

Chapter 17

Here Comes the Tyrant

Vine released its second album in the Summer of 1999. It was titled "Pieces of Time", and on it was a song called *Tyrant*. Believe it or not, a few weeks before we sent the album in to have CDs produced, I suggested to our drummer, Mike Hailey, that we pull *Tyrant* from the song list and not release it. I told him I didn't think it fit with the rest of the songs on the album. He disagreed. He thought it fit really well. He also said he'd played the album for several people and they all said that *Tyrant* was one of their favorite songs. Luckily, he was right.

Shortly before we released "Pieces of Time" a new Christian Rock radio station had begun broadcasting in the Dallas area. It was called PowerFM and it was located at 89.7 on the FM dial. It was the sister station to KVTT 91.7 FM which was a Christian Talk radio station.

For several years prior to launching PowerFM, KVTT had music programs designed to reach a younger audience. One was called Power Mix, which played Christian Rock music in the evenings. On weekends they had a couple of different programs, Lighthouse 21 and Spin 180, which interviewed local bands and played their original music. Vine had been fortunate enough to be on both of those programs several times. It was pretty cool to sit inside a radio station, hear your music being played and then take calls from listeners. We got to know several people at the station while we were on those shows and they were very supportive of us and many local bands. They would set up benefit concerts and we would frequently be invited to play. Those were always well attended shows, so it was always exciting to participate. They were a fantastic outlet for local Christian bands to gain exposure in the Dallas/Fort Worth area.

There were a handful of people who worked at KVTT who made the move to work at PowerFM. Chris Goodwin, Matt Mungle, Eddie Alcaraz, and Rick Walker were all people whom we'd met over the years and built relationships with. So, when 89.7 PowerFM launched, we dropped off a Pieces of Time CD to the woman at the front desk and asked her if she'd give it to Chris Goodwin who was the Music Director.

We never even followed up to see if he received it. We didn't know if we should or not. We figured he was busy and we didn't know if it would be appropriate to call and ask him if he'd listened to it yet. So, we just kind of let it go.

A month or so later, in September, we were scheduled to open for a national act at the Plano Convention Center. It was supposed to be a big show and we had a great time slot. We were on right before the headliner.

Call time was early, 12:00 noon, they wanted all the bands extra early so they could get sound checks done and then have plenty of time to prepare the venue before the crowd started to arrive. But, I'd heard it all before, most of the time when people said it was going to be a "big show", there would hardly be anyone there. I had heard of the headlining band before, but I had no idea if they were really popular or not. One thing was for sure though, someone had put up quite a bit of money to rent out the convention center and bring in a big PA system and lights.

The room was large and was set up as standing room only. It probably could have held around 1,000 people. The stage was good size, probably close to 60 -70 feet wide and 25 or 30 feet deep. It was big enough that all the bands kept their equipment on stage after their sound check. That made transitions between bands much faster and easier once the evening started. It was a very professional set up.

People would enter the through doors on the north side of the room. When they entered, the stage was to their left, on the east side of the room, and to their right were the merchandise tables.

All bands set up merchandise tables to sell t-shirts, cd's, posters and anything else with their name stamped on it. We were no exception. We had t-shirts, posters, 8x10 photos (color and black & white), necklaces, bracelets, hats, guitar picks, you name it and we probably had it at some point. But, we also had a new piece of merchandise...a brand new CD called Pieces of Time. To date, we'd sold probably less than 30 copies and they had all been sold to friends and family (I think my Mom bought 10 of them). In other words, we had hardly sold any.

Long days at venues before you take the stage can be really boring and this day was no exception. Once your sound check is done, then it's time to wait...and wait...and wait. If you're anxious, it turns in to dreariness and possibly a nap. Then the nap turns in to hunger and it's time to find some food.

After we got back from eating, we sat back stage and waited for people to arrive. Doors were to open at 6pm and the first band was scheduled to take the stage an hour later. We were on at 8:00 for a 40 minute set.

When the doors opened we watched as several dozen people walked in. After 10 minutes, there were well over 100 people in the room. Not bad! I went backstage and waited for the opening act to kick off the evening.

When the first band took the stage at 7:00, there were hundreds of people in the room and more people were still walking in. I was impressed. The room had to be close to capacity.

Wow, I thought, this headlining band must be more popular than I thought!

I started to get excited.

The opening act was awesome! Their infectious grooves had the crowd cheering and bouncing. I started to get nervous because their style was much more Pop sounding than ours was. We were much more of a rock band. I felt it was good that we had decided to keep some of our heavier rock songs off the set list. Our set would be a little more Pop sounding but still, *I wonder how we're going to go over?*

Before I knew it, it was our turn to take the stage. Luckily the crowd wasn't leaving...that definitely happens sometimes for unknown, less popular bands, and it had happened to us before. But, even more lucky for us, the crowd stayed and bounced and cheered with us! Right from the opening song, the crowd was in to it. At one point during the show, someone pulled out some beach balls and we ended up throwing them back and forth with the audience.

Hmm, I wonder if we can have our band name stamped on beach balls?

I'm pretty sure I did some stage diving too. Song after song, the crowd was engaged and cheering. To say the least, it was an awesome show. One of the best shows I'd ever been a part of. Man, they were a great crowd. They were there to have fun and I felt incredibly blessed to be a part of it.

The 40 minute set blew by quickly and it was time for us to go back stage and watch the headliner. I was really excited to see what they would be like. If the first two bands turned on the crowd this much, then the headliner was certainly going to blow it out. We would get to watch the festivities all over again from the side of the stage. This really was a "Big Show"!

The four of us in the band were backstage wiping our faces with towels and letting the adrenaline settle when our Manager, Michelle, walked back stage and said, "hey, you guys need to come out to the merch table".

I replied, "Oh, we'll come out there after the headliner gets done. We're gonna stay back here and watch their show from the side of the stage".

Michelle turned directly to me and said, "No, you're going to come out the merch table...right...now".

One thing to know about Michelle is that, she smiled a lot. She was a happy and positive person. People liked her because she was easy to like. So, when she looked at me serious, I took her seriously.

I said..."okay?", and we followed her...through a couple sets of doors...into the main room.

As we walked in, I couldn't believe what I was seeing.

What? What in the world is going on?

Every person in the convention center was at our merchandise table. Hundreds of people, dozens of lines, waiting to see us and buy our stuff.

Huh? I mean, yeah, that was a good show, but...It couldn't have been that good. Could it?

People immediately started walking up to us for our autographs. When we made it to our merch table we kept signing things...8x10's, posters, CDs, T-shirts. People were taking pictures with us. Then we started selling out of stuff. As a matter of fact we sold out of so much stuff that our drummer went and got some of his broken drum sticks and we started signing those for people too. We were signing *DRUM STICKS??*

We stayed behind our merch table and signed stuff during the entire Headlining Band's show. As a matter of fact, barely anybody was up at the stage watching the headlining band. People were either buying stuff from us, asking us to sign something, talking with us, taking pics with us, or they were leaving. To say the least, the headlining band was mad. One of them walked up to one of our members after their set and sarcastically said, "thanks for inviting us to YOUR show".

I'm not sure about the rest of the guys, but I was absolutely confused about what was going on...that is until, a little later when I was talking with a young girl from the audience.

She was telling me how much she enjoyed the show and then she asked, "How come you guys didn't play Tyrant?"

I was taken completely off guard. We hadn't sold hardly any *Pieces of Time* CDs before this show. Certainly nobody beside family and close friends had heard that song yet. I just stared at her and then I asked, "How did you know about Tyrant?"

She replied, "I heard it on the radio."

"The Radio?", I asked.

"Yeah, on Power FM"

It had to register in my brain for a second. Then I asked, "89.7?"

She said, "Yeah, they play it all the time. I love that song. I was hoping you would play it."

I couldn't believe what I had just heard. I stared at her for several seconds. Then I realized something and I started looking around the room. Everything, all of sudden, slowed down and started to make sense.

...All these people

...the show was awesome

...lined up at OUR merch table?

...Ignoring the national headliner.

...Tyrant is being played on the radio?

...Were they here to see US??

...Oh my, the power of radio

...They were here to see VINE play TYRANT!

I turned back to the young girl and said, "I had no idea they were playing Tyrant on the radio. I'm sorry we didn't play it. We'll play it next time."

I immediately started looking for our drummer, Mike. I found him, walked right up to him and said, "We have to add Tyrant to our next set list".

He said, "Yeah, we do. Apparently they're playing it on the radio".

Obviously, Mike had just had a similar conversation with someone else.

Then he smiled at me and said, "I told you people liked that song."

"Haha! Yeah, you did!"

Over the next several months, Power FM continued to play Tyrant in heavy rotation. They also released two more of our songs to heavy rotation, Mad World and Agape. We played many memorable shows. Talked and visited with so many wonderful people. Mad World and Agape helped us continue to get good shows for a period of time but, there was something about Tyrant that people identified with.

People always sought me out at shows and told me how much Tyrant meant to them. Several people said that Tyrant finally described how they were feeling when they were falling in to depression.

One woman told me she played the song for her family in hopes it would help them understand how she feels when she has relapses. She had been trying to explain the feelings that overcome her and she told me Tyrant described it exactly right.

At another show one night, a young lady asked if I could talk with her friend who recently tried to commit suicide. A few minutes later she led another young lady back stage and the first thing she did was hold out her arms to me. The bandages were fresh and they had blood stains on them. She had slit her wrists just days earlier. We sat and talked, and cried, and hugged, and prayed together. I saw her again a couple of years later at another show in Burleson, Tx. She was doing great. She was married and had just become a mom. I still think about her every so often. I hope she's doing well.

After visiting with so many people during the next year, I realized why I suggested to Mike Hailey that we pull Tyrant from the album, it wasn't because it didn't fit, it was because it was too personal for me. Dealing with depression is tough. It's frustrating. It's sad. It's overwhelming. It's hard to explain. It's embarrassing. I didn't want anyone to know what I'd been dealing with or how I'd been feeling. My own selfish solution was to drop the song.

I'm happy Mike over-ruled my suggestion to pull it from the album. I've joked ever since then that I can't pick a "hit song".

I'm very thankful that Chris Goodwin at Power FM heard something in Tyrant and decided to start playing it. Thank you Chris. That song ended up helping people get through some tough times in their lives.

I also feel honored that God saw fit to use Tyrant in that way. I don't know why He chose Mike Hailey, Tom Liscomb and myself to write it, but He did.