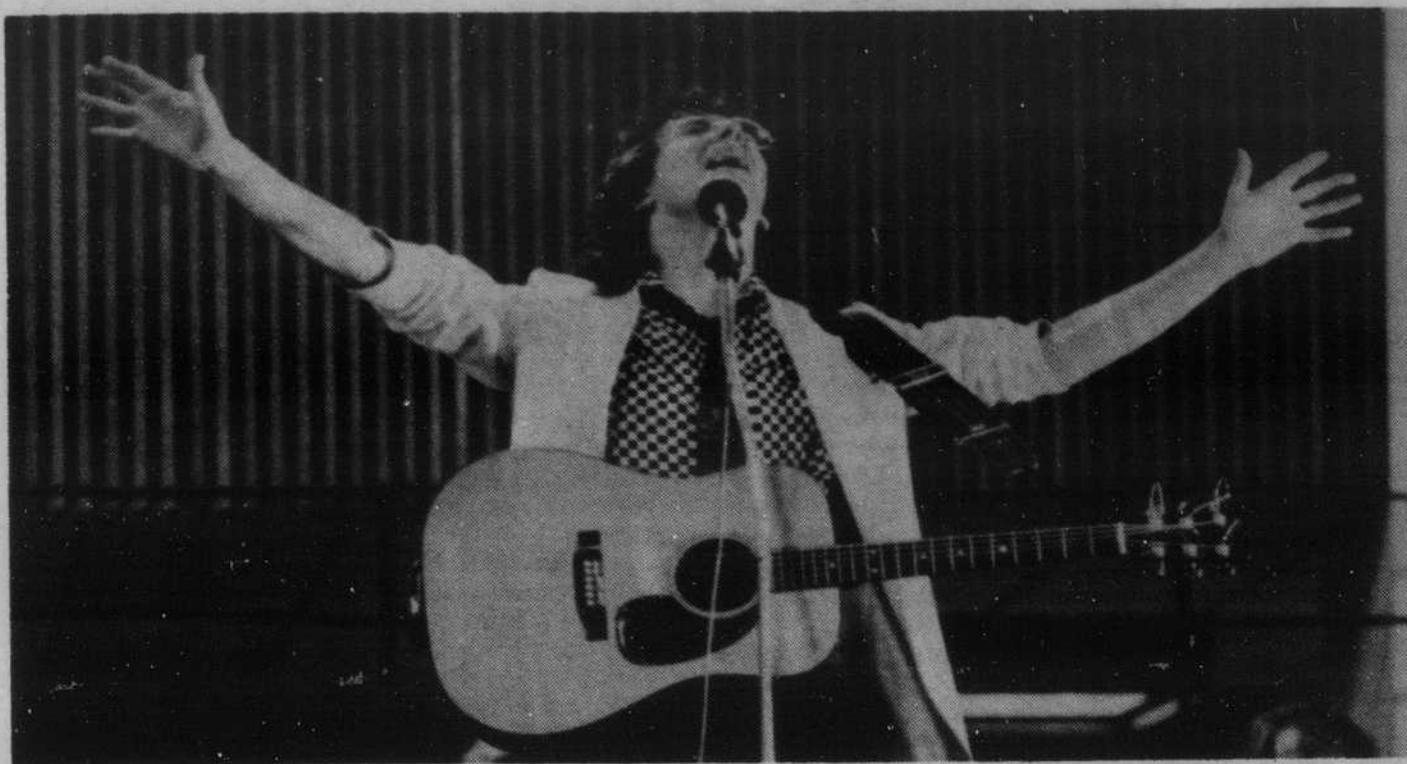


Backstage

Christian rocker sings from heart



Remember some of the actors that slimy red creature devoured in the science fiction movie, "The Blob"? Randy Stonehill was one and Cindy Williams, at that time a rookie in the field, came close to being another.

Together they memorized lines, sang Neil Young songs at Randy's place and ultimately survived the Blob. The movie ended and they parted ways. Cindy became Hollywood's "Shirley," of "Laverne and Shirley," and Randy became well known in the Christian rock music industry.

Story by Melissa Martin
Photos by Jeff Dreiling

He was in Eugene two weeks ago, playing the fairgrounds pavilion before an audience of 3,500 mostly high school kids who knew every word to every song on every album Randy has cut. Surprisingly, Randy's music still reflects an early 70's influence.

Dressed in a black and white checkered shirt, a white jacket with elbow-length sleeves, a black tie, black pants and black and white saddle shoes, Randy cranked out rock'n'roll rhythms with incredible bar-chord slides and added interesting harmonics for the Eugene audience.

He is 30 years old, left handed and plays a right



After the Eugene concert, Stonehill spent an hour and a half signing autographs and giving advice to young musicians.

handed guitar with a hole in the side like Willie Nelson's. But he brings out tones from the acoustical Martin — Randy calls it his "six string monster" — as if it were Pete Townshend's electric.

Maybe Randy has such a following because of his rapport with the audience. He spent an hour and a half after the Eugene concert signing autographs and giving advice to young musicians.

"Try not to take yourself too seriously," he said. Humor is part of Randy's character on and off stage, but he faces reality and handles pressure by "trying to focus on priorities."

"I take my eyes off myself or my fatigue or the potential for mass rejection, and try to keep my sights on why I'm doing what I'm doing," Stonehill said.

Randy, who performed after former NFL linebacker Bill Glass spoke for a crusade that was in town in mid-October, is in the mainstream of Christian music. Last April his latest album, "Equator," stayed number three for five months.

Does Randy get criticized by other Christians for playing rock music? Yes, he said. "Some eye me cautiously," Stonehill conceded.

"The key for me is to just make sure that what I say and sing on stage is genuine. People will respect you and listen to you even if they might not agree with you, if they feel you are talking from your heart. I believe what I have to say really needs to be heard.

"I don't have all the answers and I'm no spiritual giant, but I know who I am and I know who Jesus is and I know where I'm headed.

"It's not just the dream of desperate men." The Christian music industry has become a big business over the last 15 years, Randy said.

"That's good because we are able to reach more people with better quality. But it also has potential for being dangerous if we start to be more concerned about financial success and marketing than spreading the gospel," he said.

For the past 12 years Randy has been doing Christian music and writing his own songs, such as the one his Eugene audience sang with him called, "Shut de do', keep out de debil." He told everyone to pick a jungle noise that would fit close to their personalities, while he beat out a bongo-like rhythm on his guitar for the "Jamaican Hymn."

"This is an informal concert. And I like that," Randy told the receptive crowd.

And that crowd loves his music — music he calls "a combination of new wave and Christian rock."

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