

Musicians rockin' for those in utero

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

You don't expect to hear "rock star" and "pro-life activist" in the same sentence, but former Van Halen lead singer Gary Cherone can describe himself as both.

Cherone, who also sang for the hit band Extreme during the early 1990s, said he felt he had to take a pro-life stand because "sitting on the fence is absurd."

That's the attitude taken by the organization for which Cherone advocates, the Stafford, Va.-based Rock For Life, a coalition of pro-life bands and activists that is affiliated with the American Life League. The Rock



For Life Web site at www.rockfor-life.org features a list of bands Rock for Life says support abortion. Some of the performers listed are supporters of Rock For Choice, which was formed in the early 1990s by the all-female band L7 and has staged benefits for pro-choice groups. Rock For Choice supporters have included Paula Cole, Melissa Etheridge and Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder.

"We want the kids to know what the bands they are listening to are supporting," said Sara McKalips, as-



Photo courtesy of Rock for Life

Fans listen to a pro-life band during the Rock For Life 2003 summer tour.

sistant director of Rock For Life. "We would encourage kids to boycott bands that are supporting the abortion industry."

McKalips also urged listeners to send letters to performers, letting them know why they aren't buying their CDs. She dismissed the argument that pro-life listeners should be able to separate their social concerns from their musical choices.

"I would just say that there are some things that are more important than entertainment," she said, noting she only buys CDs made by Christian rockers. "Then I can be pretty confident that they're pure," she said, adding that Rock For Life also maintains a list of links to pro-life bands on its Web site.

Few listeners would be familiar with many of the bands listed there unless they're also devotees of Christian music. However, along with Cherone, Rock For Life has enlisted a couple of well-known names from the secular world, including P.O.D., a metal-rap band familiar to MTV viewers.

Cherone earned his pro-life credentials, in part, by penning two open letters to Vedder a few years back in an attempt to engage the pro-choice grunge star in a dialogue on abortion.

"If the unborn is not a human person, no justification for abortion is necessary," Cherone wrote Vedder. "However, if the unborn is a human person, no justification for abortion is adequate."

Vedder never responded, but Cherone's public stance earned him "a little hell" in the form of hate mail, he said.

"The issue is so divisive, but I thought I'd approach it as carefully and sensitively as I could, and the response from some fans has been near violent," he said. "I wouldn't call them fans anymore," he added with a chuckle.

Yet Cherone also had the consolation of receiving letters from women who told him they reconsidered aborting their unplanned children after reading about his views. In addi-

tion to his letters to Vedder, Cherone's other pro-life work includes recording a new two-song CD titled "Perfect World." Proceeds from the CD's sale will benefit Rock For Life.

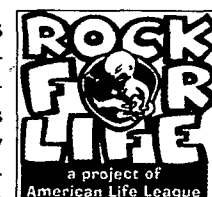
Just as Cherone entered the pro-life camp from the secular-music world, Rock For Life has ventured beyond Christian-music festivals into the world of secular rock 'n' roll. For example, McKalips said she manned a Rock For Life information booth at a Washington, D.C., secular-music festival.

"I was surprised by the number of people who came up to us and encouraged us in what we're doing," she said, adding that at least one woman said she had been converted to the pro-life movement after visiting the Rock For Life booth at the same festival the previous year.

Rock For Life has several chapters across the country. Comprising teens and young adults, these chapters have organized pro-life festivals, sponsored pro-life talks and raised money for groups that help single mothers. The chapter nearest to the Diocese of Rochester was founded three months ago in the Albany area, according to Paul Troiani, a 21-year-old pro-life activist.

"Rock For Life is great because they are youth-oriented and music is a big part of my life," said Troiani, who noted that he enjoys both Christian and secular hard-core rock. He added that his chapter has counseled women contemplating abortion and picketed abortion clinics.

"Probably the most disturbing thing I find from our activism is the number of girls who tell me that if we were at the clinic the day of their abortion, then they may have considered not having an abortion," Troiani said. "That is a wake-up call to these complacent churches that we need to get involved in the pro-life movement and sacrifice our time to help these girls in need."



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