Hi, I'm Sam. Just Sam. It's better than ESC8128.78
past, may be the present, may be the future. It m
thing for sure, it's all real--more real than you kn
They say I take after my father. I'm also a dedic
computer rules the world-grid. It is the central
information--all information. In fact, "info" becam
regulated, trafficked, and monitored through the
the world-grid as we know it. That's why everybody
keep it's "eye" on you. Govtrol knows everything ab
known as the "orphans of the under-grid." See, if y
long enough, you'll eventually erase yourself fro
grid. As far as Govtrol knows, we don't exist. The
parents in what they call the "Last War," the "War
last war, and it certainly didn't liberate us. We
speech, freedom of expression, and especially free
-there's no one out there. If it can't be seen, hear
crunches and printouts and scientifically proven,
I know there's someone out there. And no matter

VERTICAL REALITY

That is the introduction to Eric Champion's new project, *Vertical Reality*. If it sounds like a page out of a science-fiction novel, or a scene out of Terminator, don't be surprised. Besides being a huge sci-fi fan , Champion wanted to create an intriguing premise for a project from the ground up—lyrics, music, and tour production.

When he was preparing for his third album, he began to see a change in himself. He shares, "I realized I was not writing songs just to write songs. I realized the opportunity that I had and God had given me this gift to really speak to young people, to relate to young people though my music, and try to make a difference in their lives. Then it became more than a fun thing to do, I realized there was a mission and a purpose in what I was doing. Then it became my *life*. Everything I thought about was connected with wanting to find out how to really get what God was saying through me across to the young people."

At the same time, his church's youth group was heavily involved in an urban ministry near their Daytona Beach homes. Without specifically using music, they went and simply spent time with urban youth—playing basketball, talking, and just hanging out.

Between personal changes in his songwriting intent and a keen observation of his youth group's work, he became interested in implementing other aspects besides music in his ministry. 'We wanted to take some of those things that we use in our youth ministry outreaches, like drama, and incorporate that into a show," Champion recalls.

Intrigued by the concept of a video wall, Champion pursued the possibility, and the Lord "miraculously made one available." With a crew comprised only of young people from his church, the *Save the World Tour,* with the drama and video wall, was very successful. "The response to the creativity of the show was incredible," he remembers. "It even enhanced the spiritual impact, I guess because it really

ERIC CHAMPION

ISC8128.78. But, welcome to the under-grid. It may be the
ture. It may be another world or it may be your own. One
han you know. Anyway, I'm an inventor--a creator of sorts.
so a dedicated hacker. You see, in this day and age, the
e central source for the transmitting and receiving of
nfo" became such a powerful commodity that it began being
rough the mainframe at "Govtrol," the all-seeing eye of
everybody is a series of letters and numbers; so it can
rything about everybody, except me and my friends. We're
See, if you hack hard enough and mess the numbers around
urself from their memory banks and fall into the under-
exist. They call us orphans because most of us lost our
" the "War of Liberation." Well, it's not going to be the
te us. We lost our freedom: free enterprise, freedom of
ially freedom of religion. Govtrol says there is no God-
seen, heard, felt, tasted, put through a series of number
ly proven, it doesn't exist. Well, I don't believe that.
o matter where it takes me, I'm gonna find Him.

totally rearranges my motives for entertainment and my method of entertainment."

"I don't understand why that's such a big deal to some people. Maybe they're not comfortable in their own Christianity to realize that God is not saying 'God,' God is *living*. How much you say 'Jesus Christ' doesn't determine how close to God you are. Words are totally meaningless. It's what we do and how our life speaks—that's the whole difference between me and a lot of other Christians."

"The video wall and the drama and all those things are entertainment, because I believe entertainment through music and drama is one of the most powerful vehicles in moving people's emotions. You see how movies, theater, and music moves people. So, when you couple that power with the power and the Word of God inside those vehicles and those methods of communication—it's even twice as powerful."

For Champion, motives are very important in it the Christian faith. "I'm not a Christian because I want to go to heaven, or because I feel I have to do something for God to make retribution for some horrible sins that I've done in the past, or because I'm scared to go to hell, or because I want to try to be as good a person as I can, or because my mother was—I love God because I want to. He's been so incredible in my life that I want to repay Him for everything He's done for me. I do it out of my own free will. I'm not bound by tradition or religion or fear or anything. That's why I'm comfortable with entertaining and being a Christian and using my entertainment for God, because, it's my choice to serve God.

He points out that many people have different reasons for being Christians, adding, "Most of them don't even really know who God is. That's really the whole theme of this album—*Vertical Reality*—talking vertically, your vertical relationship, up and down between you and God, and coming into a *real* reality of who God is and knowing God in such a real way that you can touch the face of God. This whole album is a journey through faith in knowing the real God and knowing that He is real."

possibility, and the Lord miraculously made one available." With a crew comprised only of young people from his church, the *Save the World Tour,* with the drama and video wall, was very successful. "The response to the creativity of the show was incredible," he remembers. "It even enhanced the spiritual impact, I guess because it really connected with the young people. It seemed like it related to where kids are today, because all the world is using all those vehicles to relate to kids—that's what they understand, through technology and fast-paced action and through entertainment."

"I was so impacted by what we had done on this tour and how God had used these different things that I wanted to come up with a concept where we could utilize our creativity and drama and technology to really get a message from God across. But, we wanted to start it from the ground up—from the songs on an album project where every aspect of the project would follow this whole message and theme and creative flow. So that's where the idea for *Vertical Reality* came from. The album itself is like the soundtrack to a conceptual show. The show will represent much more of that, but I'm actually writing a book, a science-fiction-type novel. Like a sci-fi, modern-day version of some C.S. Lewis' writings—where it's all scripturally based. We just use these sci-fi elements to get that spiritual theme or point across."

"One of the problems I see in the Church today is that people do not fully understand the reality of God in their lives. We do not apply the Bible literally enough in our lives to find out that it really works. I want to use new means and approaches to make people think about the reality of God."

"I think that *Vertical Reality* could open kids up to the message of Christ because they relate to sci-fi and comic books and fantasy. I'm using those tools to bring them the Gospel. This is uncharted territory, but that just makes it all the more exciting."

Champion pulled elements from science-fiction, as he states, "I'm a fan of all science-fiction. We're trying to combine elements of the future with elements of the past—visually, theme-wise, period-wise, and even in the music. We did that a lot. In addition to lots of very sequenced computer-based music, there's also a lot of live stuff—guitars, drums, and B-3 organs."

TO ENTERTAIN OR NOT TO ENTERTAIN—IS THAT THE QUESTION?

Much of Champion's new tour concept can be seen as purely entertainment. The concept of Christian entertainers is not new nor without debate. Many opinions surround this seemingly tough tightrope and often with musicians take shots from various sides. For Champion, the criticism of his entertainment style has been minimal.

"I think people are beginning to realize that religion does not work," he starts. "The world doesn't have time for stuff that doesn't work. Religion does not represent a god that is real or relative to the day. Young people, especially, don't have time for hypocrisy and lies. They realize that we've got to have a real and true representation of God. And the method is not something to get hung up on. It's the message that we know is the answer and we have to present it in a way that presents God as alive, full of life—an exciting God."

"I have gotten some criticism. I will probably get a lot of criticism in the Christian industry for this next statement, but I am an entertainer. I love to entertain; I've been entertaining since I was a kid. Just like a mechanic is a mechanic and it's his job and what he loves to do. I'm an entertainer. And the fact that I'm a Christian

vertically, your vertical relationship, up and down between you and God, and coming into a *real* reality of who God is and knowing God in such a real way that you can touch the face of God. This whole album is a journey through faith in knowing the real God and knowing that He is real."

He concludes, "The closest thing we can relate with the Bible is fiction or fantasy or sci-fi. It relates Jesus walking on water with people on Star Trek [beaming up.] It's that same type of thing—it seems impossible—but it's real. Everything that the Word of God says was true and is true. There are experiences and dimensions that exist that God wants to pursue Him and find Him that we don't even, because of our lack of faith, it disables us from knowing the real God and who He is. I know I sound far-out and spooky, but I believe all this stuff."

A SUPPORTIVE FAMILY

Growing up in a strong Christian home is something Champion is very thankful for. "It was my mom and dad that really kept me from going out into the world and having to build one of those testimonies that really seem to move people."

He continues as he beams, "My mom and dad are incredible Christians. They were such good Christians because they trained me to know the difference between God and religion. In addition to being a Christian, we were raised, very closely in the Church."

Taught to sing at the early age of 3, he later traveled with his parents and younger sister, Caprill, across the country, singing in churches—both a blessing and a bit disillusioning at the same time. "We saw all the good and all the bad," he admits. "I saw the hypocrisy and all the things that causes a lot of young people raised in that, turn against it because they see no reality of it working in people's lives. They just see a form of godliness. Fortunately, because of my wonderful Christian parents who trained me to know the difference between God and just squirrely Christian religious people, I never rebelled against God."

He may not have rebelled against God, but he did experience disillusionment with some churches, a point he is quick to clarify—citing the difference between God's Church and our personal churches. "I'm not wanting to disconnect myself from the Church at all," he continues. "I realize that that's going to be the only vehicle for God to really reach this world in an efficient way. Sometimes when I say church, I mean the religious church, not the Church of Christ. I did rebel against religion and I'm still in that rebellious attitude, just like Jesus was. That was his whole enemy—religion. Just because they are into forms of godliness but denying the power. This generation and me, I don't have time for that. I want to know every bit of power God's got. I believe it all and I want to see it work."

His father has been a pastor for 11 years at the church he started in Daytona Beach—the church whose youth group is so intimately tied to Champion's musical ministry. Eric laughs, "Growing up, I could never picture my dad as a