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ORGANISERS OF NEW ZEALAND'S LARGEST CHRISTIAN FESTIVAL are hailing this year's event as the best. Early estimates of the four-day Parachute Christian Music Festival at Mystery Creek near Hamilton which finished today suggest crowd numbers were about the same as last year's record of 27,500. The Christian music festival, which began in 1989 as a biennial gathering, is now an annual fixture. It is the largest event of its kind outside the United States. This year, 170 bands – including San Diego-based double platinum band Switchfoot – had nine stages from which to entertain their fans. Highlights included Switchfoot, Red, Leigh Nash, Edwin Derricutt, and Rapture Ruckus.

THE PARACHUTE FESTIVAL experience is heading to Australia. Parachute Director Mark De Jong today announced that the popular New Zealand festival will stage its first Australian events in January 2009 possibly on the NSW central coast, with one other location near Melbourne or Brisbane. DeJong says that even if the events start as concerts or as single day festivals, they will develop into multi city multi day events on a scale similar to Big Day Out within five years. He says he expects the Australian based Parachute events will complement the existing Easterfest, Blackstump, and Rezfest Festivals. Organisers claim the New Zealand festival is the largest Christian music festival in the southern hemisphere. It attracts around 30 000 people each year and has been going for almost 20 years.

AFTER DISBANDING four years ago, the lead singer of Sixpence None The Richer - Leigh Nash - today announced that the group is set to reform. Sixpence is best known for recording *Kiss Me*, *There She Goes*, and *Breathe*. Nash – speaking on *The Reality Zone* - says she's really missed performing with other members of the band, and has already started recording new music. The group will begin touring mid March.

AUSTRALIAN CHRISTIAN POP BAND NEWSBOYS will headline REZFEST in Melbourne's west this Easter. The two day festival, sponsored by Wyndham City Council and Wyndham Ministers' Network will be held at the Point Cook Homestead on March 23 and 24. The cost is \$37 per ticket per day. Tickets available from Word Bookstores, Koorong, online at www.lightfm.com.au, or phone (03) 9741 9400. The Newsboys formed in Mooloolaba in 1985 and made its first US tour two years later. Following its 1992 album, *Not Ashamed*, the band gained international notice in the Christian music scene. Currently based in Nashville, drummer and lead vocalist Peter Furler is the one constant member still going strong since the band first formed. The group recently released *The Greatest Hits*. It features *Shine*, *Not Ashamed* and *Reality*, as well as newer standards including *Wherever We Go*, *It Is You*, *You Are My King* and others. Other acts to perform include Jars Of Clay, Alabaster Box, Planetshakers, Compliments Of Gus, Roma Waterman, and Edwin Derricutt. More information on the Newsboys is available at www.newsboys.com.