

'Fantasy Festival' has listeners wondering

By Shirley Howell

A slick voice boomed over KCPR, confirming appearances by the Rolling Stones, U2, Duran Duran, The Who, The Police and The Pretenders at Cal Poly's 32,000-seat amphitheater.

What a line-up! What a concert! At Cal Poly? Wait a minute!

According to Cal Poly students Jim Merritt and John Purlia, those thoughts have occurred to many listeners who have called the college's radio station for information about the fantastic concert billed to take place this weekend.

But fantastic is all that it is. With tongue-in-cheek, the two student disc jockeys tell their callers to think again.

Merritt and Purlia are the creators and producers of the "Fantasy Festival," a simulated concert to be aired today (Saturday, June 2) on KCPR. The disc jockeys have been broadcasting teasers for the big event since the winter quarter to stir interest in their "Burnt Dog Entertainment" radio show.

But to Merritt and Purlia's surprise, community residents and some out-of-state individuals have become worked up over the non-existent concert.

"People are actually taking it seriously," said Merritt. "They're hearing it second, third and fourth-hand — they aren't hearing the actual broadcasts — and they're believing it."

One Arroyo Grande resident planning to move to the East Coast called the station, saying she had been trying to get tickets for the concert through Ticketron outlets, Merritt said. She explained that she wanted to re-route her trip so her daughter could see Duran Duran.

Merritt also mentioned a phone call the radio station received from an alleged New York representative of Duran Duran's national fan club.

"He asked us to stop using the band's name in vain and to stop selling tickets for a concert they wouldn't be at," Merritt said. "We haven't been selling any



PHOTO BY SHIRLEY HOWELL

John Purlia (left) and Jim Merritt tape a segment for the Fantasy Festival at KCPR.

tickets and there is no concert. It's only an entertainment program."

Merritt and Purlia came up with the idea of broadcasting a fictitious concert about two years ago, although the two only found time from their computer science studies last quarter to begin work on the project.

With Merritt's background in "character work" on the radio and Purlia's experience doing mini-concerts on his weekly "Rock Show" program, the idea seemed a likely venture.

Their collaboration spawned the tale of a Cal Poly dropout named Julian Frisco who, in the '70s, became a roadie for popular bands. Consequently, Frisco became a concert promoter, earning a vast fortune and a cover story in Time Magazine.

Grateful for his fame, the alumnus wanted to bestow his alma mater with a gift. He financed the construction of the 32,000-seat Mustang Amphitheater at the school and organized a Fantasy Festival to celebrate the project's completion.

Trying on a handful of distinctive voices, Merritt and Purlia have stepped into the characters they invented for the show to tape short newflash-styled segments they have been broadcasting since last quarter. They also recruited about 15 co-workers and friends to don the roles of Frisco, Al Pickledish, Dan Petertom, Chrysler Hurricane and other fictitious characters.

They even got the listening audience involved by holding a poll to help Frisco select the groups to perform at the concert. The disc jockeys voiced their surprise at the almost 400 responses that besieged them during the poll.

Merritt and Purlia explained that they have kept names of the characters nonsensical and the story as outrageous as possible to clue listeners about its lack of authenticity.

"People actually believe us though, when we tell them someone donated \$27 million to build a 32,000 amphitheater and it was built in three months," Purlia said, laughing. "No-one stops to think about what they're hearing — they just want to believe it. I've been asking callers if they've ever heard of Orson Welles and 'War of the Worlds' and they say 'No, I just listen to Duran Duran.'"

Merritt added that their teasers have been interspersed with statements exposing the fictitious quality of the event. He spun a tape of one of the newflashes that ended with the question, "The Fantasy Festival ... is it live or is it?"

"The response is really baffling to us," Merritt said. "Our whole attempt has been to do a tongue-in-cheek show. It's strictly entertainment for the Burnt Dog Entertainment program. And the broadcast itself, except for the vignettes, is really an extension of John's Rock Show (program)."

Are the creators worried about the possibilities of a lawsuit? Purlia says no.

"We feel like we've covered ourselves pretty well," he said. "We've been careful in wording things certain ways."

He mentioned that while calling recording studios to find out if members of any of the featured groups would consent to talking for the broadcast, the companies voiced pleasure in having their artists chosen.

"And the executive staff (of KCPR) is behind the

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Warm 'roast' touches Swanson



PHOTO BY JOHN FREES

Myron Graham gives Clifton Swanson a scarf, helmet and toy Porsche during a 'roast' for the retiring conductor.

Clifton Swanson, retiring conductor of the San Luis Obispo County Symphony, was honored Wednesday night in a "roast" that at times seemed more like a eulogy.

Try as they might, members of the symphony board, musicians and city officials were hard pressed to embarrass or poke fun at their beloved conductor, who, after 14 years has left the symphony "in a pinnacle of excellence that is enviable throughout the state," said San Luis Obispo Mayor Melanie Billig.

But roastmaster Ron Ratcliffe, a longtime friend of Swanson's, managed to provide the necessary Don Rickles element with hilarious descriptions of the "Swanson sniff" and other Swanson body gestures that musicians have learned to incorporate into the music over the years.

Much fun was made of Swanson's "mid-life crisis," which was cited as his reason for stepping down from the podium. It also seems to have taken the form of a bright red Porsche kit that he is putting together in the garage. Swanson's wife, Jane, said that was the kind of mid-life crisis she could live with, adding his kit was like the orchestra: "It comes with hundreds of pieces — and no directions."

Swanson was given a steering wheel for his Porsche by the Symphony Association, and board member Myron Graham gave him a toy Porsche, scarf, leather helmet and goggles.

The symphony musicians gave him a bow case for his bass, and in a touching tribute, violinist Randy Garacci said Swanson taught him "what it is to play music, rather than just notes."

Swanson capped the evening by recalling some of his best moments when the orchestra truly hit its stride on a Mozart or Brahms composition and the thrill he had conducting some of the top soloists that have played with the symphony over the years.

"I'm not going anywhere, actually," he assured the audience. "I expect to always work for the symphony and I may be back."

— John Frees