

## Trio Plus — Going It Alone

**I**T'S HARD TO BELIEVE THAT ANYONE WITH, OR WITHOUT, TALENT WOULD SHUN THE BRIGHT LIGHTS OF FAME IN FAVOR OF A MORE LOW KEY, BUT BUSY LIFE. However, Memphis group Trio Plus is proving that they can have a fulfilling career in the entertainment industry without the assistance of big recording contracts, record company executives, publicists, paparazzi and gossip columnists.

Van Ford, vocalist and pianist for Trio Plus, says they don't believe they're missing out on anything by choosing to perform, tour and record on their own terms.

"We weren't trying to get on a national scale because we enjoy doing what we do here," Ford said, "We could have left a long time ago."

Trio Plus started out 25 years ago as Moment's Notice — crashing house parties

and performing for fun, Ford says. Ford, drummer Randy Jones and saxophonist Jerry Smith met through their respective churches that fellowshiped together and as members of the gospel group O'Landa Draper and the Associates.

The original 6 members of Moment's Notice finally had a meeting to decide the future of the group. While half the members wanted to continue playing for fun, the other half, that included Ford, Jones and Smith, had other ideas.

"We figured if we were going to do this, we may as well get paid for it," Ford said.

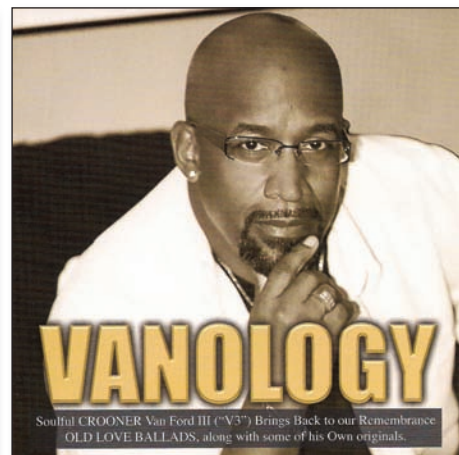
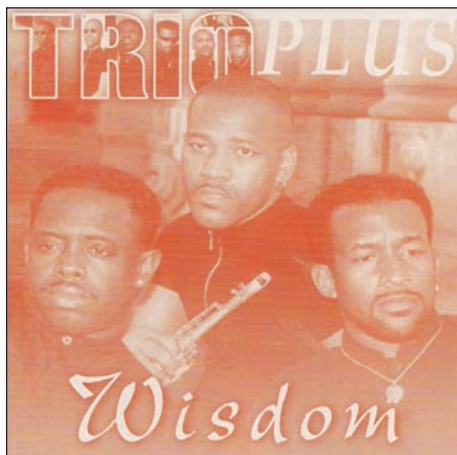
Trio Plus was born meaning not only did you get 3 musicians, you also got a plus with 3 vocalists, Ford says. They started with Ford, Jones and Smith, but ultimately took

on 2 more members with bass player Phillip Coleman and later on, their youngest member, Kyle Bolden on lead guitar.

Many of the members of Trio Plus have honed their skills as musicians in their churches, communities, high schools and college. Ford studied jazz piano, vocal techniques and electronic recording at The University of Memphis and Southwest Tennessee Community College. Smith studied Commercial Music at The University of Memphis. Bolden received a full music scholarship from The University of Memphis and Coleman attended Southwest University in Kenner, La.

In the years since Trio Plus began, they've performed in venues across the country and opened for many local, regional and national recording artists such as Angela Bofill, Phil





Perry, Pieces of a Dream and After Seven.

The group, whose sound varies from jazz, blues, R & B, gospel, old school, Motown and even country, have also performed for many prominent companies in the tri-state areas and beyond. They're hardly a struggling garage band. In fact, Ford says they aren't missing out on any money by not pursuing a recording contract with a major label.

"Financially, it would be the same," Ford says, "If we had a recording contract, there would be restrictions on when and where we can perform."

With the freedom to perform and record as they wish, Trio Plus members have performed individually when called upon and have recently ventured into their own solo projects.

"All of us have decided to do our own thing," Ford said.

Bolden, who can be heard on the Oscar-winning song "Hard Out Here for a Pimp" from the motion picture soundtrack *Hustle & Flow*, left the group 3 years ago to tour with Stevie Wonder. He had only been with the group for 10 years prior to that.

Ford, who has performed with the likes of Glenn Jones, Tony Terry and Howard Hewitt, will be releasing his own solo project, *Vanology*, this year. Ford says *Vanology* is a combination of love ballads that include 7 original songs and 8 classics. Ford says that Smith and Jones are also working on their own solo projects. Smith has previously released his own solo albums – *Jerry's Love* and *Inside Out*.

After 25 years and a lot of history, Trio Plus shows no signs of slowing down. They've always given each other the freedom to pursue their own dreams while still maintaining the group. With a full schedule of solo projects and group gigs, Trio Plus has more than proven that you can have a fulfilling music career, and earn the respect of your musical peers, just beneath the spotlight. **G**

