

ason death by his replacement in the early morning hours of Oct. 12. The investigation into Moore's

Walker County day and Burkett was returned on See SUSPECTS, A9 ▶

A swingin' good time

Big band swings Christian music for fun, outreach

By ED HOWELL
Eagle News Editor

If you could imagine Harry Connick Jr. doing evangelism, you could envision the big band sounds of Denver and the Mile High Orchestra, which will be on display at 7:30 p.m. tonight at First Baptist Church of Jasper.

Denver Bierman, 26, in fact is a major fan of Connick and has been compared in reviews to Connick. While Connick has his own new Christmas album, Bierman's 13-piece orchestra will also be concentrating on Christmas music tonight, with plans for a Christmas album next year.

"We do a lot of old-fashioned Christmas music," he said.

The band has recorded two albums, with another in April and the Christmas album coming later in the year, under the Reel Loud record label, based in Nashville. A "Christmas Pre-Release EP" is already available.

Its first album, Act the Scat, was named in the top 12 Christian albums picked by Campus Life magazine for 2001, with the magazine calling it "arguably the most fun album of the year." The band was ranked with offerings from artists such as P.O.D., Michael W. Smith, Steven Curtis Chapman and Third Day.

Samples of the music can be heard on the band's Web site at denvermho.com.

The Indiana native, who now lives in Nashville, decided early to

get into Christian music, having grown up in a Christian household in a small town. He picked up the trumpet in the sixth-grade and even placed in a statewide song-writing contest for high schoolers. He then earned a scholarship to play trumpet at Belmont University in Nashville and eventually decided to play full-time after college.

"The only problem was that with me playing trumpet, it was hard to find a lot of bands that needed horn players," he said on the band's



Denver and the Mile High Orchestra, a big band group that specializes in Christian music, will perform at First Baptist Church of Jasper at 7:30 tonight.

Photo Special to the Eagle

Web site. "Then it hit me that I could start my own band with lots of horns. Since I had a real love for the style (having listened to it for 12 years), I decided to play big-band music."

In an interview Tuesday, he said the idea of a Christian big band was helpful to other band members who also studied music in college.

"They had a tremendous gift God gave them to worship Him but there were not many outlets for them," he said.

Bierman loved the big band sound, describing it as a "fun, happy sound." That also fit in to what he wanted to convey with his

See BAND, A9 ▶

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Jackson Howard McDonald is the

He said that if \$835,000 is raised in the county, all the money goes back to a central pot for the UWCA, which then

ners elsewhere provide services in Walker County residents, with 26,000 being the United Way Food Bank and

office at (205) 251-5131 or go to its Web site at uwca.org.

Band

From A1

music, using lyrics in original compositions which edify Jesus. He also writes new arrangements to a few old Christian classics to fit into the band's style.

"You talk about Jesus every chance you get. Everyone can relate to that," he said. "It sounds joyful when you hear it. We can have a fun time praising the name of Jesus."

Response to the band over the past five years has been supportive from audiences.

"It's been overwhelming. I've rarely heard anything negative whatsoever," he said. "Our audience has been growing over five years."

He doesn't know how much of the band's success to attribute to the surge in popularity of swing music in recent years. However, others do point out the interest of singers and bands which delve into swinging arrangements.

"I was on a radio interview in Nashville today. They were

saying that secular and Christian audiences seem to be tired of the same old music and that they are looking for new, imaginative music," he said.

He described the band's concerts as having high energy, upbeat numbers, as well as some humor and interaction. Band members do go into the audience to play, for example.

"The end of the evening concludes on a reflective note," he said. "It's very

entertaining, but it gives a very clear message of who Jesus Christ is."

Also, the band is excited about going on a three-week European tour next August, winding up for several days at the Summer Olympics in Greece.

Tickets are \$5 at the door, and advance tickets are available at Berean Christian Bookstore.

Anyone wanting more information may call 221-6444.

CLOSING BELL

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