

a Young

New band responds to 'the call'

Story by Rob Cullivan

PHELPS —Too often, Catholics consider liturgical music more functional than celebratory, said Steve Duprey, director of the folk group at St. Francis Church.

"It's traveling music," he said, sitting on the front porch of his home with members of his band, The Call. "Traveling music," he explained, is music to accompany the movements of the priest, no more, no less.

Of course, for Duprey, music means a lot more, and he's been sharing his joy in music for several years now as a longtime church musician. He started out in the '70s playing folk music at another church in the area.

"There was a lot of people who decided not to go to 10 a.m. Mass any more because of these long-haired guitar-players," he said, recalling those days with a smile. However, he stuck to playing church music through the years. In fact, he said, in his whole life, he's written less than a handful of secular songs.

Now, with his Christian music band, The Call, Duprey is hoping to turn both his fellow Catholics and non-Catholics on to his own spiritual compositions in settings outside the church. Upcoming gigs for the band include performing at an outlet center and a Christian folk festival.

Duprey formed The Call last year with a group of friends he'd met through the years in the music and theater scenes. Mike Witter, a singer and percussionist, belongs to the St. Francis folk group as well. Ralph Sinicropi, on bass, attends St. Patrick's Church in Seneca Falls.

The two other members of the group describe themselves as nondenominational Christians who attend Protestant churches: Pete Saracino plays guitar, and Paul Walters, a Chapman Stick, which is an instrument that combines both bass and guitar.

All range in age from 23 to 49, and all contribute vocally to the group.

Unlike some of the more militant contemporary Christian bands evangelizing through music today, The Call's members appear fairly laid back and say that their music is more personal and contemplative. Walters himself frankly acknowledges he even struggles defining himself as "Christian" from time to time, but has always found himself being invited to play in church settings.

"I'm always being drawn back into the music," he said. "I feel it's a spiritual obligation."

The Call has recorded a CD, "Spirit's Call," that the band itself produced this year. The CD's 12 songs combine folk, country, Latin, Celtic and pop influences underlying Christian tales of struggle, doubt and faith. Among its stronger pieces are "Road to Jerusalem," a Spanish-influenced piece that describes Jesus walking to Jerusalem aware that he is to be killed there.

"You healed the blind and lame, gave sinners back their name," the lyrics go. "Visited those who were alone / Now you must walk the road, carry your heavy load / When all is done you will be home!"

The song leaves the listener with the image of Christ beginning to realize what he's about to face.

"Spirit's Call" also has more upbeat numbers like "The Fire of God's Love," which talks about "dancin' with Jesus my Lord!" and "Come Shine," a Latin-flavored tune.

And then there's the band's signature piece, "The Call," which describes the struggles various biblical figures had answering God's call in their lives: Mary, Joseph, the Apostles, Judas and Jesus. It's a disarming ditty, and may be the only Christian song in the world with these lyrics placed in the mouth of Joseph:

"When Mary told me I couldn't believe it / I'm just not ready to be a dad / And then she says that it comes from God and I think 'I've really been had.'"

Of course, as the song states, Joseph did answer his call. And Duprey believes he has answered his own call by writing sacred music. Although he's been playing in churches for years, Duprey, an ex-seminarian who's married now with two kids, didn't start writing his own spiritual music until five years ago. He noted that he formed The Call more as a vehicle to record his music and try selling it to song publishers. But when the group participated in an area concert featuring various choirs this year, the audience loved The Call, he said.

"We had five or six business cards handed to us," he said. "It was precisely at that moment that I said 'I think I'm a member of a band.'"

Among The Call's endorsers are Fathers Paul Bonacci and Peter Clifford, both of whom contributed blurbs to The Call's Web site. Father Bonacci just became administrator of Schuyler Catholic Community, which comprises St. Mary of the Lake Parish, Watkins Glen/St. Benedict's Parish,

Qdessa. He is former parochial vicar at the Roman Catholic Community of Geneva, which comprises St. Francis de Sales and St. Stephen's parishes. He grew up with Duprey in Waterloo, and served on the altar with him as a boy.

"I quipped to him one day: 'How does it feel to have the Holy Spirit as your muse?'" Father Bonacci wrote, adding: "The music that I've seen and heard, composed by Steve and performed by The Call is what I call anointed music. It gets the attention of the mind; it opens the heart and touches the soul."

Father Clifford, pastor of St. Michael's Parish, Newark, also endorsed The Call after seeing the band perform this year.

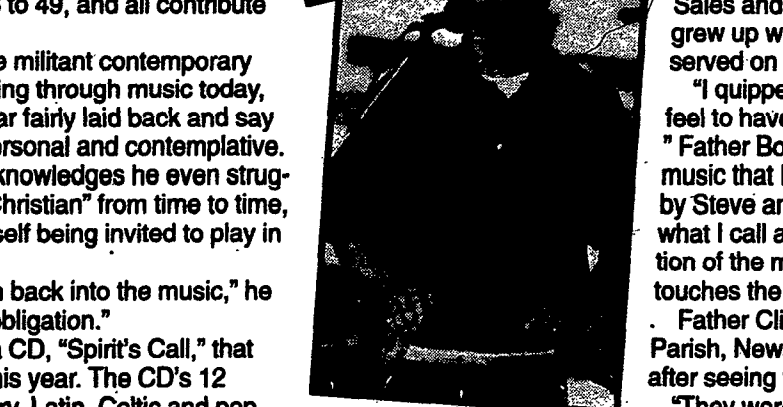
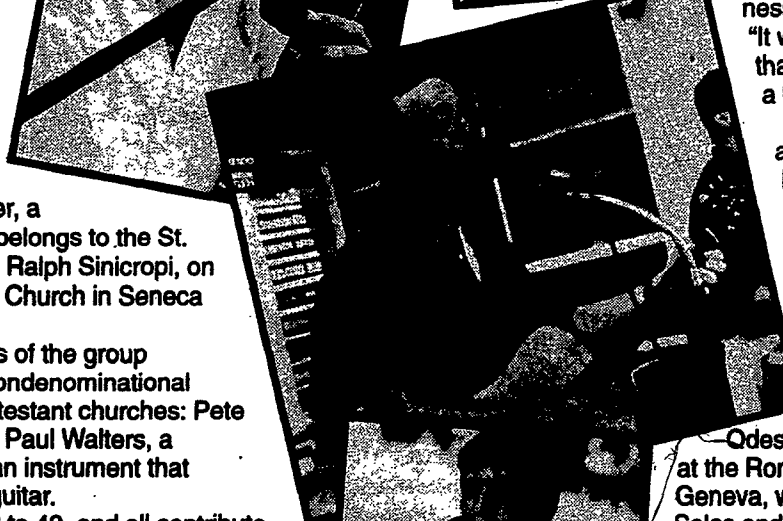
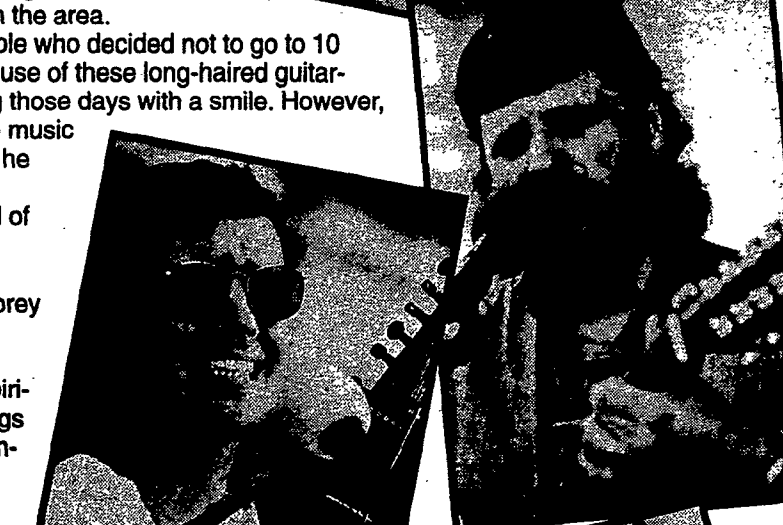
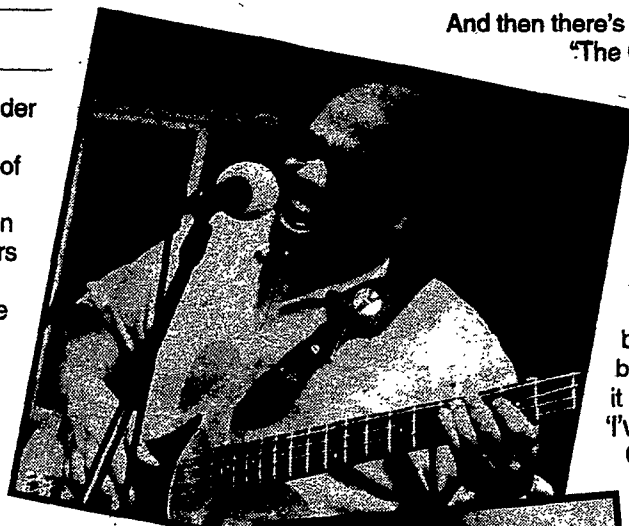
"They were incredible, and I found myself drawn in by both their music and by what the song ... ('The Call') was expressing."

Although Duprey writes The Call's music, its arrangements are handled by all band members, according to Witter. And all the members apparently enjoy the spiritual nourishment they receive from playing the

music.

"I have a sense (Christ's) hand is on the music," Saracino said. "I don't know what that means or where it's going to go." Wherever it goes, Duprey is confident that the band will run into the right people at the right time along the way.

"As the doors open up, we're just trying to walk through the right ones," he said.



Andrea Dixon/Staff Photographer
The Call from top to bottom: Ralph Sinicropi, Steve Duprey, Paul Walters, Pete Saracino and Mike Witter.

Dates for The Call

The Call will be performing at venues including the following. For more information on the group's shows, visit The Call's Web site at <http://www.thecall.com>

Sunday, August 12: 2 p.m. at St. Francis/St. Stephen's Parish Picnic, Seneca Lake State Park, Geneva.

Sunday, August 19: Noon to 6 p.m. at Sharing the Spirit Christian Folk Music Festival, Freeman's Field, Penn Yan.

Saturday, October 13: 8:30 a.m. at the 8th Annual Rochester Marian Conference, Theater on the Ridge, Kodak Park, 200 W. Ridge Road, Rochester. Info on the Web at <http://www.1ere.net/mary/>

Events

For information on these events, call the hotline for Odyssey, the diocesan young adults network, at 716/328-3228, ext. 375, or 1-800-388-7177, ext. 375. You can also visit the Odyssey Web site at <http://www.ggw.org/odyssey/events.htm>.

● **Sunday, August 12:** Renaissance Fair, off State Route 104A, Sterling. Many Odyssey members get into the spirit of the times by dressing up for this event, but dressing up is not mandatory.

● **Thursday, August 16:** Monthly dinner at Woody's II, 2758 W. Henrietta Road, 7 p.m. RSVPs are requested by Aug. 15.

● **Saturday, August 18:** Genesee Country Museum Fiddlers' Fair. Meet at 10:30 a.m. in the Tops Plaza parking lot, Buffalo Road at Pixley Road in Gates, to car-pool to the museum located in Mumford. RSVPs are requested.

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