmony - no one captures it's true definition quite like pop-rock quartet, Vertical Horizon.

Vertical Horizon, consisting of Keith Kane, Matt Scannell, Sean Hurley and Ed Toth, was originally formed in '91 when founding members Kane and Scannell first met at a Georgetown University undergrad party in Washington, D.C.



Discovering they had a common interest in music and guitar playing, Kane invited Scannell to sit in and jam during one of his regular Tuesday night gigs at a local club. The two friends evolved into a popular acoustic duo with a catalog of cover songs and original material anchored in strong songwriting, aggressive guitar licks and harmonized vocals.

After graduating in '92 with a degree in psychology for Scannell and Japanese studies and linguistics for Kane, the two New England natives decided to put their educated professions on hold in order to pursue a musical career. Their first summer out of college was spent working odd jobs at Cape Cod and saving enough money to make the self-released '92 acoustic album, "There and Back Again."

Returning to a strong following in the Washington, D.C. area, the duo eventually expanded into a full band sound with '95 sophomore album, "Running On Ice."

Vertical Horizon became complete in '96 with the addition of drummer Ed Toth and bassist Sean Hurley. An increase in touring schedule and enlarged fan base resulted in the '97 independent third album, "Live Stages," which was recorded over two nights at Ziggy's in Winston-Salem, NC.

With three successful independent albums exceeding 70,000 in unit sales, Vertical Horizon finally drew major label attention in '98 and were ultimately offered a RCA recording contract.

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Focusing on real emotions and situations, the '99 RCA debut album "Everything You Want" is a heady mix of song-oriented material, gifted musicianship and passionate performances. Debut single, "We Are," reached #21 on Billboard's Modern Rock Chart while second single, "Everything You Want" dominated the No. 1 spot on Billboard's Adult Top 40 Chart for over three consecutive months.

Ten of the eleven selections on "Everything You Want" were written by Scannell, with one songwriting credit going to Kane for "Shackled."

In this exclusive SoundBytez interview, meet Vertical Horizon vocalist and guitarist, Keith Kane, and discover his views on music, education, life and relationships.

SB - Tell us a little bit about the recording process of your album, "Everything You Want."

KK - It has been a labor of love. It took longer to record than we wanted it to, so it was a little bit more frustrating than some of our other albums to make. But, I think we made the right decision. And we were ultimately very proud of what we had. We love it.

SB - Where do you derive some of your songwriting ideas from?

KK - I think Matt and I both deal with music as therapy. For me, I can definitely say that. Matt uses music for therapy, but he also has a talent for putting himself in a different place and expanding on it. But, for me, it is certainly a therapy thing. If I have something on my mind that is affecting me, I can pick up a guitar and write about it. The fact that Matt and I both tend to do that is what leads us in the direction of being a song-oriented band. And it just keeps our songs honest and most of the time based on real life experiences. And I think that is why the song "Everything You Want" has had the amount of success that it has had is because it is a very universal emotion. Everyone has been through that particular situation at least once in their life and I think that is what has helped the song survive as long as it has.

SB - In your opinion, what are the makings of a great "Vertical Horizon" song ?

KK - We all are working with the same 12 notes, so pretty much everything you are doing has been done before. So, I think that we start with the music and the song and we try to make it something that is interesting and unique to us and shows a little bit of personality to it. The most important thing is that the music has to relate to the motion the song is discussing. That is really important. And having good lyrics and good melodies are the basis of any good song. But for us, it is something that can highlight our ability to harmonize as well as the ability of the musicians in the band.

SB - So, all aspects are taken into consideration when formulating a song ?

KK - Oh, definitely. We take songwriting very seriously. I think there are a lot of cookie cutter songs out there right now and people sometimes get into songs that are cookie cutter and easy to grasp which sometimes forces people in the industry to kind of cater to that. We don't want to do that. We want to try and have something that hasn't been done over and over again. We want the next single of ours to come out and have people say, 'Oh,

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SB - How does it feel to have both singles released from your RCA debut album "Everything You Want" chart so highly?

KK - It is amazing, it really is. When I was a youngster sitting on my parents bed listening to groups like the Little River Band and looking at the album and thinking, 'Wow, they are signed with Capitol Records.' I never, ever imagined that we would be sitting in that place. Never mind sort of dominating the Adult Charts for the last two months. I mean, it definitely staggers me. I think it is great. We have done a lot of hard work and traveled a lot of miles in our careers. I think that if you asked anybody on this bus if we feel like we deserve it, we all would say 'Yes' because we have all definitely made sacrifices. It is just a great benefit that once you get past the point in the industry, like all the hurdles that you have to overcome just to get your music on the radio and then ultimately have it fall into the hands of the masses, it is a very daunting thought after all that work. And the fact that the masses have sort of embraced our songs, regardless of how high they go up the charts, I think is a great benefit.

SB - Because you have been doing this for close to a decade now, does the recent chart topping success kind of validate the fact that the band has indeed been on the right track all these years?

KK - Matt and I have been doing this for ten years come this October (2000). We have been a partnership for that long. I don't know if I would say validation. I think that it is easier for me because, like I said, so many things surprise me. I find validation in the fact that six years ago we opened for the Allman Brothers Band. There are a lot of things that validate our careers and our lives. But it definitely feels good to have the industry recognize you and to be taken more seriously as a legitimate act. That has felt wonderful.

SB - What do you think you have learned about yourself, your career and maybe even the music industry since your debut?

KK - What do I think I have learned about those three things—myself, my career and the music industry? Well, the music industry has really been a slow learning process. When we started ten years ago, we told everybody that we are going to make an album, and people were like "Well, you are really not in the music industry yet, but go ahead." We learned every single rope of that ladder. You know, from the stingy sketchy club owners to playing wonderful places and traveling abroad. We have seen the whole gamut. And we have done the label thing and all that. I think the music industry is difficult. It is a difficult thing to be an artist in the music industry because it is so much work. You are so under the microscope. And to have to put all that time and work in and to know that at any given moment you could be yesterday's news is a very difficult way to live. So, I think that

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SB - It must be difficult to be away from your significant other and to try and keep the lines of communication open through telephone and etc.

KK - Yes. E-mail and telephone. It is very, very hard. I think it takes two very strong people and it takes a lot of trust and a lot of focus on the future. But it is very difficult. It is one of the hardest things that I do.

SB - Well, it is good you have someone who understands that pull you have going on between career and personal life. It must seem quite unfair when it comes to the choices you have to make at times.

KK - I think that it is very, very difficult to maintain a relationship on the road even if someone understands. Because they never ever fully can understand because they are not there day to day. And they also, well, you know, people get lonely. People get lonely and sometimes a phone call is just not enough, you know ?

SB - Yes. But you seem to be quite in touch with who you are, your feelings and are able to communicate that. Which probably helps in maintaining a relationship.

KK - I don't think there is any room for dishonesty, really in any relationship. But especially in one that experiences such highs and lows, like one between someone on the road and one who is not. I think that there is really no room for that. You need to be honest with all of your feelings, even if they are bad, because it is too difficult a game to play if you are not being

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SB - Reading the lyrics in the song "Shackled" that you wrote for this album reveals you have a quite a depth. It seems to me that feelings like that just have to be expressed and you do that very well.

KK - I think that when you are writing, communicating, writing songs or being creative that you need to be in a place where you can express whatever you are feeling. Because if you don't, and you keep that inside because you don't want to hurt anyone's feelings, or it is too personal to you, then I think it will just slowly eat you away.

SB - The songs on your album have a way of saying things that other people might be feeling but just don't have the ability to express. Your music helps people be in touch with their emotions and feel.

KK - Thank you. It is very flattering to be able to do it. I think it is a great benefit to be able to sit down and write something that you care about and take pride in it and say, "Hey, this is what I am feeling." And if other people can sit down and relate to it and maybe if they can't relate to it on the same level that you are relating to it, but if they can take it and make it their own and have it mean something to them, well, I mean, that is just a huge gift that they are giving us and hopefully we are giving to them.

SB - How did you and Matt, two Georgetown University graduates, make the decision to choose a musical career over that of your college professions ?

KK - It was difficult. For me it was like any life transition decision. It was a difficult decision because it was my head versus my heart. My parents and I spent a whole lot of money for me to be trained to speak Japanese. I had always sang, but I never played an instrument. I didn't start playing the guitar until I was a freshman in college. And I loved playing the guitar. I wasn't really sold after I went to Japan and studied there, I wasn't really sold on being an American/Japanese business man. Even though there was a lot of financial temptation to do something like that. It wasn't where my heart was. So, I told my parents during my Senior year that Matt and I were going to try and make an album and sort of do the whole "do it while your young" kind of thing. You know, so that you don't regret it later. Never really expecting to still be going strong ten years later. And at first, my parents were like, "Listen. You are young and we think you are crazy, but, if you want to do this, then do it. But know that you are going to do this on your own and see how hard it is going to be." And I said, "That's fine." And we did it. As soon as the day rolled around where my parents received our first album, they were behind us 100%. So, that was a hurdle that I got through. And also deciding for myself whether I should follow my head and earn for a family and a future and all that or do I take a big chance and try and be happy in life. Even if it means a less comfortable life.

SB - What was it about the Japanese culture and language that initially drew your interest in order to pursue it academically ?

KK - That was one of the hardest things that I had to do. It wasn't a mistake. But, applying at Georgetown, I went to the school of language and linguistics. So, when you are a high school senior and you are applying for college to get into that school you need to declare a major on your application. And you have to do it for at least a year before you can change majors if you don't like it. I was 17 years old, and since Spanish and French came so easy for me in high school, I figured that Japanese and languages was where my talent lied academically. And at the time, the best business opportunities were in Japan, so I said 'Hey, I'm up to this challenge of taking it.' And I was. I was just 17 years old when I made that decision and it would have been foolish to invest a year in learning something and then give up on it after a year and change. So, I stuck with it and I still have that paper on my wall. And it is definitely not out of the realm of possibilities. It is a good thing for me to lay back on if I need to. You know, I wouldn't have traded the past ten years for the world. So, I think I made the right choice.

SB - According to your birthdate, it looks like you are scheduled to hit 30 this year. Do you have any qualms about turning 30 or is it not such a big deal for men?

KK - I think it depends. I wouldn't want to speak for the whole race or gender. For a male, it is really hard because it is the time when you start losing hair in some places and gain it others and your body gets tired and just the normal growing older things. For me, I am fine with turning 30. I look forward to someday settling down and hhaving a family. And to tell you the truth, I look forward to retirement. I think that each stage of life is kept fun and there are also drawbacks to each one of them. So, I guess I am just taking it in stride and just going day to day.

SB - Are you able to say what your next single is going to be ?

KK - Yes. I think it is going to be "You're A God" and it should be released sometime in June.

SB - Are you going to be doing a video for this third single ?

KK - Yes we are. I'm not exactly sure when. I think we will be doing that video within the next month.

SB - Do you have a favorite cut on the album ?

KK - Since "Shackled" is the only song of mine on the album, I would say that it is one of my favorites. But I also love the energy and the performance we got out of everyone in the band on that song. Out of Matt's songs, I would have to say that my favorite song of his is "Everything You Want." I think it is such a well-crafted song. And the first time I heard it I was like "Wow! That is definitely the best song you have ever written." I was impressed. And not just because of the success that it has had, but because the first time I heard it I thought it had a really cool chord progression, lyric and melody. I felt even back then, that it had commercial appeal. Even though that is not the most necessary item when writing a song, it is surely a nice benefit after doing this for as long as we have been doing it and all of us really hoping to be able to have families and educate our children and things like

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SB - Any plans of working on your sophomore RCA album in the near future?

KK - I don't think we are going to be making plans for that. Obviously we are all excited about it and ready to start addressing it but we have been so busy on the road. There is such a lack of privacy on the road that Matt and I tend to do our writing when we are off the road. So, I think we are going to support this album until it doesn't need support anymore and then we will take probably three months off and write songs and then hop into the studio again.

SB - What is the best piece of advice you have every been given, and who gave it to you ?

KK - I think that probably the best piece of advice I have ever gotten is that you need to be true to yourself and follow your heart. My best friend told me that when I was having a particularly rough time deciding between this life style as a musician and a more secure or stable one. That is the best piece of advice I ever got. And I think that it definitely translates into every part of life. It is a case of "Follow your heart and watch your ass." That puts it best.

SB - That takes a lot of courage to do that.

KK - Well, life is difficult, you know ? And you just have to strive to find those rare happy moments that make all the difficult ones worthwhile.

SB - What is next for Vertical Horizon ? What do you hope to accomplish throughout the rest of the year and in the future ?

KK - Well, we are willing and excited to follow the music as far as it will take us. We will love to be able to increase our business, but as well as we would love to increase our coverage and travel different parts of the world. Mainly our desire is to really just make sure that with each day and each project that we become better people and better musicians and a better band. I think that we are always striving for developing every aspect of our existence, whether that is individually or as a unit and I think we will keep doing that. As long as we keep having fun we will be making music for a long time.

SB - Many years from now, when you look back on Vertical Horizon's vast musical portfolio, what do you hope the music will contribute ?

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SB - Many years from now, when you look back on Vertical Horizon's vast musical portfolio, what do you hope the music will communicate ?

KK - I hope that people would think back, and regardless of whether you like our style or our different styles I should say, because I think each album has a little different style showing when you compare them collectively. I would like people to look back and say, " You know what ? Regardless if you like their style of music, these guys were good at what they did, they put their heart into it and the musical fabric has been better off with them in it."