



## KIMBERLY FREY

Kimberly is a graduate—studying Equine Science from Denison. Kimberly spends free time with her horses and enjoys photography.

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Swimsuit from Gadzook's. Photo by Peter Rocha.



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Kayla is a sophomore Interdisciplinary Studies major from Anahuac. Kayla enjoys singing, playing the piano, dancing and water-skiing.

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Swimsuit from Dillard's. Photo by Peter Rocha.

# Pop music's war of the words ... and of the warning labels

By Tom Moon  
special to Thumbs Up

Like 13-year-olds cranking up the stereo to send a message to bickering parents, those involved in the escalating debate over record labeling are doing whatever it takes these days to make themselves heard.

In the last year, as labeling legislation has gone from conservative pipe dream to serious consideration in at least 10 statehouses, everyone has become an expert on the subject of song lyrics. Especially those found in rap and heavy-metal music. And even before a single piece of labeling legislation becomes law, these "experts" are having an effect on what we are hearing.

Record retailers are experts. Worried about the passage of labeling bills that would differ from state to state, several regional record-store chains are removing from their racks any album that could possibly offend. At other chains, officials have formulated lists of titles no longer for sale to customers under 18.

Radio programmers are experts. Sensing a shift toward stricter interpretation of obscenity guidelines by the Federal Communications Commission, many no longer feel safe programming music with "adult" lyrics, even in the late evening. Thus they ponder their playlists, deciding what to censor.

Even the governor of Florida is an expert. Expressing outrage over the sexually explicit lyrics of Miami rappers 2 Live Crew, Gov. Bob Martinez—whose knowledge of pop music had previously gone unnoticed—last month suggested that the group's recordings might be criminally obscene, making their distribution illegal under federal racketeering statutes. The music failed to meet the state definition of obscenity, but local courts in Florida are investigating whether community standards have been violated. Some retailers have responded by pulling the albums.

That some lyrics might give parents pause is not in dispute. Over the last few years, explicit themes and rough language have given pop music—particularly rap—a gritty street realism. Pennsylvania state Rep. Ron

Gamble, D-Allegheny County, author of mandatory-labeling legislation under consideration in Harrisburg, says he seeks merely to provide "simple consumer information" for those who wish to avoid such music.

Equally indisputable, however, is the specter of censorship such legislation poses. Songs with potentially offensive lyrics do exist, rocker Don Henley last month told reporters at the Grammy Awards, but that "(doesn't) mean we should cast aside the U.S. Constitution and go back to (the witch hunts of Salem)."

Proponents of mandatory labeling "are saying that (popular) music exists outside the spectrum of protected speech, which of course is not the case," said Dave Marsh, editor of *Rock and Roll Confidential* magazine. "The people who want to label records are frightened by the loud and distinct voices of groups like (rappers) NWA, and if they win even this one battle, then degree by degree, we will lose our free-speech rights."

Since December 1985, when they signed an agreement with the Parents' Music Resource Center (PMRC)—the group founded by a number of well-connected Washington women—the country's major recording companies have voluntarily affixed warning labels to their more provocative releases. At the gathering of the National Association of Record Merchandisers two weeks ago, plans were discussed for the six majors to adopt a uniform label that would read: "Parental advisory: explicit lyrics."

But the industry's attempt to defuse the debate is proving counterproductive. The 119-store Disc Jockey chain and its wholesale arm, known as WaxWorks, have announced that they no longer will order recordings that bear warning labels. In regions where Disc Jockey dominates the market, the result is de facto censorship.

"We've always predicted that (even voluntary) stickering would create too many problems for retailers," Bill Adler, of rap-oriented Rush Artist Management, told *Billboard* last month. "And that some of them would eventually respond by declining to carry

stickered albums at all."

It's doubtful that even PMRC could have foreseen the predicament in which the recording industry now finds itself with labeling legislation in Pennsylvania, Missouri, Iowa, Arizona, Maryland, Rhode Island, Delaware, Virginia and Tennessee, and similar bills being considered in Idaho and Alaska. Spearheading the effort in Pennsylvania is Tipper Gore, wife of Sen. Al Gore Jr., D-Tenn., the PMRC continues to advocate voluntary labeling rather than legislation.

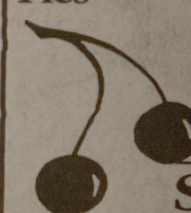
But last fall, the debate over record labeling intensified in a hailstorm of rhetoric from the clergy, free-speech advocates, child psychologists and others. At that time, Gamble's bill had been defeated when considered on its own, was amended to broad anti-drug legislation. That bill, SB938, was passed by the House in December by a vote of 198-2. It is before the Pennsylvania Senate Rules Committee. No hearings have been scheduled.

Critics of the Gamble legislation, which has been cited as an influence on bills in several states, charge that its proponents used sensationalism and selective fact-gathering in presenting the plan to the House.

Gamble's amendment would mandate that any album containing "objectionable" material

Please see Labeling

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