

Down Time For Musicians? Not Likely: A Candid Conversation with Matt Scannell of Vertical Horizon

Contributed by Richard J. Atkins, Ed.D.
Thursday, 17 May 2007
Last Updated Thursday, 31 May 2007

A long time ago, the Supremes reminded audiences that, "You Can't Hurry Love." Artists such as Simon and Garfunkel ("Slow down, you move too fast") and Tom Petty ("The waiting is the hardest part") have cautioned listeners and stakeholders that when "the goods" are rushed, mistakes can be made. The wisdom contained in these musical messages is as old as time. But in modern society, people generally want something new yesterday. No one could be feeling the pressures of public demand for creative output more than Matt Scannell of Vertical Horizon.

Frequently, music enthusiasts overlook all the obstacles that stand between "the latest album" and the release of a new one. Speaking from his home in Los Angeles, Scannell remembered what it was like to be an eager fan anticipating new material from a favorite: "I remember waiting for Peter Gabriel records and thinking, 'Would you just release it? I don't even care. Just release the record!' Unfortunately I find myself treating my fans the same way. I want to be less that way."

For fans, it's important to consider the bigger picture in cases like this. Although the "favorite act" may have released the album and, a few months later, came to the respective market that served that area, once the show is over, fans may think that the artist is now "off the radar." That's not really the case.

Modern recording and touring artists spend practically all their time engaged in some (or a combination of many) of these activities:

- -Touring from the previous album.
- -Writing new material.
- -Working on other projects/collaborations (such as writing for other artists).
- -Practicing/perfecting the new songs for recording.
- -Recording the new tracks.Making Appearances/promotions.
- -Navigating through record company red tape and mismanagement.

Sometimes, they get a chance to rest and be with loved ones.

Just like any business owner, these musicians-in this case, Matt Scannell-are engaged in numerous daily actions that help to build their "business," the music. And similar to most business owners, there are no "off hours." Amidst other career-building steps, one of Matt's ongoing projects has been the monthly trip to Nashville, writing songs to be placed with other artists.

Scannell recalls what it is like to be on this side of the record-buying counter: "I just know how I felt with Peter Gabriel. I'm still a fan. I'll buy the record the day it comes out, but it's like 'Dude, you made me wait ten years for that!' It's ridiculous." In an effort to assuage fans' feeling of being in limbo, he says, "My aim is, over the next year or two to be in a position where I can be releasing more things than ever before. But it takes a lot of work to set yourself up in a position, both with the label and with a team, that is able to make that happen. That's my goal - to be more and more productive."

In addition to a greater dedication to his audience (think: symbiotic relationship), Scannell has made effective use of the web to get closer to his supporters and keep them up to speed on upcoming events. The response to his personal and band MySpace pages has been incredible(www.myspace.com/verticalhorizon , www.myspace.com/mattscannell). There's even a www.mattscannell.com in process that refers visitors to Matt's MySpace page. All of this accessibility is Matt's way of communicating with the fans to say "I'm Still Here." He says, "I'm trying with these web updates and blogs on MySpace to be more interactive. It's not the thing that comes easily, because naturally, I'm a very private person. I think our fans deserve it. I think we've been far less than stellar in that regard in the past. I'm sorry for that and I'm trying to do better."

The response to the MySpace page has been quite impressive. A regular visitor will notice numerous daily additions and messages, showing how fans continue to esteem Matt Scannell. What's the secret to having such a dedicated fan base? It's a simple customer service approach-good character and always being audience-focused.

"I want people to feel respected. I don't want us to come off as too unresponsive or too quiet. I hope to assure people that it's not through any cavalier attitude or sense of entitlement. I am eternally grateful for what our fans have done for us. The fact that I that I own a home, have heat in the winter, a/c in the summer, and put food on the table because I have people who have supported me and my music, because people like my songs." Vertical Horizon's record and ticket sales, in this case, tell all. East-coast fans are delighted by the announcement of a Vertical Horizon show at the Mohegan Sun Casino in Connecticut on July 10.

"I'm always grateful for the fact that people stick with us they way they do. It's been so long since we've had any new release. The fact that people are still out there hanging tight with us is the biggest honor of all." Currently, Matt Scannell has tracks recorded and ready to go for an upcoming release.

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