

industry:

*God gave rock and roll to you
gave rock and roll to you
put it in the soul of every one
you can let the music take you
but where will you be
when the music's gone?*

These two groups are almost mainstream compared to the albums tucked away in the corners of obscure heavy metal record stores and Christian paraphernalia shops. A lengthy metal rant by Stronghold deals with the evils of modern society calling it "sodom in the world today." Homophobia with a heavy metal beat.

U2, The Alarm, Cliff Richards and Donna Summer are all Christian musicians working with major labels.

If you're not ready for that, you may not be ready for bands which consider their "ministry co-ordinator" a band member, or list two dates of birth on their songbook biographies—physical date of birth and date they were born again.

The "Christian big beat," as one deejay describes it, is riding the crest of the Born Again religious movement which has swept North America since the mid-seventies. The movement is centered around a revelatory conversion experience and strong emphasis on Bible study. Born-again adherents exist mainly outside organized religions, simply calling themselves "Christians."

One fundamental belief seems to be that all people who haven't been "born-again" are hell-bound, regardless of their actions in life. That kind of raises the stakes in the evangelical sweepstakes.

When existing rockers discovered this charismatic movement, many decided to use rock and roll as a means for spreading their new-found faith, rather than giving up their beat for Bibles. As Joey Taylor, keyboardist in the group Undercover, told WORD magazine, "Punk and New Wave were just getting started at the time (of our conversion) and we saw right away that this was the tool that God had given us. We got a clear calling to minister to people in that subculture."

"The Lord just said 'Go get 'em,'" said Taylor.

These bands know what traditional evangelists had ignored for years—there is a genuine generation gap in the selling of kids on Christ. The evangelists demanded that the kids change. They didn't. It doesn't take a born-again marketing genius to see why young people weren't excited about the music their religious friends or parents pushed on them. Without even considering the lyrical content, it was dull. B-O-R-I-N-G. And they weren't about to change their musical tastes for something as trivial as being saved from the fires of eternal damnation. So something had to give.

As a result, Christian Rock Bands with names like Stronghold, Bond Servant, Petra, and the Rez Band (Resurrection Band) are filling the airwaves and Christian bookstore record stands across the country—and emptying the stands in a hurry. Their records are by far the hottest selling items in Christian stores in Halifax and other cities and regularly achieve "gold" record sales in the U.S.

The resulting merger of rock culture

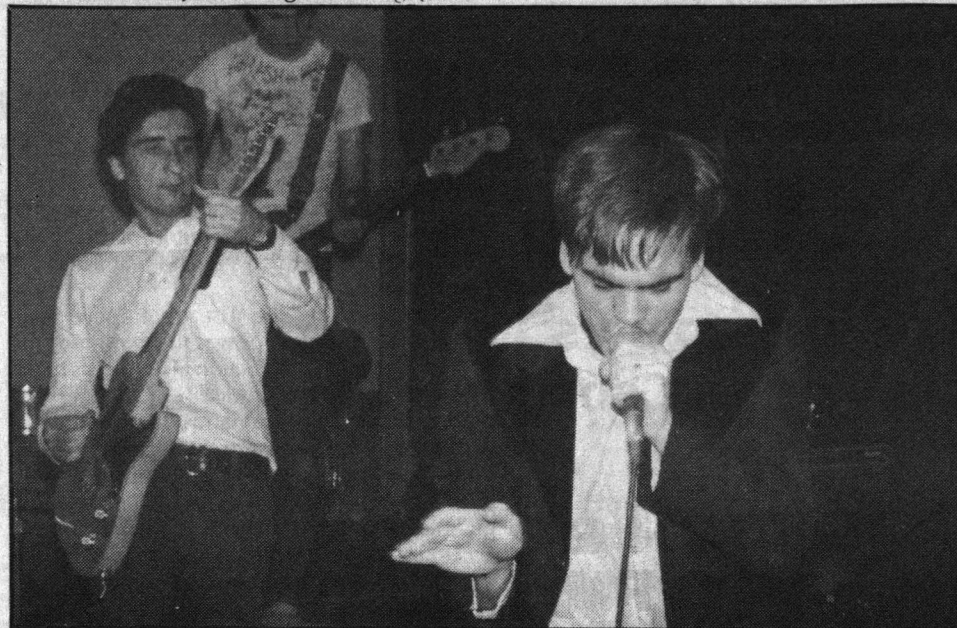
and evangelical religion has taken on the full force of a marketing blitz, selling Christ to the masses as he's never been sold before. There are T-shirts, fanzines, videos, samples cassettes, and posters galore. Ads tell kids the albums they're looking for are the Permanent Wave. Another ad for the Rez Band promises "music to raise the dead."

These sales efforts are centred around the real thing—musicians on independent Christian music labels like Exit, Light, Sparrow, and Myrrh. On mainstream labels, born-again rockers have been playing for years, though usually spreading a less dogmatic message. U2, The Alarm, Cliff Richard and Donna Summer are all Christian musicians working with major labels, although people buying their records may not recognize their

messages of peace, love and harmony as Bible-inspired.

The wide variety in Christian rock has many born-again purists puzzled about where to draw the line between Christian and secular music.

"Right now I'm drawing the line at Simple Minds," says Boychuck. "They're Catholics, but I don't think any of them have said they're active Christians. I ask 'is the dominant force in the group Christian?' They use religious images



Edmonton's Jerry Jerry and the Sons of Rhythm Orchestra parody Christian Rock; their Gospel punk wins fans, not souls.

Photo Bill St. John

in their songs," she says.

Anyone doubting how much Christian rock means to its fans could ask Christine Boychuck for a testimonial. Before hosting the two and a half hour CKCU show, which Chicago's Cornerstone magazine listed as one of the best in North America, the Carleton journalism graduate was the "number one fan" of the show's first host, Lorne Anderson. She took over as host in 1982, five years after she first experienced Christian rock and roll.

Before her conversion, Boychuck loved bands like Led Zeppelin. Then religion changed all that. "I was taught that I should break my records and burn my music," she says. Minus the offending music, something still wasn't right with her life. "I felt a void," she recalls.

"Part of my soul still wanted to rock." When she finally heard the Word made metal in 1977, the music was a Godsend... literally. "I said it can't be Christian because it's too good," says Boychuck.

Reactions such as her own to Christian rock come few and far between from students at Carleton, says Boychuck. "I

haven't had much student reaction," she shrugged. "They're not my listeners." CKCU has a mandate from the CRTC to provide community service outside the Carleton campus.

"Some of them find it bizarre—they're not used to alternative music, and I'm alternative alternative," she says, pausing to underline the words, "so they find it really hard to take."

Hosting Song for You for the past two years has led Boychuck to define her goals—and limitations.

"The four objectives of the show are: entertainment, information, edification, and evangelism," she says. "Evangelism is deliberately fourth. This is a rock show. I don't want to preach." station staff. Keith Wells doesn't look at of hers on the east coast.

High above Dartmouth, in the studios of Q104-FM, Penthouse magazine "pets" stare from bulleting boards in snapshot embraces with deejays and station staff. Keith Wells doesn't look at them though, or at the picture of Billy Idol's iron-on sneer and endless legions of faceless bands that festoon the studio walls. Instead, he looks out the huge windows to see the station's listening audience spread out below, split by the shining waves of Halifax harbour on a Sunday afternoon. In his shades, jeans, India cotton shirt and sneakers, he looks just like any of the station's cooler-than-thou deejays—until he opens his mouth to speak. Keith Wells is a concerned

young man.

"There are a lot of young people out there going to hell and we've got to try and reach them," he says, leaning back in his swivel chair at the sound controls.

...some born-again Christians would consign all rock music to the fire, with a specially hot place reserved for Christian rock.

"There's got to be a way other than Amazing Grace to reach young people."

Wells, a roadie and singer with Nova Scotia rock bands before his born-again experience at a 1981 Billy Graham rally, hosts a Sunday morning Christian rock show on Q104, or The Rock of the Atlantic as they like to be called. As he makes no bones about the role he sees the music as playing.

"It's a premiere effort by God to reach young people," he says.

"God has traditionally made material to reach the people. You have to relate to people from where they are at the time."

Where Keith Wells is places him in the unusual situation of being a deejay for a

radio station he hopes nobody will be listening to when he's not on the air, that is. You see, not only does the Rock of the Atlantic play hard rock, but specializes in the loudest, fastest, and sometimes vilest.

"I can't run somebody's salvation for them," he says, "but if those kids want to keep listening after my show, they're going to be receiving ideas that are very unGodly. I just hope what they hear on the Christian rock show is enough for them."

Wells, who still professes to being a Journey and Bruce Springsteen fan, acts on his concern with modern music by giving two and a half hour presentations on "the satanic element in sectarian rock" to local high schools and anyone interested. He sees rock and roll as another battleground between the ultimate powers of good and evil in the universe.

"Gospel music was way ahead of its time," he says slowly, making sure his ideas are given the weight they deserve. "That rock and roll sound came from the gospel roots. Then when it became rock and roll the devil took it—he knew the power in the music."

"Music has changed to the point where it's promoting things that will put you in the pit of hell—about 70 per cent of modern records are like that. So, obviously, you have some kind of conspiracy in the music. People don't like to hear that, but..." Wells' voice trails off as he searches for words to describe the situation.

"What bugs me is if you say one thing against it (modern music), all hell breaks loose—so to speak."

Christine Boychuck agrees there is a problem, but describes it in terms less harsh; "It's not the music that's at fault, it's the singer's motivation. It's the lyrics," she says.

Others are less charitable. Citing a satanic conspiracy which runs through all rock music, some born-again Christians would consign all rock music to the fire, with a specially hot place reserved for Christian rock. "One of the greatest victories of the occult world was to penetrate the Christian music with their satanic beat... The words appear to be God's, but the beat belongs to Satan!" charges one evangelical comic book tract.

The theory is that all rock songs are updated version of druid music used to call up the devils. "The drum beat is the key to addict the listener," the book cautions.

Accusations of satanic possession aren't new to religious groups of any stripe, but the bigger question is: can the music avoid drowning in its own contradictions? It's hard to tell boys and girls to "renounce the world" when you're buying into that same world's music in order to get their attention. And lyrics such as "Don't you know/the world will tease you/squeeze you/into its mold" are less radical when they come from a Christian trying to make his music sound like everyone else's.

Or as Molly Austin says, laughing and leaning conspiratorially forward in her Canadian Bible Society office, "Frankly, I don't see how anyone can get the message. I can't hear a thing they say."