

ood soaking of Christian rock



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Members of Christian rock group Trace of Grace, Mark Lepkowski, left, and Dennis Chapdelaine lead musicians and spectators alike under the band shell July 24.



Local residents turned out for the day of free music in Owego's Hickories Park.

"I'd like to introduce ... oh, my goodness, you poor people!"

So much for a smooth introduction by the emcee. Blame the interruption on a sudden cloudburst that soaked concert-goers at Owego's Hickories Park on July 24. However, the series of afternoon

thunderstorms didn't dampen the enthusiasm at the Summer Christian Music Celebration. Marvelously ad-libbing the situation, musicians called the audience onstage for an impromptu sing-along until the rain stopped.

The festival was sponsored by St. Patrick's Church in Owego. It featured 17 acts, Catholic and non-Catholic. The musicians sang not only about loving Jesus; they also implored the audience to build stronger fellowship.

"There are so many kind so people. If we can just learn to love and accept people for who they are," Beth Buczkowski told the concert-goers.

Buczkowski is a Christian rock artist as well as youth minister at St. Margaret Mary Church in Apalachin. She hopes to start a parish youth ensemble this year, saying that Christian rock is a great tool for drawing young people to the Catholic faith.

"Their spirituality is deeper than when I was growing up," said Buczkowski, 34. "The kids are looking for something."

Virginia Young, the concert's public-relations coordinator, said she sees Christian rock as a growing movement.

"Our spirituality speaks to us through our music. And we find that's true of a lot of others," said Young, who performed at the July 24 concert with Trace of Grace, a band from St. Patrick's Church.

However, Buczkowski said the Catholic Church has been slow to accept the hand-clapping and swaying that's such a big part of Christian rock.

"It's something different — to get out of sitting there listening, and instead get up and be participating," she remarked.

Buczkowski said that some Catholics do not consider such conduct to be "liturgically correct."

"They throw that 'New Age' label on. It's because they don't understand it; it gets you out of your comfort zone," she said. "But there's nothing wrong with getting inside of yourself and finding out who your God is."

Two teens who attended the concert, Chris Fleming and Jason Brusso, thought the Christian music they heard was a nice diversion from traditional Catholic hymns.

"This is much more spirited and upbeat. People look like they're having a pretty good time."

said Chris, 17, from St. John the Evangelist Church in Newark Valley.

"It gets the people involved," added Jason, 18, from St. Patrick's Church.

Chris and Jason were among a large group of teens who served as volunteers that day. Funds raised from concessions will be put toward the Tioga Catholic Community's trip to the National Catholic Youth Conference in St. Louis, Mo., this November.

Chris and Jason said they actually welcomed the stormy weather, explaining that people who sought refuge under the concession tent were more likely to purchase food and drink.

According to Kevin Martin, cluster youth minister, the fundraising campaign also includes can drives, spaghetti dinners and flower sales. The money will help send 26 teens and five adults to the national conference.

Through their volunteer work, Martin observed, the teens are forming stronger unity in the Tioga cluster, which includes St. Patrick's, St. John the Evangelist and St. Francis Church in Catatonk.

"These types of fundraisers are good because it draws the kids together. They get to know each other," Martin said.



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consecutive day, having also played at a "tent revival" worship service near Binghamton. However, the busy schedule didn't seem to dampen his enthusiasm.

"I'm really pumped. I can't wait to play," he exulted.

Kevin joined the St. Patrick's choir during his sophomore year of high school. One of his goals at that time, he said, was to help bring a more contemporary sound to the music at his parish.

"It was the first time a drum set had seen the inside of St. Pat's," he remarked.

He became involved with Trace of Grace two years ago, first as a sound technician and then as a full-time performer. The band, he said, makes numerous appearances in the Tioga County area, with the July 24 Christian rock concert topping the list.

"This is our biggest one of the year. It's the one we get up for," Kevin said.

Kevin is equally enthusiastic about Trace of Grace's creativity, noting that the band plays mostly original material. One of his personal favorites, he said, is *Jesus*, which contains the following lyrics:

*Who can point me to paradise?
Who would not lead me astray.
Who can take my sins and wash*

them all away?

*Guide me through the night,
Teach me wrong from right.*

*Take me to the light. I glorify
your name.*

Kevin said he enjoys the overall atmosphere whenever he plays a Christian rock concert.

"People who come to listen to this music are some of the most dedicated people I know," he said. "When they clap they're not just praising us, they're praising God. That's my goal — to lead people in music and praising God."

Kevin is about to begin his sophomore year at Binghamton, where he majors in vocal performance. After college, he hopes to shoot to the top of the music world.

"Obviously the ultimate goal is to be a rock star. But if I can just make some kind of living in music, I'll be happy — being a studio musician, doing production," he said. "I wouldn't mind traveling at all. I'd love to go out on tour."

Kevin said he'll do whatever it takes to have a successful career. This level of sacrifice, he observed, is vital for musicians but not one that everyone is willing to make.

"If you don't love what you're doing, you can't do this. It's a lot of work," he said.

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