

Union Grove: In Tune With Times

RICHARD Gellis had waist-length hair when he opened Union Grove Music 13 years ago. Now the only remnant of that period is the long guitarist's fingernail on his right index finger.

His shop has changed, too, since its strictly acoustic beginning in a 400-square-foot Cathcart Street storefront. Electric guitars have joined the noted collection of Martins and other stringed instruments on the shop's walls.

Today, Union Grove's 5,000 square feet contains a separate room devoted to blinking state-of-the-art synthesizers; music information processors and the throbbing megalithic speakers to which they're attached. This latest inventory contrasts the first as much as Gellis' current yuppie coif contrasts his 1972 locks. In the beginning, he said, "We opened with seven guitars and nothing to plug in except for the lights."

Gellis is not alone in the Union Grove venture. His partners include Geoff Miller and Teresa Gellis. The three manage the store together, but Richard is the general manager, according to Miller, who said, "All three of us are managers, but Richard is the 'general manager.' You know, you can't have too many generals around; they get in each other's way."

Gellis plans to add more computers and video equipment to the collection — he must, he said, if he's to keep up with the electronic explosion taking place in the music industry, an explosion that last year was responsible for more synthesizer sales than those of the previous 12 combined.

Gellis' ability to fly with the winds of change is one reason his music store has lasted long enough to see

half-a-dozen others come and go. He's had to work at it; putting in those legendary 60-hour weeks of owner/manager, reading some 30 trade magazines a month; always keeping his store riding technological currents.

And keeping his clients informed, too. Union Grove gives about one free music clinic a month. Last month it sponsored three. All are designed to educate the public (Gellis has a masters in educational psychology) on matters such as computerized music, recording and the newest trends in synthesizers. "If you educate the public," he says, "the product will eventually sell." (Gellis also has a degree in economics.)

Both customer and retailer have to spend some of their time educating themselves; obsolescence attacks high-tech music accoutrements as much as it does microcomputers. But the advancements are worth the trouble, and Gellis lights up when he describes how members of his newest inventory can do things like produce written manuscripts of synthesized improvisations. Record jam sessions on floppy discs, which musicians can send via modem to fellow players across the country. Allow people to record layers of instrumental tracks with the flick of a few buttons and to produce studio-quality sounds at home.

Which is, you get the feeling, where Gellis would like to be spending more time. "I got into this business for the wrong reason: to be around music," he says. The busier Union Grove Music gets, however, the less he plays. Nevertheless, Gellis is *around* music, and his mind is thoroughly enmeshed in it and its evolution.

Perhaps he could be at home tuning his Martin now, if he had been less in tune with the evolving needs of his clientele. •

—SS



Richard Gellis flies with winds of musical change