

Chynna Phillips and Vaughan Penn: Proclaiming Hope in Jesus

Chynna Phillips and Vaughan Penn each have achieved  extraordinary success in the mainstream music arena. Now they are collaborating as the duo Chynna & Vaughan and using their talents to glorify God.

Phillips, the daughter of John and Michelle Phillips of the '60s hit group The Mamas and the Papas, earned international recognition as a member of music trio Wilson Phillips. The group released the popular hits "Hold On," "Release Me," "You're in Love" and others. Penn is a singer and songwriter whose music has been featured in more than 100 films and television programs such as *Grey's Anatomy*, *Criminal Minds*, *Numb3rs*, *Boston Public*, *The Hills* and *Laguna Beach*.

Despite their successful careers, Phillips and Vaughan did not experience true joy, peace and fulfillment until they dedicated their lives and talents to God. Now as Chynna & Vaughan, they desire to share the hope of Christ to those who are hurting.

Each woman had an experience with God as a young teen. Phillips was attending a Baptist school when a group of girls decided she needed to get saved. Phillips agreed just to appease them; she didn't expect anything to happen. But she says as soon as she started repeating the words to the salvation prayer she felt this "energy."

"Obviously, now I know it was the Holy Spirit," she says. "But I had no idea what this was entering my body at the time. It just overcame me and I just felt so cleansed, and I felt uplifted, and I felt hopeful, and I felt like all my depression and my anger and my sadness and all the things that

this young girl had been carrying around for so long were lifted in a moment. ... I knew it was God. I knew in that moment that I had experienced God. It was undeniable.”

Vaughan was raised in a small town in North Carolina. Her family attended a Presbyterian church, but she says her church didn’t talk about being born again or having a personal relationship with Jesus. She says she knew Jesus was the Savior, but she didn’t know what that meant.

When she was 14, some missionaries came to her church. Vaughan says she could see a difference in them. “They had this light about them. They had this joy about them. They were very, very filled with the Holy Spirit.”

The missionaries sensed that they needed to talk to the congregation about being born again and had a service that day. “I had my conversion moment. The Holy Spirit came into my heart, and it was God, and I knew it,” Vaughan says. “I didn’t really know how to keep developing that, but I knew that I had accepted Jesus and I knew I was different at that point.”

In college, Penn joined a singing group and experienced a new level with God. The group prayed together, read and studied the Bible together— things Penn had never done before. “We went back to the poorest of all churches and stayed with the poorest of families that we could find, just to be with them, spend the night with them, love on them, bond with them, share joy. And it was a really important time in my life where I really, really, really began to walk really close with Jesus during that time.”

But both Phillips and Penn took detours along the way. Phillips says she got involved with the wrong crowd and started making wrong choices.

Vaughan says she got confused “not about Jesus but what does it mean to have a Christian life, to walk a Christian path.” She says she isolated herself and got off track a bit. But God

had His hand on them and restored them to the plan He had for them.

When Phillips was 19, she turned away from a harmful lifestyle. She started modeling and eventually reconnected with Carnie and Wendy Wilson and they formed Wilson Phillips. In 1991 she met Billy Baldwin, and they were married in 1995. She became a mom and took a break from music for a while. But six years ago, she sensed that something was still missing.

One night, she says, she was on top of a mountain in a beautiful house, and it was snowing. She was praying. She had all the trappings: money, the house, kids. Her husband was an actor; she had a career in singing. "There was nothing to complain about, but I was just feeling empty; I was just feeling an emptiness. I thought: You know what, I know there's more. I know there's more because I experienced more."

Phillips cried out to God. "I got on my knees and I said, 'OK, whoever You are, wherever You are, I need You to reveal Yourself to me because I'm ready to commit my entire life to serving You.'"

A week later, her brother- and sister-in-law Stephen and Kennya Baldwin and several others were in Phillips' house praying for a niece who was going through a difficult time, making some bad choices. While the group was praying Kennya suddenly told Phillips: "The Holy Spirit is telling me that I need to pray over you Chynna. Would that be OK?"

Because of what had happened to her in seventh grade, Phillips was bracing herself for an experience; she knew that "when Jesus gets involved major things happen." As soon as Kennya Baldwin laid her hands on Phillips, the floodgates opened.

"I just cried my eyes out. I started to shake a little bit and I knew I was home. I was like: 'OK Jesus, You have confirmed. That's it. I am home. You are God. I will never worship or adore any other God. You are the God; there is no other God.'"

Penn also had another life-changing encounter with Christ. About four years ago she was admitted to the hospital with a life-threatening condition. The doctors told her surgery was the only option. But Penn knew God had told her not to have the surgery. He was going to heal her. "This was a very, very definite tell them no" to surgery, she says.

A Christian mentor and friend believed Penn was being led by God. The friend visited and read from the Bible every day. She prayed with Penn, and she brought in some music. "I had never heard this kind of music. ... She told me about a band called Casting Crown. I had never heard Casting Crown before. And she put on a song ... 'Who Am I.'

"Right before I heard the song I was filled with fear. I was afraid. I really thought I was going to die. I was telling God: 'I know it's Your timing Lord, but I don't feel like I've done enough here on the planet for You. I don't feel like I've lived my purpose-driven life. Please don't let me die. Please let me stay and do some things for You.'"

When Penn heard the song from Casting Crowns, her fears melted away. "The Holy Spirit jumped off the music into me. It lifted my spirits and told me everything was going to be all right. God grabbed me, and He also grabbed my fever and started bringing it down."

She had another medical device inserted to try to get rid of the sickness without surgery. The medical staff didn't think it would work. But Penn had faith. She believed God would heal her.

She checked out of the hospital, went to the beach to a minister who laid hands on her. And she listened to as much contemporary Christian music as she could. "I couldn't get enough, I couldn't get enough. And I was like: 'Lord, I love writing songs. I love using my gifts for Your glory. And when I get well, I just want to do music like this, to praise You

and help others to find hope and healing like I've found.'"

Phillips felt the same way. She knew that God wanted her to write music for Him and sing for Him. But when she started making phone calls and connecting with writers, they weren't too keen on the idea of her being so bold with her declaration for Jesus. They would tell her, "Well, you don't need to say 'Jesus.'"

Phillips would exclaim: "No, no, no! I do! I need to say 'Jesus'!"

But they would argue that people don't want to hear about Him. She would reiterate her conviction. "Listen, I want to talk about Jesus because this is who saved my life and this is who I'm living for now. So I need to be able to say 'Jesus.' If you don't want to say 'Jesus,' this isn't going to work out."

She says half the writers walked out. This experience disappointed and discouraged her. But the Lord told her: "You're pushing it. You're pushing it. I have a plan. Don't worry. It's going to happen when it's time. And it's not on your time."

Eventually, God brought the two women together through Phillips' stepfather, who is a filmmaker. He met Penn when he was looking for some new music for one of his movies. He knew she was a Christian and told Phillips about her.

Phillips was hesitant to make the call but eventually did after listening to Penn's music. They met in Los Angeles and the next day wrote half the record, though they thought it would be Phillips' solo record.

But God had other plans. And He used Billy Baldwin to help his wife recognize the new direction for her musical career. Phillips says that Billy loved what they were writing, but one night, he was just restless in bed, tossing and turning. She convinced him to share what was on his mind. He said, "I just

feel like this whole Chynna and Vaughan thing is way bigger and more important than this Chynna Phillips thing.”

Phillips prayed, and by morning she knew he was right. Chynna & Vaughan formed, and the pair today wants to share the hope they have in Jesus with others, and especially want to help women.

On a particularly busy day, Phillips was running errands and thinking of all she had to do. She called Penn and said: “Please don’t ever let me put my schedule and my life ahead of my relationship with God because that is what I’m doing today. I haven’t had any time in the Word, I haven’t prayed.”

“I had lost my center,” she says. “I thought, Who can’t identify with that. And Vaughan said, ‘That’s what we’re going to write about.’”

This experience inspired the song “One Reason” Phillips says women can easily lose sight of their relationship with God because of the demands of life. “But if we don’t take the time to nurture our own relationship with God, then all the cards, the house of cards, falls. So I want to be able to help moms prioritize and put Jesus first, before their husbands, before their kids. Jesus first—because He’s got to be the one running the household.”

The duo wants to minister to those who are hurting. Penn says, “Sometimes it’s a painful place to be even when you are a Christian—the judgments of others, the condemning of others. And it’s not about that; it’s about loving each other; it’s about loving the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and soul and loving your neighbor as yourself and not judging. And so for me it’s about getting out there. ... And it’s not about me; it’s about the Lord and having the confidence in God to do this work. And as soon as I really embraced that, and after I was sick and got healed, then I had the strength to do this the right way.”

Click [here](#) to purchase Chynna & Vaughan's new CD, *One Reason*.

Editor's note: Chynna Phillips and Vaughan Penn also have a heart to help others. Phillips supports Los Angelitos, an orphanage in Tijuana, Mexico. Penn supports the regional ministry Loaves and Fishes in Raleigh, N.C. To learn more about these groups visit [and](#) .