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JARS OF CLAY
PHOTO COURTESY OF ESSENTIAL

Christian rock music is sweeping the nation, garnering sales and touching lives. But the trend is complex. Despite its popularity, the holy genre has come under fire from some groups.

REDEMPTION *song*

BACKSTAGE PA



SWITCHFOOT

PHOTO COURTESY OF MASS CONCERTS

Riding the wave of Christian-themed introspective rock, Switchfoot has cashed in on hits such as "Dare You To Move," which won the band top spots on secular and religious charts alike. More than 40 of the band's songs have been used for national television shows, including five on "Dawson's Creek."

BY JIM WALSH

ASSISTANT ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

The schedule goes something like this: Pitch the tent. Rock out. Worship. Repeat.

Across the country — on the barren plateaus of the Gorge Amphitheater in George, Wash., and between the roller coasters at Six Flags Over Georgia, in the countryside of Illinois and the fairgrounds of western New York — throngs are forming.

Thousands of young adults, primarily but not exclusively found in the 12-to-29 demographic, are packing their bags for days-long concerts, under the banner of Christian rock.

The names of the festivals tell the story — Creation Festival, Cornerstone, Kingdom Bound.

They are part of a new wave in music-as-lifestyle, one that traces its roots to the days of Woodstock and the politics of youth. They are a revival more than a revolution, and they are pushing into the mainstream a genre once relegated to the outer echelons of a pious fan base.

Major labels are taking notice, and exclusively Christian production companies are jumping at the chance to sign the next big thing.

Meanwhile, a small but vocal contingent decries the popularity of Christian rock, saying its contemporary style detracts from God's word. And accusations abound that the message gets diluted by merchandising.

But that's not what matters to the faithful standing in those fields. For them, Christian rock is an experience to last a lifetime.

"I think people who come to the festival typically are supportive of the music," said Bill Darpino, administrator of the nonprofit Creation Festival, which organizes two of the biggest Christian rock events in the United States.

This summer, Darpino is overseeing Creation East in Mt. Union, Pa., and Creation West in George, Wash. Together, the three-day festivals draw tens of thousands of Christian rock enthusiasts.

Tickets for these shows range in price from free for children under 5 to \$100 for adults at the gates.

The cost is on par with that of other three-day festivals — tickets for the secular Bonnaroo concert in Tennessee can cost as much as \$170.

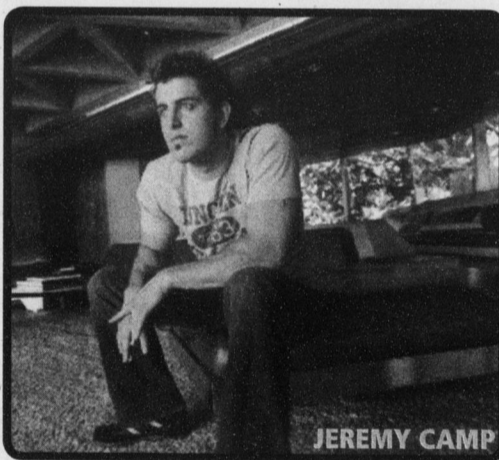
And people are willing to pay. Since 1998, its first year on both coasts, Creation Festival has solidified its place as the mammoth event on the Christian rock scene.

It's not unlike similar festivals in New York and Illinois, which entice concertgoers with multiple events including bike shows and dance clubs, speakers and prayer tents.

At New York's Kingdom Bound festival, now in its 19th year, fans can attend teaching sessions four times a day and visit four separate stages. The festival is put on by nonprofit group Kingdom Bound Ministries.

Commuter tickets, for adults who opt not to camp at the four-day event, which is held at Six Flags Darien Lake theme park, range in price from \$75 to \$95.

SEE REDEMPTION, PAGE 8



JEREMY CAMP

PHOTO COURTESY OF JEREMY CAMP



P.O.D.

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CREATION EAST

concert facts:
when: June 29 to July 2
where: Mt. Union, Pa.

additional information
Creation East is the Atlantic leg of Creation Festival, one of the biggest Christian rock programs in the country. It features various speakers and events.

CORNERSTONE

concert facts:
when: June 30 to July 3
where: Bushnell, Ill.

additional information
Cornerstone festival is one of the many works of Jesus People USA, a Christian community based in Chicago that also manages a home for senior citizens.

KINGDOM BOUND

concert facts:
when: July 31 to Aug. 3
where: Buffalo, N.Y.

additional information
Kingdom Bound, like Atlanta Fest in Georgia, is held at a Six Flags theme park. At Six Flags Darien Lake, fans can enjoy both rides and music.