

# POINT

## Young Adult Audio Collections? Yes, It's a Library Drawing-card!

by Joy Vee Davis

**M**adonna versus the Church, Two Live Crew versus state and/or local courts, New Kids on the Block and brutality: all must be considered in designing a policy for young adult audio collections. Like Sweet Valley High or Avon's Flare series, current popular music should be included in YA collections. In concert with ALA's freedom of access to materials policy, to eliminate teenage popular music is a form of censorship in a public library collection.

Teenage popular music can draw young people into the library. In locations where YA books do not circulate well, popular music should be allotted a larger portion of the YA budget in the beginning, so as to draw teens into the collection. After an initial period, a portion of funds could then be returned to the book portion of the YA budget without losing YA patrons.

With the demise of 33 1/3 and 45 rpm records and the advent of compact discs, cost becomes a prime consideration. In the face of declining budgets, possibly a better approach is to purchase only cassettes for current popular materials and to save compact disc purchases for "classic albums." If the single video/music disc becomes widespread, it could be the contemporary replacement for the 45 rpm records, and could be considered as cost effective.

Teens want to listen to "what everyone else is listening to." Currency of library materials is always a problem regardless of format or subject content, and is, therefore, not a truly valid excuse for exclusion. When the decision is made to provide YA audio, the currency question must be the first of two major questions addressed. The easiest method of acquisition is to place a standing order with an audio vendor to supply music from one or more of the *Billboard* charts on a weekly or monthly basis. Some companies provide the same type of service as the McNaughton's best sellers service. This eliminates decision making by the staff and provides a more rounded collection than personal selection. In another approach, only requested materials could be provided; however, this tends to defeat the currency of materials and could produce an unbalanced collection. In a third plan, local radio/television play could be the determining factor; however, this must also include the ability to order materials locally and in a timely manner rather than depend on a prearranged vendor plan. Depending on funding and/or billing requirements, this might not be possible.

Another part of the currency question is the use of local recommendations versus reviews. Unless use is made of a weekly review source, such as *Billboard*, *Village Voice*, or *LA Free Press*, waiting for reviews from regular audio review sources effectively eliminates currency. If a decision is made to depend upon local information, it is expedient to consult more than one person so as to maintain a balanced collection. A combination of local radio, MTV, and teenage advisors would provide the best mix.

The second major question is whether or not to catalog the materials. Cataloging makes materials available to everyone. "Quick and not too dirty" cataloging of popular materials has been a time honored library practice. "Quick" provides for continued currency of the collection, while "not too dirty" eliminates the need for doing something more than once. When contents notes are retained in the item record, they provide extended searching access to "serious" patrons who may have more than a good beat on their minds. Often this is the only method, especially in smaller public libraries, to locate song lyrics. Cataloging also provides better tracking of both circulation and popularity and gives the non-rock oriented librarian accurate methods of weeding and replacement. Since currency is the aim of the collection, replacement, except for long term "classics," does not become a consideration.

Yes, YA audio collections have problems. Today's seemingly costlier formats and the availability of video, not just a poster, may require more consideration than simply marking a selection list. Access to, and currency and retention of, materials may seem to be more difficult. Heavy metal or rap may not be our thing. Other librarians have felt the same way about jive, swing, big band music, jazz, and rock and roll at various times. Vanilla Ice is as relevant as Sweet Valley High. Or perhaps that is another argument entirely.

... see page 98 for continued argument by Anthony Miller.

# COUNTER POINT



## We Should Enlighten, Not Just Entertain!

by Harry Tuchmayer, Column Editor

**I** think we're missing the point here! The question isn't whether or not we should be buying materials suited for young adults, but rather what types of audio materials should we purchase to meet their needs? After all, the goal of any good library should be to build its collections with the needs of all users in mind without regard to personal taste. The real trick is how do we do it without abdicating our responsibilities?

We have a responsibility to our patrons and our community to provide them with materials they want in a timely and balanced fashion. And yes, we have a responsibility to purchase materials that meet their educational or entertainment needs. But let's be realistic — we don't buy everything for everyone! Our library doesn't subscribe to *Playboy*, *PlayGirl* or *Soldier of Fortune* magazines although I'm sure more than one patron would like us to do that. Furthermore, we don't buy *The Iliad*, or *A Tale of Two Cities* in comic book format even though there is a demand! Why? We have guidelines that make it possible for us to merge popular taste with quality materials. Because we have a responsibility to provide quality materials, we don't buy just what we like. We look for reviews, discographies, and other sources to assist us in selecting the best examples of any genre.

Although the audiovisual department provides an increasingly popular service, I still have questions concerning the extent to which these collections serve a purely entertainment role in the library. I, for one, have problems with the tendency to provide these materials with little or no thought given to their place in a library. After all, what are we here for anyway, entertainment or education? Now I know we have plenty of "light" reading in the library, and the argument has always been "If I can just get them to read anything, at least it's a start," but can the same thing be said about listening to music? Before we can even talk about why we don't buy the latest rap or heavy metal CDs that have hit the charts, we need to be talking about what place popular music has in a library.

I'm willing to be reasonable and say that the issue isn't "Should we?" or "Shouldn't we?" but rather, "How can we do it effectively?" There's a fine line between satisfying demand and providing trash. We buy all types of materials that are questionable from a literary standpoint, but nonetheless have popular appeal and at least a recognizable story line. If we can buy *The Babysitters Club*, we can certainly own a recording of Vanilla Ice. How much, and to what extent do we build our collections around this type of material? Should we even consider making this material the cornerstone of our collection, or an addendum to it?

We do have an obligation to provide representative samples of today's music which should include performers from outside the mainstream, but we should do so in a balanced fashion. Relying solely on popularity would have inundated our collections with CDs by such "reputable staples" as Milli Vanilli, or some rather passé discs by Duran Duran or New Kids on the Block. Rather than cave in to the demand, we should take a more "cautious" approach and purchase retrospectively titles that have won awards or been recognized for some remarkable achievement or contribution to the world of music. Sure, we might miss the boat on timing, but we'll create a collection any teen would be proud to steal!

I'm not trying to fool anyone by suggesting that this is solely a question of collection development guidelines. I know that for some, all of the above arguments have been used to divert us away from what they believe to be the real issue of censorship! There is a critically fine line between responsibility and freedom of expression. I certainly don't want to advocate censorship, but I don't want to ignore common sense. If we don't even consider purchasing materials that promote racial hatred, why would anyone insist on circulating music that denigrates women just because it's popular? But then again... that's another whole issue for "Point/Counterpoint!"