

Fear and Loathing

So who's dazed?

And who's confused?

Ask Senator Vicente Sotto III and his Junior Drugwatchers, and they'll say it's the Eraserheads and Co. Ask the beleaguered parties and they'll point accusing fingers at the good senator and his bunch of Tipper-Gore wannabes.

For the upteenth time, rock music is feeling the brunt of what appears to be a witchhunt. Senator Tito Sotto is railing from his cushy post on the Senate floor, and he's got the Junior Drugwatch--youth arm of the Citizens Drug Watch--chorusing their amens not far behind.

Both insist that the issue they are raising is valid and timely.

According to Sotto, "The



TALKING 'HEADS. The Eraserheads with Sen. Tito Sotto and manager Ann Angela.



The Ballad of Tito Sotto

Just who is Vicente Sotto III and why is this pot calling the kettle black?

Well, the man is many things to many people: grandson of a distinguished senator; '60s rocker and a member of the Tilt Down Men, a band of relative fame during the period; prolific composer of popular hits and movie themes for local films; record producer; even a professional bowler.

For most people, though, he is Tito of Tito, Vic, and Joey fame--local cinema's Three Stooges--

famous for their slapstick routines and "green" jokes.

In the late '70s, the group hit it big with a series of comedy recordings called *Tough Hits* that lampooned popular hits. Their success with *Tough Hits* paved the way for their incursion into television where they scored even bigger in the sitcom *Iskul Bukol*. The long-running noontime show *Eat Bulaga* followed and the rest, as local viewers say, is television history.

Later, Sotto tried his hand at politics and won handily as vice

Continued on page 28



YANO. (Top) Eric Gancio and (bottom) Don



"I WANT YOU." Now on the other side of the fence, the former comedian of the toilet humor and risqué jokes vows to run after "erring" artists.

airing, promotion, and sale of records of songs and music by various rock bands tend to encourage the youth to use illegal drugs, and the songs and musical recordings of foreign heavy metal rock groups, which espouse Satanism, mock and curse God, and offend the sensibilities of our deeply religious people."

Sotto is calling for a probe "in aid of legislation" by the Senate committees on public information and mass media and public services as "these kinds of songs and music have negative effects on the morals of our people, particularly the youth."

The senator insists that "There is a need to define the limits of artistic freedom, and the artist's right of expression, which must be balanced with the duty of the State to protect public morals and promote the general welfare."

Sotto specially cited the Eraserheads' hit single "Alapaap," and argued that the song's "sole intent is to encourage the young to use or try drugs so they too can go flying among the clouds."

Two other songs, Teeth's "Laklak" and Yano's "Iskolar Ng Bayan," as well as recordings by the foreign rock group Slayer, have also been cited by Sotto in interviews and press statements.

"To my mind, the danger posed by songs of this nature is clear and real. Indeed, in the youths' impressionable minds, drug use becomes acceptable, even desirable, because their 'idols' say so," he argues. "Effectively, our government's campaign against drug abuse is completely undermined."

Sotto and the Junior Drugwatch have urged PARI and the Kapisanan Ng Mga Brodkaster Sa Pilipinas to look into the matter and "take concrete steps to stop the recording and promotion of this kind of music."

Not surprisingly, the bands concerned deny Sotto's allegations and vehemently protest being singled out in his crusade.

Other members of the "local rock community," from fellow musicians to fans to sympathetic journalists to human rights advocates, were just as outraged by Sotto's crusade, calling it "myopic," "ill-advised," "reeking of censorship," and "a publicity stunt."

After all that's been written on the controversy, and with still no end in sight, we take another close look at the people and the industry behind the issue.

Fear and . . . Continued from page 26

mayor of Quezon City. Next he ran under an anti-drug abuse platform and topped the 1992 Senate sweepstakes.

As a hardworking and fairly articulate member of the august chamber, he is considered by political pundits to be a strong contender for the vice presidency in 1998.

The '60s relic, showbiz personality, politician, pater

Painting It Black

Junior Drugwatch is a five-year-old organization with a little over 500,000 volunteers. It is currently headed by its 22-year-old National Youth Coordinator, Lachmi Cordova, and it was their controversial resolution calling for the banning of "Alapaap," "Laklak," "Iskolar Ng Bayan," and



TEETH. (Clockwise, from left) Piding Narvaja, Jerome Velasco, Mike Dizon, and Glen Jacinto.

familia, born-again-Christian insists there is no "inconsistency" in his previous standing in the industry and his stand against illegal drugs.

"I love this industry, that's why I want to keep it clean. I have always taken an anti-drug stance all my life. When I was still playing with the Tilt Down Men, two of our guitarists were kicked out because of their involvement with drugs. They eventually met tragic fates. Tito, Vic, and Joey recorded a lot of funny songs but we never promoted drugs in any way."

Of the free-spirited Escalera Brothers in *Iskul Bukol*, he says: "Yes, we were slackers, we were witty, we were malicious, but we were never on drugs. In fact, *nilalait nga namin 'yung mga addicts at mga jeproks sa Iskul Bukol*. Besides, we always lost in the end of every episode. Ang moral lesson ng show e huwag kaming tudaran."

other songs which supposedly suggest or promote drug and alcohol abuse that fired Sotto into taking his subsequent actions.

"Every week, we conduct seminars on the evils of drug abuse and its preventive awareness, as well as conduct our own after-care program for rehabilitated drug dependents," Cordova reveals. "It was during these weekend activities that rehabilitated drug users admitted getting high (on) these songs. We also received complaints from concerned parents and our own parents' support group regarding these songs' effects on their children."

This explains, they say, their resolution and subsequent press releases and radio-station petitions which, in turn, brought on a hostile backlash from many quarters.

"We would receive all sorts of crank calls like *'Dito ba ang bilihan ng drugs?'* or *'Gusto mong pumunta*



ERASERHEADS. (L-R) Ely Buendia, Raymund Marasigan, Marcus Adoro, and Buddy Zabala.

saalapaap?'" Cordova admits.

"May mga threats din. Tapos pag nakakaharap pa namin tuong mga bandang ito sa mga talk shows at forums, masyado nila kaming pini-personal. Sa amin, trabaho lang, walang personalan."

In their defense, Sotto says, "These kids are devoting most of their free time to a worthy cause. Instead of hitting them, we should be praising them."

Like Sotto, Cordova denies that she and her group are anti-rock. She says she listens to any form of music as long as she finds nothing questionable about the lyrics. Among local bands, she admits

being partial towards Afterimage, saying their songs deliver "positive values."

Bands On The Run

Forget about Slayer and other foreign heavymetal groups that supposedly espouse Satanism (they're not around to defend themselves anyway). Let's look closer to home.

The Eraserheads is arguably the most popular rock group in the country today. Their first two albums, *ultraelectromagneticpop* and *Circus*, sold more than 400,000

Continued on page 30

Fear and . . . Continued from page 28

copies combined (read: 10x platinum) and continues to do well despite this controversy.

The Eraserheads are of course no strangers to playing hardball with the law. Just last year, the band earned the ire of both PARI and the KBP for the cuss words they used in their big hit, "Pare Ko," which dealt with the frustrations of a lovestruck boy taken for a fool by the girl of his dreams. "Pare Ko" typified the Tough Hits-like tongue-in-cheek edge of the band's catchy brand of powerpop. But despite its release of a sanitized version of the song, BMG Records was initially ordered by PARI to pull out ultraelectromagneticpop from the shelves until PARI settled for the Parental Advisory label on the album's cover that was there all along.

The KBP Standards Authority, on the other hand, ordered all member stations to refrain from playing the original version---although it could have saved itself the trouble since no station even dared to air the original "Pare Ko."

"Common sense already tells us that a song with any cuss words in the lyrics is not suitable for airplay," remarked Chris Hermosisima, station manager of rock station NU107. "We're responsible enough to know that."

If we're to start from that premise, then "Alapaap," the latest hit from their Circus album, committed an even bigger sin. The band is now accused of promoting drugs through the song---something the Eraserheads deny at every opportunity.

In their letter to Sotto and the KBP, the band insisted that the song is actually an "ode to freedom" and not the "ode to drugs" that the Junior Drug Watchers makes it out to be.

Teeth and Yano also issued similar statements regarding the supposedly "subliminal" messages of their songs "Laklak" and "Iskolar Ng Bayan." Both bands and their managers are one in saying that their songs do not endorse alcohol and drug use and that, in fact, they condemn these.

Controversial or not, Teeth's debut album was certified platinum (meaning it sold at least 40,000 copies) by Warner Music Philippines, while Yano's is the recipient of a double platinum award from Alpha. Meanwhile, the Eraserheads will also release a new album this December. According to manager Ann Angala, the band believes there is nothing controversial about their new songs.

"Fine," quips Sotto, "if they're not doing what we thought they were doing, then we don't have an issue. *Tatahimik na kami dito sa Senado.*"

Can't Get No Satisfaction

The entire issue has "boy who cried wolf" plastered all over it. And because of this, despite everybody pooh-poohing and saying it's all water under the bridge, the ruckus is far from over.

Yano looks like it lost big when Alpha sent Sotto a letter informing him of their decision not to promote "Iskolar Ng Bayan" and promising to "exert their best effort to restrain its airplay." To many

music watchers, this smacked of cowardice: after all, neither the KBP nor PARI had any problems with the song.

Still, the controversy bore one good fruit. Pocholo Concepcion, Yano manager, while not yet on speaking terms with the band, has taken it upon himself to fight Alpha and defend Yano's right to creative self-expression.

Teeth also had a few setbacks when two major gigs in Tagum and Davao City were cancelled because of the impression that "Laklak" was "actually banned in Manila," says manager Richard Tan. The song, however, continues to enjoy considerable airtime and is doing well, owing, in large part, to the KBP and PARI never declaring a ban on the song.

The Eraserheads believe they had the last laugh as "Alapaap" continues to fly high in the charts.

But the Eraserheads went one step further. They personally delivered a letter to Senator Sotto which reportedly promised support to the Junior Drugwatch program. They also signified their intention to come up with an anti-drug song called "Urine Therapy."

Unfortunately, if this is a game, the band may not have been playing it too well. Their overtures to the senator have disappointed a number of fans and fellow musicians who consider the moves a cop-out. And they have not gained any friends each time they turned around and ridiculed those same overtures when in front of their fans and Junior Drugwatch members.

For its part, PARI president Danny Olivares says there's a need to come up with "better guidelines in the exercise of self-censorship and self-regulation." He now believes that PARI has attained "that delicate balance... between an artist's right and freedom of expression on one hand and society's duty to protect public interest and welfare on the other." How? With the ubiquitous display of the Parental Advisory warning on album covers.

Meanwhile, the KBP sent an advisory to all member stations "to exercise sound discretion and caution" in the airing of "Alapaap." To this end, the KBP invited the Eraserheads to a meeting to discuss the issue.

But, like it or not, Tito Sotto and his Junior Drugwatchers have emerged the biggest winners in this rock-and-roll circus. Their crusade shows that---fortunately or unfortunately---it has popular support, as evidenced by the prompt, and mostly favorable, response that this has elicited from PARI, the KBP, record companies, religious groups, and even the bands concerned.

What media backlash there is, Junior Drugwatch is dealing with directly. The group is now looking for "songs that promotes positive values" which it intends to endorse to further its cause.

As for Sotto, he expects the Senate to act on his resolution soon. At the same time, he himself acknowledges that banning songs and curtailing anybody's freedom of expression is not the best way to address the nation's drug problems. But the reality remains that the senator is not alone in objecting to music that is "socially damaging to the youth."