

-Feature- Promoting the ministry and producing the music

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Staff Writer

Over the decades, the world has witnessed the rise of new and different forms of music.

The categories of jazz, country and rock 'n' roll have evolved so that now smaller subdivisions of these music varieties exist. The list keeps growing. Take rock 'n' roll, for example. This

industry includes mild and hard rock, new wave, pop and, within the past decade, another addition.

More and more Americans are listening to and liking Christian rock or Christian contemporary music, according to Jim McGuire, assistant station manager of WRTP, a Christian radio station in Durham (1530 AM).

"In the past 10 years, the contemporary Christian music scene has exploded," says Mc Guire. The output of Christian music is "probably at an all time high," he adds.

And with this new addition comes a new breed of musicians — Christian rockers — with their successes and their problems.

Take Eddy Crabtree, a musician from Durham, for example.

Crabtree, who has written and performed locally, began his interest in Christian rock seven years ago. "I found out about it (Christian rock) in 1979 because I wanted to find something more uplifting," Crabtree says. "I've always liked to sing, and a couple of friends encouraged me. I dove head-first into it."

What's it like to be an up-and-coming Christian artist? For Crabtree, a local musician hoping to make it to the top, the future offers the trials of any would-be star, actor or musician. "I'm still writing songs and DJ-ing and waiting for the chance to do something else," he said. "I guess some people do it for a living; but it doesn't seem like work at all to me because it's so much fun."

Crabtree, a disc jockey at WRTP, says he has received much support for his music from the Fellowship of Contemporary Christian Ministries (FCCM), a grass roots group that tries to promote ministry. "It's for non-traditional forms of ministry such as dance, visual art, etc." Crabtree says. "The function is to be a support group for people who aren't supported on the local level. Our goal is to try to work together rather than outsmart the other guy."

The FCCM has also helped Crabtree get local concerts. Recently, he opened for a local Christian rock band called Hizzon (pronounced "his own") in Durham.

"Right now," Crabtree says, "I'm chief critic and sometimes opening act for Hizzon."

As far as describing his own music, Crabtree says the term "pop" is too vague. "I'm really influenced by new wave, but I wouldn't categorize my music as new wave." Crabtree says his music is not really hard rock either because, as a solo artist, it is difficult to produce the hard rock sound without several accompanying musicians and various instruments.

"My music sounds kind of like Foreigner - the same synthesizer rock

sound. It's light, but it's not bubblegummy. A cross between Christopher Cross and Steve Windwood is the style I go for," he says.

Crabtree is optimistic about his future in the Christian rock industry. "You've got a smaller market in Christian music so it seems easier for people to attain relative fame," he said. "Because it is a Christian audience, you don't have quite as hard of a time; they're coming from the same point (of view) you are."

Crabtree says Christian contemporary music is on the rise. "It's much more accepted now than even in 1979, when I first started," he said. "We have rap now and heavy metal."

Both Logos bookstore and The Sign of the Fish Christian bookstore in Chapel Hill have noticed an increase in the demand for the tapes by contemporary Christian musicians they carry.

And, according to a sales clerk at the Sign of the Fish, more Christian rock bands have sprung up, and with them has evolved a larger interest from younger crowds.

What kind of audience listens to Christian contemporary music? McGuire says results of a recent national survey show that women over age 30 who are college graduates support the industry the most.

Michelle Pruett is in public relations for Reunion Records in Nashville, Tennessee, the agency that manages Christian rocker Michael W. Smith. She has noticed a large response to Christian contemporary music from high school and college age groups in general as well as from women in their 30s. Pruett has been especially excited that the teenage male audience has been receptive to Smith's latest album, The Big Picture. "The 16-and-under male age group is the hardest to reach," Pruett says.

The rise in popularity of Christian contemporary music has made the field more competitive in the last few years, according to Pruett. "It's a saturated market," she says.

As more and more Christian musicians appear, they will offer the general public a broader choice of music, Pruett says.

"For example, sonically, Michael W. Smith sounds rock 'n' roll; but lyrically, his music is a message of hope and he is playing the music for a young audience to give them

alternatives."

Getting started in the Christian rock industry, according to up-and-coming rockers and their agents, is just like beginning in any other musical category. "The best thing to do is get a song published first," Pruett says. "Get your music on a demo. Then a publishing company can send it to a record company. It gives you some credibility."

McGuire says an artist can start singing on a street corner if he or she wants to — it all depends on the person's goal. "The same kind of rules apply (to Christian music) as apply in the secular music industry," he says. "You look for the chance to expose the public to your music."

The response to WRTP, which gives Christian artists airplay, has been positive, McGuire says. WRTP, which switched from country to Christian music in April of 1986, is the only contemporary Christian music station in the Durham and Chapel Hill area, he said. WRTP conducted listener polls and received a large response from what McGuire says is a broad section of the community. The station tries to program music according to people's needs and likes to pay some tribute to minority tastes. "But we can't be everything to everybody," he says.

"We tend to be in the middle — what is called M.O.R. — in this industry — middle of the road; nothing too fast or too loud or too sleepy. It seems to satisfy people the most."

WRTP also tries to promote local artists. The station is starting a daily feature in which it spotlights the music of one local musician for 10 to 15 minutes. Artists drop a tape of their music by the WRTP studio and, while the station does not promise air coverage, it may offer the exposure many musicians seek.

According to Pruett, Mc Guire and Crabtree, there is no particular denomination from which Christian rockers seem to come. "Actually," said Crabtree, "a lot of them seem to be non-denominational."

"Our artists cover the gamut. Each artist has their own audience," Pruett says.

Amid the growing popularity of Christian contemporary music, various religious institutions have given the music negative feedback. "Jimmy Swaggert thinks all contemporary music is wrong, and he thinks most people in Christian contemporary music are into it for the money," Crabtree says. "But we support them whether they support us or not."

Pruett talks of some of the same issues. "It's a difficult time for Christian music. The Church is taking a different approach and isn't sure where to stand," she says. "We get mixed reactions, but the letters we get from kids are all positive."

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A number of special intramural events dot the calendar in the coming weeks. One of particular importance is April 1, when Carolina will face N.C. State Duke and Wake Forest in the 41st Annual Big Four, an extramural competition featuring 11 sports. This year, Carolina will travel to Duke, trying to win for the first time since 1980.

On the home front, a number of tournaments are approaching and their deadlines come even quicker.

FENCING TOURNAMENT, scheduled for Tuesday, March 31, features foil competition. Held in Fetzer Gym, the meet will begin in the early afternoon. Entries are due tomorrow.

It's spring and that means tennis. For all racquet aficionados, the **WEEKEND TENNIS TOURNAMENT** will begin Friday, April 3. Entries are due March 31.

There's also action on the links: **THE TEAM GOLF TOURNAMENT**. Entries are due April 3 for this two-day tournament, April 7 and 8.

And tonight at Bowman Gray Pool, you are invited to watch the intramural **SWIM MEET '87**, the annual swimming and diving meet featuring your friends and neighbors. The meet begins at 6 p.m.

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