

Peace Concert Raises Concerns

Peace Concert Raises Questions Across Campus
By Kristina Shaw

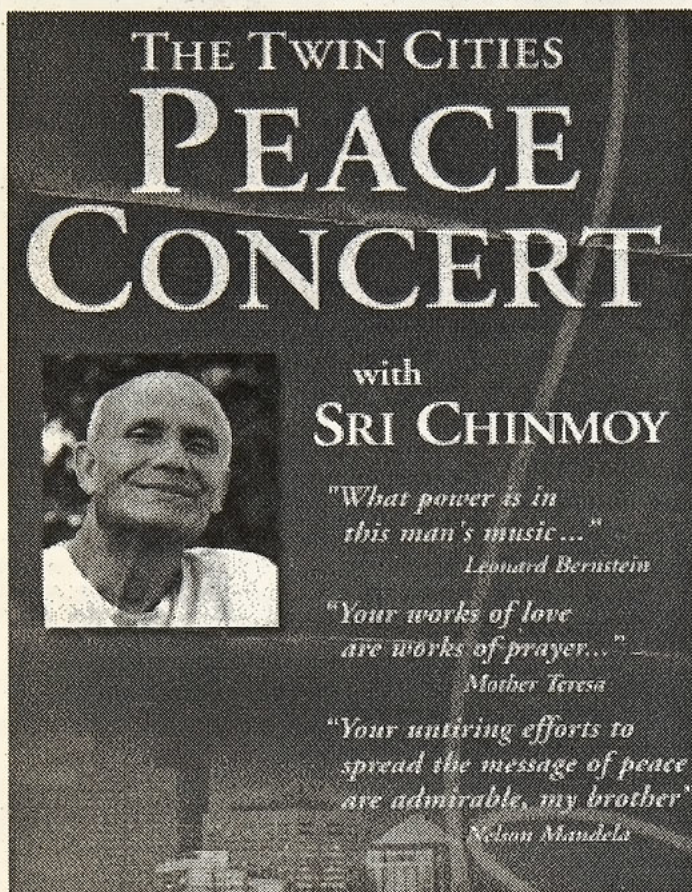
An organization promoting the Twin Cities Peace Concert was on campus during the first week of October set up a table in the hallway of the classroom tunnel. This is a fact. After that, things get a little confusing.

For one, the Peace Concert fliers that were handed out state only that this event will be a chance for "thousands of music-lovers and peace-seekers to create an atmosphere flooded with inspiration" and will take place Oct. 21 at the St. Paul Xcel Energy Center. The concert is free and the table that was set up was a chance for students to register for tickets for the event.

But there is more to the story that many are not aware of. Also on the flier is a picture of the Peace Concert's leader, Sri Chinmoy, who also happens to be a leader of a growing religious movement across the world. Chinmoy spreads this message through concerts, marathons, poems and books.

On a large scale, the controversy over Chinmoy's religious movement is huge. The negativity surrounding Chinmoy includes how he sees himself (as a guru, as the reincarnated brother of Jesus as well as being Thomas Jefferson in a past life), his claims of lifting thousands of pounds just on thought alone and the hours of meditation spent everyday. Chinmoy's group's main focus is peace and they have proposed to place a "peace plaque" at the Statue of Liberty, among other places across the world, to promote world peace. These plaques alone have created a stir in the country.

The main discussion on



campus is the fact that this other religious group came to Concordia, set up a table and started advertising their concert. To be absolutely clear, they did not spread information about Chinmoy's beliefs unless specifically asked. Nowhere on any fliers or posters were any of his beliefs except the idea of World Peace. The controversy lies in the fact that many did not realize that the Peace Concert was affiliated with Sri Chinmoy, who is a leader of a religious movement. So even though they did not advertise specifically this movement, the movement was involved in the concert.

In fact, when called at the number listed on the flier to get more information about the concert, Morris Klein, a volun-

teer for the concert, stated, "This event is not a religious event. The Peace Concert is founded on the idea that all of us need peace and we feel that if the community pulls together we can create peace."

According to its promoters, this World Peace Concert is exactly that: a concert to promote world peace. The only reason this is a controversial topic is because the organization that is promoting this concert is Sri Chinmoy's religious movement, which ties the two (peace and his religion) together.

Concordia University is a private, Lutheran university. Obviously Chinmoy's movement and Lutheranism are different. To have Chinmoy's organization-sponsored event pro-

moted in the halls of this Christian University raised some eyebrows.

Concordia's Pastor Benke stated, "[Concordia] has a diversity of belief systems, we are not here to attack other religions. But it is a stated purpose of the University to proclaim Christ, so we do have a point of view [on the matter]." Though Benke sees nothing wrong with promoting world peace, he did feel that the organization was here without full disclosure of their identity.

Students of Concordia have mixed reactions. Many people walked right by the table and did not even notice much less understand what it was all about. Michelle Evens did not think it was a problem that the organization was here, "I don't see a problem with encouraging people to be aware of what's out there," she said.

However, the position of Concordia officials came in an email to students on Oct. 4 that read, "Earlier today in the 'tunnel' a group was offering free tickets to a Twin Cities Peace Concert with Sri Chinmoy. Concordia University does not endorse this concert or the organization promoting it. We have concerns about the reli-

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gious beliefs they express as they do not understand the uniqueness of the love of Christ. If you would like more information about this organization, please contact Campus Pastor Bob Benke (x8741) Pastor Tom Ries (x8811), Vice President for Finance and

Operations."

Some students feel that this bulletin was a little harsh Josh Otto, for example, said, "I understand we are a private university, but as Christians don't we accept all groups, no matter what race or religion. There's a difference between endorsing and accepting."

Concordia's policy states that "rental to a non-Christian group will be for secular events only," 'secular' meaning not having to do with sacred issues. An example of a secular event would be a marathon or anything recreational, nothing to do with worshiping of any kind. Ries says the school asks every client who wants to rent a table to "respect the Christian nature of this institution." Ries says, "We weren't aware of Sri Chinmoy's [role] within this organization." Because the organization is a non-Christian group and what they were advertising could be viewed as non-secular by some, having the table set up in the tunnel would be, in general, against Concordia policy.

Concordia officials point out that they do rent tables to non-Christian groups. They sent out the bulletin regarding the Peace Concert table "simply to make clear [to members of Concordia community] that we don't endorse that part [Sri Chinmoy's religion] of the organization or the concert," said Ries.

When asked about the bulletin and the "concerns about the religious beliefs," Benke said, "They are welcome back for discussion but we wouldn't want to promote their agenda but in no way do we ban them either."

Prospectives: Life at Concordia

By Joe Austin

"It's a great way for prospective students to get an idea of what Concordia is all about," say Saturdays at Concordia student co-coordinator, Marissa Holcomb. "It will help students make decisions about where they'd like to be, whether that will be Concordia or not."

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Holcomb works in conjunction with the other co-coordinator, Kevin Just, and Admissions Counselor Rhonda Behm-Severid to plan a series of day long events, open to all prospective students, in order to show them a little of what life at

Concordia, particularly on Saturdays, is like.

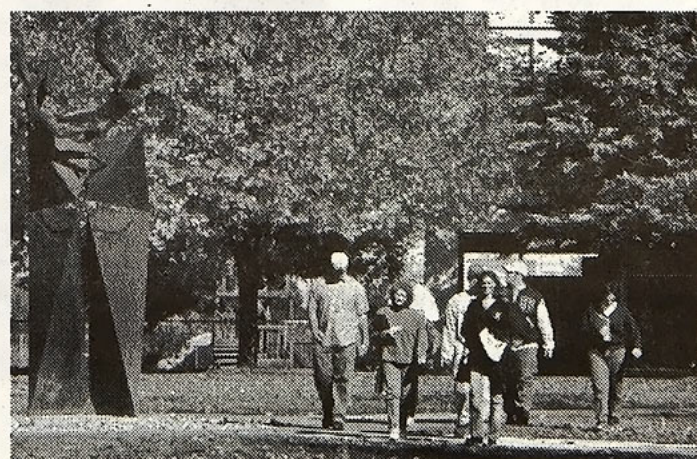
Centered in the music building and auditorium, students begin arriving at 9:00 a.m. when, Holcomb says, "They [prospective students] mingle with counselors and student ambassadors who can answer any questions they may have." Following registration and the informal visiting, the students enter the auditorium where President Holst typically takes a few moments to personally welcome the campus visitors.

Following the greeting from President Holst, the students are given the choice of three sessions to attend: advice in choosing a career, information about the College of Education, and information about the College of Arts and Sciences. This is followed by an additional informational session in the lobby outside of the

Buetow Auditorium where, according to Holcomb, the students have the opportunity to "visit with representatives from each of the academic departments on campus as well as representatives from campus ministry, information and technology, and athletics."

Next, lunch in the cafeteria awaits the students, followed by an all-inclusive campus tour that gives visitors a chance to get a personal feel for the Concordia environment. After the tour, each student ends the day with an individual meeting with the Admissions Counselor assigned to recruiting that student; there they can discuss such important details as financial aid and the application process.

Of all the students who attend Saturdays at Concordia, "Only some stay over night," says Holcomb, "And they get an even better sense of what life at



Marissa Holcomb gives a tour of Concordia to prospective students
Photo by Brian Berwald

Concordia may be like. When they go and visit other campuses they can collaborate the ideas they've gotten from Concordia with what they get from the other schools and form an idea of what their ideal college would be."

Saturdays at Concordia was kicked off for the 2000-2001

school year on Sept. 23, and additional Saturdays activities are planned for Nov. 4, Dec. 2, Feb. 17, and April 21. "Every time we do [Saturdays at Concordia] throughout the year, the more students we have," says Holcomb. "By our last few Saturdays of the year, we have great turn-outs."