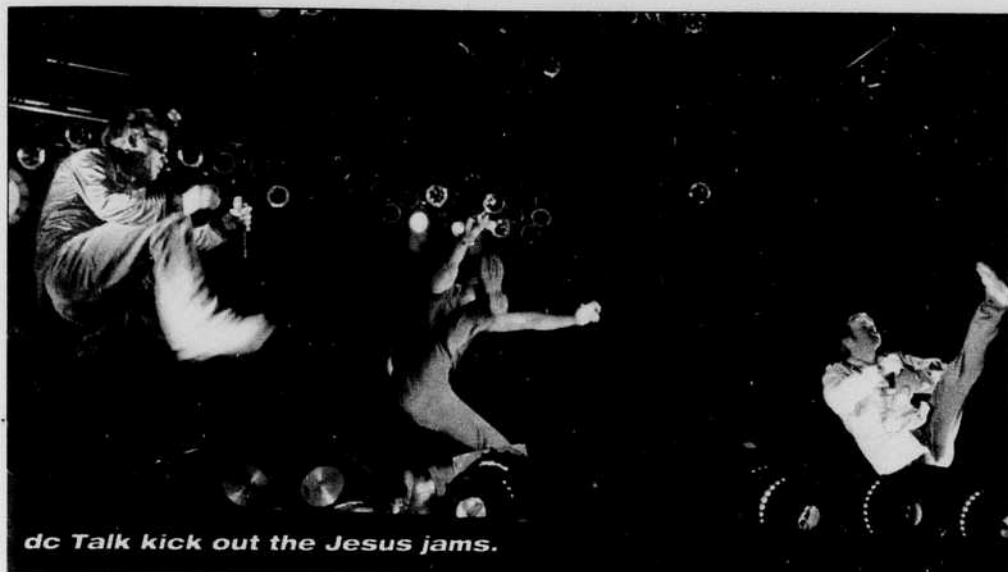




dc Talk kick out the Jesus jams.

"The trend used to be to mirror a secular act to give people a Christian version," says Mark Harris, a singer/songwriter for the lite-FM act 4HIM. "Now people are less accepting of copycat bands, so you have to carve your own niche. It's more healthy to set your own standards, and the bigger budgets and better production help us do that."

Of course, most musicians agree that promoting the Gospel still takes priority, even for Silverchair-ish rockers Audio Adrenaline, whose roots are at Kentucky Christian College.

"I wanted to do something for God, but I wanted it to be radical," bassist Will McGinniss says. "It's cool that you can be in a rock band and still say something meaningful and cause-oriented. The songs are tools for the younger generation to glorify God and get some energy out."

Scoff you may at the mention of energy, but don't be fooled by stereotypes. The fans aren't sitting in pews letting their souls be saved. dc Talk's Toby McKeehan has been known to pull an Eddie Vedder by climbing the stage scaffolding to incite audiences into chanting "Jesus is the way!" McGinniss reports uncontrollable dancing, moshing and even stage diving at AA shows.

"People definitely thrash, and we get pretty wild

"I wanted to do something for God, but I wanted it to be radical."

**AUDIO ADRENALINE
BASSIST WILL MCGINNISS**



Blooming stars Audio Adrenaline face the music.

on stage," he says. "Even the union guys — who might have worked Pantera the night before — will tell us, 'You guys rock!' I think they have the illusion that we're going to be a big sissy band."

Kevin Hart, a Colorado Christian College junior, says CCM concerts maintain a different vibe from secular shows without losing the sound's edge.

"When I saw Rush, I felt out of place. Everyone was drunk or stoned, while I tried to enjoy the music. You can tell when you're in a community of Christians. Everyone is accepted, and you feel the presence of the Lord."

Practicing what they preach

DESPITE THE INCREASING musical similarities between secular and sacred acts, the two remain worlds apart when it comes to lifestyle. Most of the time it's the little things you notice — absence of the F-word,

high marriage rates, heavy religious imagery and the most helpful PR reps this side of St. Peter's gate. Rebecca St. James, the evangelical equivalent of Alanis Morissette, even prayed out loud prior to her interview.

"The person behind the music and how they live their life is basically what divides people into Christian and non-Christian acts," 4HIM's Harris says. "If people know the Lord, and they want to sing music to represent him, they will perform it in whatever genre they feel most comfortable with."

Most of the bands admit that temptation remains. In 1994, CCM darling Michael English had an extramarital affair, and all hell, so to speak, broke loose. He was purged and his records yanked from shelves. Odmart says he deals with the same things any 23-year-old single male does and must remember to check himself.

"There are always things to struggle with whether you're Christian, in a band, both or neither. We all walk wounded through this world, trying to decide the best path."

Drummer and born-again Christian Peter Furler of the Newsboys explored the wild side first. He and his mates from down under formed the band to drink beer, impress girls and even smoke a little pot.

"I realized my faith was more important than my indulgences. You learn how to be in this world but not of it," Furler says. "God never puts us in situations we can't handle. Or maybe we're just too ugly and too old to get groupies."

Other problems common to the secular side exist in CCM as well. Vocalist Christine Dente of Out Of The Grey notices the same absence of females.

"I find myself in a lot of situations where I'm the

only woman in the room. I have to force myself to have a voice."

Music for the masses

DISCUSSION OF CCM BEGS ONE QUESTION: Can it dwell in the house of the Lord and the palace of pop culture simultaneously?

"I don't want to be pigeonholed," dc Talk's Michael Tait says. "It's great to have music that can be enjoyed by all people, even atheists. We won't water down our message, though."

One example of cross-over strategy is EMI's No Lies campaign. EMI is working with 16 campuses (including U. of Arkansas, East Tennessee State U., U. of Kentucky and George Mason College, Va.) to get the music out, and plans to take the program nationwide this fall. A compilation CD and other products will be donated to campus Christian groups, which can use them for contests and other promotional events. There will also be a college lifestyle Web site (www.NoLies.com).

"We want the mainstream to hear what great music this is," Vest says. "I hope one day bands can exist in general categories, like ska, instead of being segregated to a Christian section at Blockbuster. They don't have a Krishna section for Live, even though that's what they sing about."

Some artists say popular acceptance is a plus, but prefer to concentrate on loyal fans.

"I would rather focus on strengthening pre-existing religious families. Music can change lives when the message is in a language they can understand, although I also pray it gets in the hands of nonbelievers and sheds some light," St. James says.

Rock of ages?

WHEN GOD TOLD PETER TO BUILD HIS church on rock, was this what he had in mind? Probably not, but the band members — who aren't out to reinvent the church — feel music is an innovative way to reach people, although the Gospel with guitar has its opponents.

"How could rock be evil if God created music?" Tait asks. "The same bricks that build a whorehouse can build a church. The message remains the same; the delivery is different."

Furler agrees fervently. "I haven't seen any Bible passage where it talks about what decibel the devil comes in."

** last name omitted for privacy*

At press time, God was still unavailable for comment for Carrie Bell's righteous opus. But she knew she must rock on.



More than 40 days and 40 nights of fame for Jars Of Clay.



**Guest
Expert:**
Carrie Bell

On God

rock:

"I'm not a follower of any organized religion. The leaders of religious factions usually have a lot of money, and that turns me off. So, I wouldn't listen to any Christian rock."