

'Prog' rock's progress

Thanks to the Internet and radio programs, progressive rock is finding a wider audience

By **CHUCK DARROW**
Courier-Post Staff

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When Maple Shade's Tom Gagliardi first went on the air, in 1992, with his weekly *Gagliarchives* program his was truly a lone voice in the musical wilderness.

The show, on Burlington County College's WBZC-FM (88.9), focused on progressive rock, the genre whose hallmarks have always been virtuoso instrumental work, complicated, "symphonic"-style arrangements and imagery-laden, often-obtuse lyrics.

But in the early '90s, grunge ruled the rock scene, and hip-hop was well on its way to becoming the dominant pop format it is today.

That made "prog," which had its commercial heyday in the first half of the 1970s, little more than a relic of a time long gone. "I felt like I was teaching Latin, (progressive rock) was a dead language," says the 30-year-old disc jockey.

A decade later, it appears Gagliardi was ahead of the curve.

Back then, he says, he may have had "50 to 100" listeners. Today, between local fans and those tuning in via the Internet, he estimates his weekly audience to be about 2,000.

Those listening to the program are hearing bands like Norway's White Willow, Sweden's Flower Kings,

See our Web site for audio clips by contemporary progressive rock bands The Underground Railroad, White Willow and The Paranormal Humidor.

England's Porcupine Tree and two Burlington County-based acts, Scott McGill and Mastermind. All have built global followings despite their exclusion from the rock mainstream.

And throughout the year, "prog-rock" festivals are staged in the United States, Mexico, England and elsewhere.

One of the largest is next weekend's NEARfest — the Northeast Art Rock Festival — at the Trenton War Memorial. The two-day gathering, whose featured artists include such ex-Genesis guitarist Steve Hackett and '70s favorites Nektar and Caravan, is the fourth annual edition of the event. According to festival organizers all 1,000 tickets sold out in less than an hour.

"There's definitely a (vital) scene, with new bands," says Gagliardi.

Gagliardi, whose program airs Saturdays from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m., says the current "prog-rock" movement began to take shape in mid-1985, a time that coincides with the Internet revolution.

See **MUSIC**, Page 2F



CARLOS J. ORTIZ/Courier-Post

Tom Gagliardi, of Maple Shade, hosts a weekly radio show devoted to progressive rock.

If you go

■ 'NEARfest' takes place Saturday and June 30 at the Trenton War Memorial, Memorial Drive, Trenton. Show times are 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. both days. The event is officially sold-out, but organizers say some tickets can be purchased via the 'NEARfest' message boards at www.nearfest.com.

■ Mastermind performs Saturday at midnight at Joe's Mill Hill Saloon, 300 S. Broad St. Trenton. Admission is \$15 and \$10 (with 'NEARfest' ticket). For more information, go to www.k2nesoft.com/mastermind/welcome.html.



Band Websites

Norway's White Willow (above) and England's Porcupine Tree are two contemporary progressive rock bands.

