

SAINT JOHN'S

# CALGARY REPORT

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## JESUS ROCK'S CALGARY CONQUEST





## THE FAITH

### The Jesus rock phenomenon: It's of God, say some youth pastors, others disagree

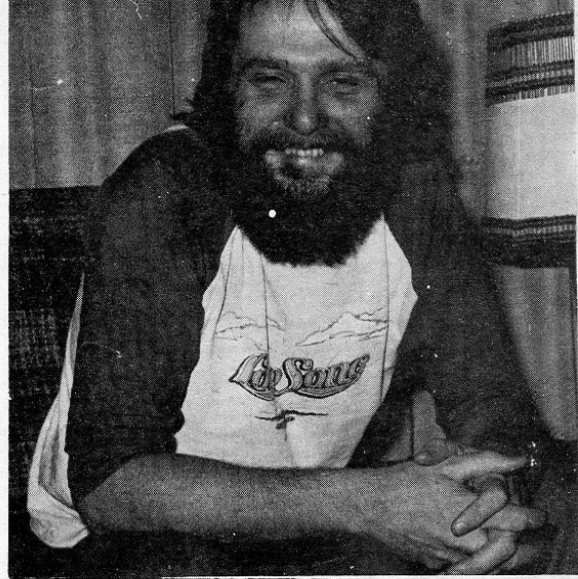
Rock had its first impact on North American consciousness with Elvis Presley. His pelvic gyrations left little doubt in the popular mind that rock music was about sex. Shenanigans of such later groups as the Beatles and the Rolling Stones added the notion that rock was about drugs. Groups named Coven, Black Sabbath, and the Damnation of Adam Blessing suggested an outright satanic influence. Rock 'n' roll records therefore were burned in the Bible Belt, and their influence denounced from pulpits everywhere. Nonetheless, by 1970 Jesus rock had come to the forefront. It was hailed by Larry Norman, one of its more radical exponents, as being music "as contemporary as rock, as scriptural as the Bible."

Since then a steady battle has been waged to gain acceptance for the new musical tool. The battle was fiercest in the evangelical ranks of Christendom, to which most of the Jesus rockers belonged. And in Calgary it now begins

helping Calgary Jesus rockers win a victory were these personable youth pastors, fresh out of Bible colleges and seminaries, responsible not to their congregations as a whole so much as they are to their own particular constituencies, the youth groups.

The concert of the visiting California star has highlighted the sweeping gains Jesus rock has made in Calgary. But the phenomenon of rock's drawing power isn't confined to foreign stars. Calgary's pubescent passions to a like degree are lavished on strictly local Jesus rock groups: Six such groups now ply their trade on the coffee house, concert and youth organization circuit. Two of them, Harvest and Eli, are pondering the big leap to the pro — and secular — market. Calgary even has its own Jesus rock record store called Rock of G Ages, which publishes a monthly fan magazine of the same title. Despite the apparent sincerity of the Jesus rockers, the religiosity of their lyrics and the frequency of their altar calls, many in the evangelical churches still are ambivalent towards the new wave. Rock is rock, they say, and Jesus is Jesus, and never the twain should meet.

Grady Williams, one of Sound Fellowship's founders and until recently youth pastor at Christian Centre [see *CR*, Jan. 20], couldn't disagree enough. Mr. Williams, at 25, has gone the whole route from drugs, booze, Eastern religions, to Bible college and youth ministry. Now the pastor at Calgary's Foursquare Gospel Church, Mr. Williams was converted at a California Jesus rock concert. Like a whole generation, he had rejected the materialistic values of his



**ROCKER GIRARD**

*Half full, or half empty cup?*

Depression-raised parents, sought love and acceptance in the hippy communes and spiritual meaning in Eastern mysticism. He was looking into the Bible too, however, and finding Jesus much more real than anything in Buddhism or Hinduism. Finally he went reluctantly to a Jesus rock concert in Riverside, California, "after a weekend of drugs." What converted him there, he admits, was not the music but the atmosphere, among the Christian performers and audience, of genuine fellowship.

"It's not the music," he insists. "It is what the group projects that is important." A group which projects the egotism and swagger of a secular rock band, but throws in Jesus, will win no converts. On the other hand, a stage presence of humility, and a genuine testimony, will bear fruit. Then, too, some Jesus rock is aimed at the unchurched. Its music, says Mr. Williams, needs to be more secular in style, and would be entirely inappropriate in a church atmosphere.

It was to sort out such problems, and to give Jesus rock a maximum impact in the city, that Sound Fellowship was

### The Cover

to look as if the battle has been won by the rockers. Last month, Jesus rock star Chuck Girard came from California to give one of his biggest concerts ever at Calgary's Jubilee. Twenty-three-hundred adolescents each paid \$3 to hear him and a Calgary backup band named Harvest. Reason for the big turnout: A newly founded association of youth pastors called Sound Fellowship. They had made of the concert a youth activity and their youthful charges had attended *en masse*. Instrumental, therefore, in

### The jeans are alike, the spirit's different

At first sight the Chuck Girard concert at the Jubilee seemed typical rock. Down on the stage was the usual array of chrome-plated electronic gear, music stands, microphones, and extension cords. And filling the seats were 2,000-odd teenagers shoving, chewing gum, and giggling. The arrival of the local warm-up act brought a partisan chorus of shrieks and yells, which gave way to hushed attention as the musicians filed in. The musicians of the Harvest group were dressed, not in the sequined display of modern rock, but in the normal uniform of the teenage Calgary male: faded jeans, lumberjack shirts,

stylishly long hair. None of the garish cockiness of rockdom was evident. The words of the first few songs, discernibly about Jesus, were all but obliterated by the volume.

Between songs the lead singer would make a low-keyed joke, or a few unspectacular, straightforward statements addressed to the unbelievers, along the lines: "I found that becoming a Christian didn't mean I couldn't have fun anymore."

Mr. Girard, who played guitar and piano, sang at a lower volume and spoke with more wit. The songs covered the same narrow range of material: The

personal relationship with Christ and the practical effects of a changed life, all delivered in the rock style and spirit. His talks revealed a simple, inexperienced grasp of theology; he concentrated on the practical aspects of the Christian witness to teenage friends: Jesus, not "churchianity," or personal righteousness, were to be emphasized. "Christians still sin," he advised the unbelievers; "hopefully we sin less." And for those contemplating the altar call: "Don't look for an emotional experience — if it happens, praise the Lord." Indeed, the whole concert, even the altar call, was notably lacking in emotional appeal, low-keyed and low-volumed enough for the 30-plus generation.



created late last year. Though ski rallies at the Paskapoo Hill on the city's western outskirts are part of the program, Sound Fellowship concentrates, as its name suggests, on coordinating musical affairs. As Reg Worthington, leader of the Harvest band, which led off Chuck Girard at the Jubilee, says: "Any youth pastor worth his salt has his youth group's plans made half a year in advance." So, bringing in a name star is a hazardous project. Chuck Girard's concert was the weekend event for two dozen youth groups, all of whose members were advised to bring along their non-Christian friends. Some churches even bought complimentary tickets, which their groups distributed.

Mr. Girard under the terms of his contract received 45% of the gross concert gate. While organizers did not release the official gate figure, it was estimated that some 2,300 paid \$3 each for tickets, totaling about \$6,900. Mr. Girard's share of this would have been about \$3,105. What was left of the remaining \$3,795, after expenses were deducted, went to Sound Fellowship. The small Calgary Jesus rock groups, by contrast, rarely break even. They either play for free or receive a donation — rarely more than \$100 — from the sponsoring youth group.

More promotion for the Girard concert was furnished by a fledgling tabloid monthly called *Rock of Ages*. The tabloid provides interviews with the stars, reviews of touring biggies and news briefs on the local scene. It doesn't make money, and Editor Barry Wilson, 22, and his partner Jerry Curtis hope to turn it into a charity enterprise. The record store, also called *Rock of Ages*, which occupies a cubbyhole at 17 Avenue and 11 Street S.W., also loses money. Both partners live with their parents and **draw no salary but expect the venture to**

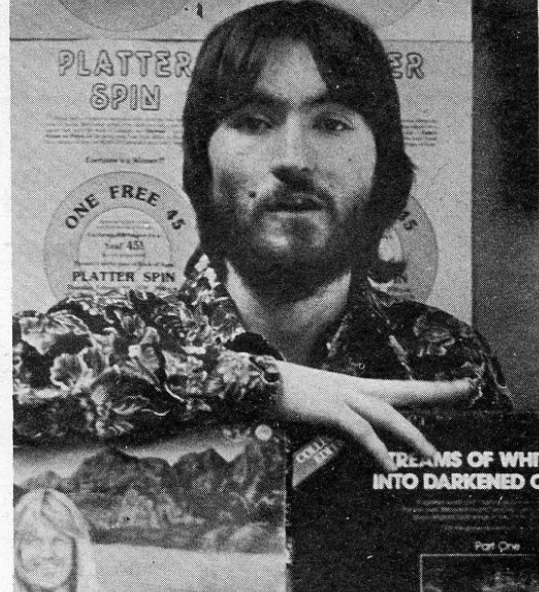
be profitable when the market expands. It was started in October because of the lack of any outlet for hard Jesus rock in the city. Mr. Wilson recalls, for example, that Larry Norman's first Christian album, *Upon This Rock*, was banned in most of Calgary's gospel book stores.

Mr. Wilson admits that with Jesus rock, as with normal rock, it is hard to hear the words. "I couldn't hear them myself the first time I went to a rock concert." With endurance, he insists, one can discern them. Besides, he says, a lot of a group's impact comes from the testimonies between the songs and the counseling afterwards. Some groups have formal altar calls, others just invite people up to chat after the show. The sponsoring church group usually provides counselors who lurk in the wings for those intrepid enough to answer the call.

Answering the call is what much of Jesus rock is about. Eli, Calgary's most radical Jesus rock band, which may very well be the first to turn professional, is composed entirely of born-again Christians. Several were already professional musicians when they converted. They had to take full-time jobs to support themselves when they joined a Christian band, with its limited market. Keyboard player Don Macareavy, 24, is a delivery man. It is the third job he has held in the year and a half that Eli has existed. Now, he says, Eli has cut a single 45 and hopes to get a contract with a Jesus rock publisher. The hope is to break into the secular market, which might mean, he says, "we would have to mellow the music a bit." The church circuit is just too tight, says Mr. Macareavy. The kids want hard rock, but the youth pastors want something different. Furthermore, playing in churches just created hostility. "People would get upset and walk out; then we'd get upset too."

Reg Worthington, 21, says Harvest would also like to go professional, and has received nibbles from several publishing houses. Mr. Worthington, who works for a rent-a-car firm, expects a demonstration tape to be ready soon to send around. Hopefully, a contract would mean touring as the warm-up act for a big star. Mr. Worthington has hopes for the secular market too but doesn't think any compromises need be made in content. "In AM radio, the words aren't as important as the total sound," he says. "But if people listen, they'll hear the gospel."

Some people are not so sure. Ron Ellergodt, manager of the Alliance Church's Christian Publications store across 17 Avenue from *Rock of Ages*, doesn't think Jesus rock can disassociate itself from rock's worldly image. The music, says Mr. Ellergodt, spells



#### EDITOR WILSON

*For Jesus hard rock, an outlet.*

rebelliousness. Those few rock records stocked by the store, he says, are usually kept in the backroom, out of sight.

A more significant attack on evangelism through rock came from John Teibe, youth pastor at Bethel Baptist. Mr. Teibe, while a staffer for Youth for Christ ministries in Toronto in the early 70s, sent out several Jesus rock groups on cross-Canada tours. "I don't know how much we influenced anybody," he says. "It was good entertainment, but not much use in bringing to the kids that the basis of Christianity lies in a commitment to Christ." Light Jesus rock is OK in small doses, he allows, but he wouldn't want it as a steady menu for youth. Rock, like it or not, figures Mr. Teibe, has an association with drugs and expresses a spirit of rebellion. Contemporary music has a place, but Mr. Teibe is happier with folk music and finds that folk groups draw well. The evangelism doesn't come through the music anyway, he claims, but through the witnessing of the performers person-to-person after the show. The music is just a carrot to get the unchurched kids out to experience some Christian fellowship. The problem with using Jesus rock as the carrot is that it whets the teenager's interest in rock. The result will be that he listens to more rock, and since there isn't much Jesus rock, he'll listen to secular rock.

"Is the cup half full, or is the cup half empty?" is the reply of Chuck Girard. "You could just as easily argue that the teenagers will listen to rock anyway. It's their music. So at least this way, they'll listen to Jesus rock." Mr. Girard, now 34, was one of the original converts to Jesus rock. That was in California, where Mr. Girard became a Christian under much the same circumstances as Grady Williams. A professional musician for several years, he had slipped into drugs and Eastern mysticism. The Bible



**PASTOR TEIBE**

*In small doses, okay.*

was a useful source book too, however, particularly the Sermon on the Mount and the passage exhorting him to have no care for the morrow. "It fit right in with the hippy lifestyle," he smiles. Eventually his search led him to a prayer meeting at Calvary Chapel at Laguna Beach. Though retaining a few intellectual reservations, he found himself making a commitment. More study banished the skepticism, and he soon formed a group with other converts from

among the dropout musicians hanging about the Laguna Beach area. Soon several groups formed and marketed themselves as the Maranatha Music. (A recent Maranatha touring group, Parable, drew 1,200 at Lord Beaverbrook School). Mr. Girard's group, Love Song, whose first album sold 200,000 copies, was never a member of Maranatha, which had failed, says Mr. Girard, to fulfill its original vision to be a musicians' co-op.

Now that Mr. Girard has gone solo, he wants to move Christian rock to the forefront of rock. "Christian art," he says, "used to be the best there was. Now it is considered second rate." He wouldn't mind if his artistic daring won him some secular popularity. He has, after all, had some concerts canceled lately and could use the bread. Though he's doing better now than he did as a secular musician, he does far worse than the top secular stars.