

Consent raps to a different beat

By Darcy Diamond

When the O.N. Klub on Sunset Boulevard sponsored its "Rap Night" several months ago, many trendy new-wave people showed up just to find out what rap was all about. After all, Los Angeles has not been a hotbed of rap music activity and many people were hard-pressed to even define it.

Though they hardly made a dent here in Los Angeles, rap music singles—a combination of sassy East Coast "talking" over a rhythmic, heavy bass track—are selling remarkably well in all major cities. Philadelphia even has a 24-hour, all-rap radio station. Groups like the Sugarhill Gang, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five and Sequence are blasting through the radio waves with short, often didactic speeches about the state of things around the neighborhood block.

But back to L.A. Out of nowhere during this "show and tell" rap night at the O.N. Club, two white gents named John Callahan and David Hughes appeared in dark suits, black shirts and white ties. They picked up the microphones on the tiny stage and proceeded to syncopate back and forth to taped music about being gay in Los Angeles! What a surprise. The people in the audience, usually blasé and bored at such events, cranked their heads around to listen to the two guys up there performing a rap entitled "Fight Back."

A rap group in laid-back L.A.? A rap group that, unlike the majority of rap artists, is not black? A duo that also addresses the issue of repression of homosexuals? The fellows who made their surprise appearance at the O.N. Klub that night call themselves Age of Consent, and will be giving Los Angeles audiences a second slam of social rapping tomorrow night at the O.N. Klub with new member Andrea Gardiner and the intellectual electronic group, The Brainiacs.

Callahan, a robust former schoolteacher from the East Coast who found himself in Los Angeles as the result of a marital breakup, provides the "heavy" street-wise rappin' to Hughes' reedy-thin rhyming complaints. Gardiner provides a high-pitched voice of question and expostulation.

The three come from very different backgrounds. Callahan was a theater aficionado, directing playhouse and avant-garde presentations in Rhode Island and Connecticut. Gardiner and Hughes met during the '60s as members of the United Farm Workers Union, marching and campaigning together for Cesar Chavez's organization. The three work at clerical office jobs by day—rumor has it that Callahan has been locking himself in the corporate lunchroom of the industrial complex where he works to blast the tapes and rehearse.



Age of Consent, from left: John Callahan, Andrea Gardiner and David Hughes.

"David was into performance art downtown when I met him," explained Callahan. "And then through our friendship, this rap thing evolved. Andrea had been David's friend for years, and in one of his performance pieces, she's talking on tape.

Gardiner, who is not gay, believes in personal freedoms for everyone, and was brought into the group to voice more feelings about women's issues.

"When I saw the hassles and repressions, and just the gay guys that get beat up beyond recognition as they walk out of bars by homo haters, I thought somebody ought to address the problem and not Hollywoodize the issue like the Village People do," said Callahan.

"I was always into black music, growing up on the East Coast. Rhythm and blues, and then even disco became music of interest to me."

Hughes made a grimacing face at the mention of "disco."

"Yeah, well, David and I disagree about disco's merits, but you've got to agree, it became gay people's anthemic music. Let's face it, gay clubs had a hard time providing live bands all the time so gay clubs were stuck with taped music.

"And, although disco has a bad name now, mainly because white people regarded it as race music, the best of disco contained themes of sexual liberation which is socially valuable. You know, the sings false[?] let me go, let me be sexy, let me be me..."

How do they feel about working in a genre dominated by black artists who address different issues?

"Well," said Callahan, "I sincerely doubt that our tunes will be recorded by any of the established rap labels. I've sent stuff around, but I'm sure the black music establishment doesn't particularly want to know about gay white rappers in L.A."

Fortunately, Los Angeles is a melting pot of eclectic talents. There is a large supply of small, independent record labels, and Age Of Consent aims to release some of their more memorable raps on one of the renegade labels. Age Of Consent is a professional and tough little unit; their marvelous humor has a sense of conscience. They aren't heavy, they're just rappin'.