

# Carrboro residents rave about new age spirituality

Electronic rave used as a form of worship at the Carrboro Century Center

By Faima Ramirez

Carrboro Commons Staff Writer

Black light, neon-colored flashes, bumping bass, the DJ behind a MacBook, laser lights and full-blast electronic beat. No, it is not a scene from a techno rave at a nightclub on Rosemary Street. It was all part of the first Electronic Cosmic Mass in the Triangle area.

Two hundred people, mostly Carrboro and Chapel Hill residents, attended what Blake Tedder described as “a community ritual that involves dancing, song, communion and communal grieving” at the Carrboro Century Center on Jan. 12, 2013.

Tedder, 27, from Rocky Mount, N.C. and a group of 12 “visioneers”—they don’t like to call themselves a “committee” or “board”—started organizing the event after theologian and Episcopal Priest Matthew Fox, the main proponent of The Cosmic Mass, gave a talk on Creation Spirituality in Carrboro, April 2012. After Fox’s teleconference course, Tedder decided to introduce Carrboro to the ritual, which combines religious traditions from around the world, including Buddhism, Judaism, Sufism and Native American spirituality.

“A lot of people are really craving going deep into spiritual activity—Tedder explained—but they don’t want one thing; they are seeing there are multiple truths.”

According to the official statement on The Cosmic Mass website, it is an effort to deconstruct worship forms inherited from the modern era (such as sitting on benches, reading from books, and being read to or preached at). Tedder says that, while he sees value in western religious practices, “they squash the human spirit that wants to experience.”

Megan Goodwin, a doctoral candidate in the department of religious studies at



The First Cosmic Mass event in the Triangle area involved residents dancing rave-style on Jan. 12, 2013 at the Carrboro Century Center. (Photo Credit: The Cosmic Mass.)

UNC-Chapel Hill clarified that New Age Religious Movements like Fox’s are not that new.

“There is a long history in the United States for religious fragmentation and innovation. There is a push to find a spiritual path that fits for you,” Goodwin said.

Goodwin’s claim on America’s religious flexibility is backed by research. According to the Pew Forum for Religion and Public Life, one-in-four adults (25 percent) indicate they attend services of at least one faith other than their own, and roughly one-in-ten (12 percent) adults say they participate in the services of two or more faiths in addition to their own.

Goodwin explains that New Age rituals appeal to a certain demographic that fits Carrboro’s profile. “Chapel Hill/Carrboro is full of highly educated, upper-middle class, almost overwhelmingly white people,” she argues. “It’s what we call seekers: people that don’t have a strong affiliation with one religious group and that are looking for an essential truth.”

Tedder said Carrboro is a fertile ground for community-building initiatives: “Carrboro is a very special town; it is very open to diversity, even though when I looked around I mainly saw

white people and older folks.”

Luke Miller, a yoga teacher originally from Pennsylvania, moved to Pittsboro 13 years ago and attended The Cosmic Mass out of curiosity. “I was intrigued by the ritual and I wanted to experience what it was all about,” he said. “I danced in total ecstasy.... I was a rave kid once, I know what it is like, and this was very close.”

The ceremony was divided into four parts that are taken from Christian liturgy. The best known part being the “via negativa,” where participants are encouraged to release grief in a communal space. “It was a safe space for people to heal. I was surprised by how loud the wailing got. People were just howling; it was incredible,” Miller said.

Susan Hutton, 57, from Carrboro, said she lost her voice during the mass. “Stuff came up that I did not expect. I was a different person the next day.”

The mass lasted for two hours and 15 minutes. Two hundred people plus the 25 volunteers who set up the event raved from 7:30 p.m. to almost 10 p.m. “When I asked how many people had been to a Cosmic Mass before, only four people lifted their hands,” Tedder said.

Participants’ only complaint was that the music was too loud.

## FIND OUT MORE ONLINE

- <http://www.cosmicmasstriangle.org/>
- <http://www.thecosmicmass.com/>
- <http://www.pewforum.org/>