

Phil Wickham to lead worship at The Vine Jan. 28

By Tonia Johnson | tjohnson@secc.org

If critical acclaim means anything, Phil Wickham has a bright future in contemporary Christian music. Wickham's self-titled April 2006 debut for Simple Records has won praise from critics for its poeticism and a lyrical depth they say showcases wisdom far beyond his 22 years.

Regular attendees of The Vine already have heard Wickham's music, as selections including *Messiah* and *Shining* have been sung during worship. But they'll get a chance this month to know the artist a little better.

Wickham is slated to lead worship at The Vine Jan. 28, fresh off a nationwide tour with MercyMe and Audio Adrenaline.

Wickham joins a number of Christian artists who led worship at The Vine, including The David Crowder Band and Chris Tomlin. Vine leaders have sought visits from such artists "because their ministries have impacted ours," Vine Worship Leader Daniel Dabney said.

The same goes for Wickham, whose songs Dabney said seem to already have touched The Vine's audience, despite Wickham's relative newness on the Christian music scene.

"There was some whoopin' and hollerin' when we announced his name," Dabney said.

Wickham said his goal is to make music that inspires listeners to go deeper with the Lord, which is a concept he learned early in life.

He is the son of John and Lisa Wickham, veterans of the "Jesus Movement" bands of the 1970s, including *The Way* and *Parable*. It seems Wickham almost was assured of two things—that he would be musically inclined and reared in a Christian home.

Recalling the "little bubble life" of his adolescence, Wickham said talking to God and sensing His presence came naturally. But at 12, a move away from his home church and friends shook up his world.



COURTESY OF PHIL WICKHAM
Christian singer/songwriter Phil Wickham says his goal is to make music that inspires its listeners to go deeper with Christ.

"That move just clicked in me that I'm not always going to ride in the back seat of my parents' car to church every week," he said.

Wickham knew he needed to take the wheel. So for the first time he picked up his Bible and a guitar.

Learning chords from his dad, Wickham started writing songs about his blooming faith while in junior high school. He became so adept, his youth pastor asked Wickham to help lead worship just a few months later.

Despite his youth, shyness and the fact that he knew practically no one in his new church, Wickham now can see God's hand in those early days of leading worship.

"I think the Lord really used that to spur on the rest of the 75-kid youth group to really start doing stuff for the Lord," he said.

Encouraged by his dad, Wickham recorded his first independent CD, *Give You My World*, in his late teens, and it was met with a great response. Although Wickham said it had no formal marketing, *Give You My World* found its way around the country—and that includes selections sung at The Vine.

"I have no idea how they got it," Wickham said.

In attempts to describe Wickham's music, writers have made comparisons to the British band Coldplay, singer/songwriter Rufus Wainwright and Queen frontman Freddie Mercury.

Wickham laughed, adding, "I like Coldplay. I like Freddie Mercury, so that's a compliment." In truth, Wickham said, his sound probably is that broad. He said he's influenced by artists who are honest, bare their hearts and take a fresh approach to song writing—and that covers a multitude of genres.

That comes across in Wickham's songs, according to Dabney, who called Wickham's music fresh, with honest lyrics and a vulnerable sound.

"It's almost like reading a psalm in which David is pouring his heart out," Dabney said.

Vine leaders hope to build a relationship with Wickham as they have with The David Crowder Band and Tomlin, College Minister Steve Kohlman said. And they hope that leads to a larger mission of creating a more tightly knit community at The Vine, built on what's going on during the week in small groups, including Real Life and Awake.

Kohlman said he hopes this year's lineup at The Vine will help connect people who often attend the service but leave immediately afterward.

If you go:

» **What** | Phil Wickham

» **Where** | The Vine

» **When** | Jan. 28, 6 p.m.

» **Info.** | There are no tickets and seating is on a first come basis. Phil Wickham will sign autographs directly after the service at Café 920. For more information, visit The Vine's website. For more information on Phil Wickham, visit www.philwickham.com.