

Time Horizon

'Living Water' is the debut album from Northern Californian four piece Time Horizon and while keyboard player Ralph Otteson, vocalist and drummer Bruce Gaetke, guitarist Dave Dickerson and bassist Steve Gourley have dedicated much of their lives to music, the real motivation behind this excellent, commercially tinged prog act was to help others. All the more impressive then that the album in question not only illustrates what talented musicians the four members of the band are, but also that Time Horizon are capable of bringing together the sounds of Asia, Styx, Pink Floyd and Genesis to create some easily accessible, but wonderfully intricate music that undoubtedly should appeal equally to lovers of prog rock and AOR. Steven Reid recently had the opportunity to quiz Ralph and Bruce about the album, the Living Water International charity the band hope to help fund through sales of their album and how difficult it is to be taken seriously as a Christian prog rock band.

Hi guys, I'm sure Time Horizon will be a new name for most of our readers, can I start by asking what your musical backgrounds are?

Ralph: I came from a musical family where just about everyone in the family is a musician. I tried playing the concert snare in grade school, but I was told I did not have any natural rhythm and was not allowed in the music program, so I did not get an early start in music like most keyboard players. Maybe I did not do well in grade school because I was more comfortable in odd time signatures, ha ha! I started playing the piano around the age of 17, basically taught myself by ear and started writing songs right away. I have taken lessons, but my sight reading is still not so good. I sold my car in high school and bought a Fender Rhodes Stage 73 electric piano so I could play in a band, then later a Moog Prodigy - a poor man's minimoog - and string machine. I was listening to progressive rock bands like Yes, ELP, Kansas and playing cover tunes with bands. After high school, I became a "born again" Christian and played piano in church and eventually started a Christian Rock band called One-Eighty. We played and recorded a few albums that had a Prog influence on some songs, but disbanded after a good ten year stretch. Ironically 20 years later the bass player from One-Eighty, Allen White, is taking over on bass for Steve Gourley in Time Horizon. It is good to team up with him again. I also played in a band called Iron Clay Poets in the 90's but was not able to release the album we made as the band broke up during the project. I am still trying to better my writing and hope to finish a longer "epic" prog song that I am currently working on.

Bruce: Personally, the first memory of music really getting a hold of me was when my older brother Dean brought home a Beatles album when I was around 6 years old. I was so taken by the beat of the music and singing, I think I played it more than he did. I remember he'd get ticked off at me when he'd come home and find some new scratches on the vinyl. Later on when I was about 9 or so, my cousin John Frlesen, who later became the drummer for the band Player, was drumming at a show in San Francisco that my parents took us kids to see. I was so blown away watching him. After the show I asked him if I could play his set - he handed me the sticks and off I went. It was the first time I'd ever played a full set, but I had been watching him play that night and I memorized some beats he'd played so when I got on the set, I mimicked them. He told my mom I was a natural at it and that she should get me some drums. It didn't happen right away, but I did eventually get my first drum set when I was 11, during Christmas. My older sister Barbara was the one who bought it for me. She didn't have much money but she knew how much I loved drums. She was the first person to invest in me as a musician. After I got my set, I played that thing until it fell apart. I was drawn to heavier rock music, you know, the typical stuff, like Grand Funk, Jimmy Hendrix, Black Sabbath, Black Oak Arkansas, and such. Then one day a friend played me the Emerson Lake and Palmer album 'Brain Salad Surgery' and I completely flipped. I knew I'd found music that really spoke to me. From then on, I was a PROGHEAD!! I got into Yes, King Crimson, Kansas, Starcastle, and a bunch of other progressive stuff. That's how it all started.

So how did you get together in the band Time Horizon and how long has the band been making music?

Bruce: I knew our guitarist David Dickerson for many years, since about the age of 14 and he was in the band Iron Clay Poets, with Ralph. Ralph heard

that I had a studio and one day approached me about helping him mix the ICP project. I had a hard-drive system that we transferred tracks to and we mixed the project over several weeks. During that time, Ralph and I really connected and became fast friends, we went to a couple of concerts together and we began to talk about jamming together. Well, Iron Clay Poets disbanded around the same time so the next thing we knew, we were jamming and writing music. David Dickerson came onboard immediately as the guitarist and about a month later Steven Gourley, who I had played with for several years on other projects, joined as our bassist. That was the beginning of Time Horizon back in 2006.

Reading through the band's web site, I was surprised to see that your debut album 'Living Water' has been ready for release for two or three years now. It really is such a strong album, so why has it taken so long to see the light of day and what were the difficulties you came across in getting the album released?

Ralph: That's a good question Steven, it was delayed for several reasons. Rewriting the material, rerecording tracks, some songs ended up getting dropped near the album's completion even at the mastering phase and so we had to write, record, mix and master complete new ones.

Bruce: Yes, it's been an exercise in patience to say the least and as with most bands there has been the problem of members leaving for various reasons. Our bassist Steven Gourley moved to Cambodia to work with World Vision International and we've had to bring in some additional musicians to complete tracks that we just couldn't wait on anymore. But with that said I still feel it was completed when it was supposed to be. God's timing!!

Have you signed to a label, or are you releasing the album independently?

Ralph: Well, we initially started looking at label support and we are still not opposed to working with a label in the future, but at the moment it seemed to make more sense to release it on our own independent label, Angelic Noise Records. One of the things we've also started doing is video production, so a video to support the album will be next. If a label wanted to bring us onboard and the contract was good for Time Horizon's goals, we would not be opposed to signing.

So how long did you spend actually writing the songs and recording them and just how much did you "tinker" with them between their completion and releasing the album?

Bruce: "Tinker" must be my middle name! We poured over the music so many times and we changed so much of how the music sounded at the beginning to create its finished form, but we weren't going to settle for just good enough.

Ralph: We wrote the initial core songs over the course of a few months and oh yes, as Bruce says tinker we did! However I think it made the album stronger. We have learned a lot so next time it will go much faster.

Bruce: Ralph's right, I was OCD-ing on details just a bit and that can lead to problems as well. Patience can run a little bit thin and opinions can slow up the works, but when it's all said and done, it has been so worth all of the hours we've invested into the 'Living Water' CD.

So who else plays on the album?

Bruce: Jeff Garner – he's a guitarist I've known for

nearly twenty years. He's an awesome player and he has worked with me in my recording studio on many projects. He and I wrote the core of the song 'Feel the Change', before we handed it off to Ralph to add his masterful touch to it and ta-nah, a great song was born. Jeff also plays on the song 'Paradise', as well as contributing some background vocals on both of those songs as well. Another fine musician who played on the CD is Phil Segroe, who is a wonderful bassist and a great friend. He was more than happy to step up and assist us with his bass playing. He's very solid.

One of the first things that struck me about 'Living Water' was the stunning production and mix of the album. Who did that side of things?

Bruce: Each of us contributed to the overall sound of the music. Ralph tracked his keyboards at his home studio, a very nice personal facility by the way, and David recorded his guitars at his house on his own system as well. The rest of the tracks, drums, vocals, bass, and Jeff's guitar were all recorded at my studio Zion Recording, which is in the basement of a church. Ralph and I co-produced the mixes and I did most of the engineering, we really do make a really great team. We hold nothing back from each other and we put it all on the table and present ideas to each other no matter how out in left field we may personally think they might be. The 'Living Water' CD is the result. Mastering was something we felt needed to be handled by a real pro, so we went to Gene Crout who has mastered all 4 of the CPR (Christian Progressive Rock) CD's, I call him "The Wizard". In my opinion, he's one of the best when it comes to mastering.

There is a real variety of styles across the album, although it comes together as an album remarkably well. I detected everything from Yes and Genesis to Asia and Boston as well as some Spanish guitar in the Time Horizon sound. Who would you site as the band's influences?

Ralph: The bands you mentioned for sure Steven, as well as Styx and Pink Floyd. We are fans of the band UK as well and maybe some commercial sounds like Journey and Toto, so maybe that is why we are all over the map. The Classical - Spanish Guitar solo was Dave Dickerson's contribution and I think it adds a nice audio pallet cleanser so to speak that helps the second half of the album sound fresh. I enjoy albums with a variety of the musical flavour; if an album has every song sounding like the last one it loses the momentum for the listener.

It's pleasantly unusual to see a band with a lead singing drummer. Obviously in the studio it is easy to split the roles; however as someone who has played drums for many years, I've often wondered how difficult it is carrying out both roles when the band performs live?

Bruce: Well Steven, I literally have to split my thoughts in half. One side is the driving beat that has to maintain the push of the music while keeping it all in time, but then there are the more flowing aspects of vocals. Rhythmically they are miles apart, but for some reason it comes together very naturally for me. Over the years it's become more second-nature, but I know this, it's a gift from God.

Speaking about performing live, are there any plans for Time Horizon to get out and play some shows in support of 'Living Water'?

Bruce: We are currently looking for a first gig target day sometime around June and we are really looking forward to it. One thing I have to admit is when we started rehearsals for live performing, I felt like I had to reacquaint myself with the music all over again. We had spent so much time on the production and mixing of the CD that we hadn't had a real band practice for several months. Now it's coming together and I have to say that some of the material sounds even better live. That's just my opinion of course!

I really like the name of the band, where does the phrase Time Horizon come from?

Ralph: The technical definition of "Time Horizon" is the time it takes for an investment to mature, so taking that definition and applying that to our Christian World view, means knowing the fact that we all have a horizon where our time here comes to full maturity. The

"investment" of our time and talents while living on this Earth is to fulfil an eternal purpose.

The album title 'Living Water' refers to a project, Living Water International that aims to help people in India and Third World countries in Central America and Africa by drilling for water. Can you tell us a bit more about this organisation and how did the band become involved with this project?

Ralph: During the time when the band was fragmented so to speak, I had also lost my Job and was trying to make sense of what was happening. The last band I was in, the album never went into production and I asked God to use this one as He saw fit. Later, I attended a Christian conference where I saw the LWI booth and the answer was clear. I realized how even though I may lose my house and however desperate my situation may get, there are those that don't even have the most basic need which I take for granted: access to clean water. I knew then that I have the ability to make a difference and I need to give this music back to him to help others. I shared with Bruce what God had laid on my heart and he also knew in his heart it was what we needed to do, which just confirmed it.

Bruce: I remember the evening Ralph called me and explained what he had experienced at a local men's conference. He asked me if I would be interested in helping him complete the CD. After hearing his vision, it was obvious, God was in it and He wanted us to finish the CD. It came together so fast after we decided to follow His prompting.

I believe that all the proceeds from the first 1000 copies of 'Living Water' will go directly towards the LWI fund?

Ralph: Yes, we are giving 100% of the proceeds from the initial run of 1000 copies to LWI to fund well projects and we would like LWI to receive a percentage on a continual basis from Time Horizon to help fund clean water well projects. They are a great organization with around 80% of the funds going to programs. In addition, Living Water does an outstanding job of tracking all donations and giving a good well completion report. We will be able to see photos of the projects, the name of the village, GPS coordinates of the site we help, and testimonies from the people receiving the water. Also releasing the album on our own label has given us the financial freedom of not being tied to a label, which means we can work closer with Living Water International. That allows us to use all the proceeds from the initial run of CDs for providing fresh water wells.

Lyricaly 'Living Water' is a strong Christian statement. There have been quite a few Christian melodic rock and AOR acts over the years, but until recently less from the more progressive side of things. Why do you think that is?

Bruce: Steven, I really don't know however, I do feel that needs to change. There are some great class 'A' Christian musicians who can shred on their instruments and write incredible music. I don't know why the genre hasn't blossomed more. There are projects like the CPR CD's that are superb compilations and show what kind of talent is out there. I feel we have a message that is one of forgiveness, hope and redemption and we all need to experience that. I believe we are just beginning to see the start of more progressive rock with spiritually based themes at their core.

Ralph: As Bruce says, this is a hard one to answer, but I will give it a shot. Progressive rock in general tends to be closer to Jazz or Classical in its approach with longer compositions and odd time signatures than AOR and also I don't think the church has had much exposure to progressive rock. AOR might be part of a church service because it is simple, sing-along or clap your hands style which I also enjoy, but Prog rock with odd time signatures and such, is not so much that way. We have had a great response from the church so far, it may be because a lot of them grew up listening to Yes, Genesis, Kansas and other prog artists. Many in the church really do enjoy progressive music, but are looking to be supported spiritually by the lyrics as well. I think they just don't realize it is available to them to enjoy. I am hoping that will change. Time Horizon and other Christian prog artists are making a concentrated effort to introduce progressive rock to the church and

introduce Christian themes to the progressive audience. In a sense, I think it is bringing a style of music back to the church. Bach and Beethoven wrote music for the church and Handel's "Messiah" is an amazing work that is closer to Prog rock than the church music of today. I am not knocking modern worship music; I play keys for my local church and find it also the best music for worship, but also enjoy rocking out to prog in my car and listen to many genres as well. I am currently listening to John Elefante's (Mastedon) latest release, Kerry Livgren plays on it as well as other well known artists.

Has someone with the high profile of Neal Morse (ex Spock's Beard) releasing albums with strong Christian flavours made it easier for Christian prog acts to be taken seriously?

Bruce: I would hope so. Neil has great lyrics with a very clear message. It has certainly helped me in my boldness to not be timid regarding what I write about. I can see that he is making inroads into the progressive rock community and that can only help others, like us, which are doing the same.

Ralph: Yes, Neal is an amazing writer and when I first heard the 'Kindness of Strangers' Spock's Beard album, I knew that the genre of Prog was coming back strong! I later learned that God had entered his life and of course I was excited! I mean, I think of the impact he could have because he was already very well respected in the prog community with SB and Transatlantic. But not just Neal, there are so many other gifted and talented bands that are "faith based" like Glass Hammer, Kerry Livgren's ProtoKaw and Iona just to name a few. Some have a



stronger Christian flavour than others, so I say; find one that appeals to you. I know many will be surprised at what jewels they'll find and that are a lot of fun. I think anyone that enjoys well written music should not dismiss a band because of a point of view. There are a lot of artists that have spiritual views that I don't agree with, but I can still recognize and respect their efforts. I see the talent and can enjoy their music CD or I may catch a live performance.

Obviously this aspect of your music is very important to you. Personally as someone who has no strong religious leanings, I have no problem with the lyrical themes, as they fit very well with the uplifting and positive vibe of the music. Do you encounter any negative feedback purely based on the message behind your lyrics?

Ralph: Most of the feedback I have heard has been very good. I have not experienced negative feedback yet, but when it happens, I have to remember it is not about me. I think even though the lyrics is an expression of our faith that someone else may not share, we are just being honest about who we are and through our lyrics, we offer a message of hope and that positive vibe you caught is a reflection of how we are lifted up through our faith. We have so much to be thankful for.

Bruce: On the contrary, we've had several non-believers actually enjoy the music and say how much they have been touched by it. We know it may happen, but we simply proclaim what we believe and keep in mind, that so do all other bands who write their own music. I appreciate bands and their music even if I don't

agree with their philosophy of life. Many bands write very humanistic lyrics in their songs, yet I appreciate them as musicians. I don't subscribe to their world view, however I still enjoy them. I would hope that those who hear our music would hold to a similar attitude. Time will certainly tell.

When I review albums I will often mention the lyrical content they contain and am acutely aware that even in a day and age where hardly any lyrical theme is taboo, that commenting that an album has Christian themes will impact on some people's opinions on whether they would wish to buy it. Do you ever worry that some potential fans of the band, who may really like your songs, could almost automatically dismiss Time Horizon without ever even taking the time to listen to your excellent music?

Ralph: I am not really too worried about it. I realize that some will not give it a chance, but my hope is that there will be something about the music that will appeal to a potential listener. There is a lot in the music and sometimes it takes a few listens for a song to grow on you. You find something new each time you play it and before you know it you're humming along or finding yourself reaching for it again. I think this album has that quality, but listeners may have to give it a chance. I hope to have an even better sounding album next time around and that may bring people around to this one as well.

Would you, as some bands do, ever consider "watering down" the lyrical content to possibly get your music and themes heard by a wider audience?

Ralph: Ah Steven, you ask a very pertinent question. "Watering down" tends to have a negative aspect associated with it. We tend to write our lyrics on our personal experiences and observations and we will approach the next album on a song by song basis.

Bruce: We never know what may influence the lyrics on one of our songs. For example, I recently lost a good friend who died in a tragic scuba diving accident. I may desire to write a song about the impact he made on my life. That is a subject that everyone can certainly relate to.

Ralph: This first album reflects what we wanted to share and what we feel God gave us to share. The next album may have a different approach to lyrics on some songs altogether, but we will sing them with integrity and we will always try to follow the Lord's leading. If watering down lyrics to sell albums is the motive, then we are not being true to ourselves as an artist, then the music has lost something. I guess it depends on what we would be doing it for.

After having to sit on this album for so long what are the plans for Time Horizon and can we expect some new music hot on the heels of 'Living Water'?

Ralph: That is the plan. This release was painfully slow and we are in one accord that the next effort is to be done hot on the heels on this one. We are working on our live performance in support of this and have material ready to start recording... I don't think we will have as much trouble as this first one. We have learned a lot from it.

Bruce: That's right new music is already in the works. We currently have enough material for another CD or very close to it. Our goal is to start the second project sometime in the Fall of this year. We have had some personnel changes since the 'Living Water' CD was recorded and we feel their contribution will make for an even better second CD.

I'd like to thank you both for taking the time to answer the questions. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Ralph: Thank you so much for taking the time to listen and asking some excellent questions Steven. I just want to add, that to me, there is no other genre like progressive rock. The freedom of musical expression and creativity is apparent in progressive bands and artists. I hope the progressive audience continues to grow in the States and abroad, and that Time Horizon will contribute in some way.

Bruce: Thank you Steven and enjoy the CD.