



Ken Vasoli: Vocals, Bass Tom Gryskiewicz: Drums
Matt Watts: Guitar Mike Golla: Guitar

On The Starting Line's aptly titled debut, *Say It Like You Mean It*, the Pennsylvania-based quartet began where the best bands leave off—with a fully realized sound all its own. In less than a year from its release, *Say It Like You Mean It* is approaching 200,000 units sold. Quite an accomplishment in itself, made all the more remarkable by the band member's young ages and that they did so at a time when the chart tops and airwaves are overridden with grown men trying to pose as kids by wearing shorts and backwards baseball caps.

Even the band's formation seems unusual to those not in Gen-Y -- the band started via email... Subject header: "Jamming And Shit."

Message: "My name is Matt. I live about 20 minutes from you. I checked out your AOL profile. You like a lot of cool bands. I was wondering if you knew anyone who would be interested in singing for my band."

"I was like, 'What the fuck is this?'" recalls singer-bassist Ken Vasoli, the email recipient. Fortunately, he hit "reply" instead of "delete." Soon after, he was rehearsing and hanging out with his future bandmates. The chemistry between the four musicians was instantly apparent, even if the goal at the time was simple.

"We just wanted to have fun, and rock out with friends," says Matt of the band's original vision. But like many relationships sparked in the anonymity of cyberspace, things were not what they initially appeared to be.

"Ken lied about his age when he first started hanging out with us," Matt reveals with a laugh. "He said, 'I'm like 15.' And we thought, 'That's cool. He'll be driving soon.' But we didn't catch on to the 'like' part; he was actually 14."

Not a problem--unless your dream label happens to phone wanting to sign you and send you out on the road with a few of your favorite bands. By 2000, The Starting Line had caught a small indie label's interest through touring and grass-roots internet marketing. Recognizing the band's immense potential, that indie label passed along the band's demos to Drive-Thru's brother and sister team Richard and Stefanie Reines.

"They called me at work and told me they wanted to sign us," recalls Mike. "We all freaked out." (1)

"That was the biggest excitement I've ever had in my life," says Ken. "I heard the news and I did not believe it; I thought it was a joke. I was smiling for weeks after that."

Living up to its name, The Starting Line was moving fast, and the band's members had to accelerate along with it. For one, Ken was still in high school, while Matt was working his way through college.

Fortunately, Ken had understanding parents--they understood he needed to finish his education before hitting the road. With the help of a hip guidance counselor, the singer doubled up on classes to graduate early. The downtime also gave Matt time to finish his degree.

"I didn't leave the house, and just did school work," Ken recalls. "But it was only for a semester and a couple summer classes."

Free to focus exclusively on music for the first time in its career, the band experienced a growth spurt. The results are apparent on *Say It Like You Mean It*. Songs like "Up & Go," "Given The Chance," and "Saddest Girl Story" highlight the band's dual guitar interplay, with Matt generally providing the "weird" crunching chords and Mike handling the buzzing melodic runs. "Almost There, Going Nowhere," "A Goodnight's Sleep," and "Cheek to Cheek" showcase Tom's inventive drum thwacking. Then there's the first single, "Best Of Me," which will go for adds at Modern Rock radio in late July 2003. And throughout, Ken's confessional lyrics and arching melodies details the pain of separation- - whether that uncoupling is for better or worse.

Lingering good-byes and songs of loneliness are the inevitable by-product of the band's non-stop touring schedule, which has included extended stints with Drive-Thru labelmates New Found Glory and Finch, shows with Sum 41, Taking Back Sunday and Good Charlotte, a jaunt through Europe, as well as a mainstage headliner on this summer's Warped Tour, and the headlining slot on this Fall's Drive-Thru Records tour. (2)

Not surprisingly, the full itinerary has turned an already dynamic live show into a display of breathlessness. Straps break during heroic leaps. Skin shreds on strings and sticks and post-show bruises appear in unlikely places. That commitment to putting the music across has established a strong bond with fans.

"As soon as I saw kids singing along to our songs, I said, 'I want to do this forever,'" says Matt, who first experienced the sensation in the band's second home, New Jersey.

Drive-Thru's Stefanie recalls the point at which Ken first vocalized that feeling. While on the road with New Found Glory--one of his early favorite groups, whose members have since become his friends – Ken suddenly realized how far The Starting Line has traveled in the past three years.

"Wow," he said, shaking his head and thinking out loud backstage. "I'm supposed to be a senior in high school."

Then he hit the stage and kick-started the dream all over again.

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