

Toronto boasts North America's first record label trading exclusively in hate rock

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And that's just what they'll do.

One of these days these boots are gonna stomp all over Jews.

- Toronto race rock band RaHoWa , perverting Nancy Sinatra's

1960s song called "These Boots are Made for Walkin'."

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THIS ISN'T nicey-nicey pop music with a danceable beat. It's way beyond the pain threshold and obnoxious in the extreme, with lyrics tailored to offend any decent right-thinking person.

It's the kind of music and message that anyone would love to hate.

A group of Toronto-based white power musicians has started Resistance Records for the express purpose of hawking some of the most virulently racist hate propaganda ever recorded. Their aim is to attract a new generation of recruits to their brand of neo-Nazi racism.

Enlisting popular music to influence teens is hardly a novel idea. But using music as a deliberate tool to market hate propaganda introduces a chilling twist to the much-debated issue of censorship in music.

Rock, rap, jazz, the blues and other forms of popular expression have a long and honorable tradition of breaking taboos. Is race rock just another way for youth to push the envelope? Or have things finally gone just too far?

Dan Hart, program director at CIUT, the University of Toronto's student-run radio station, says that comparing race rock to other forms of youthful musical non-conformity gives it a veneer of respectability it simply doesn't deserve.

"I wouldn't sanction it with that umbrella," Hart says. "It's propaganda; it's a pamphlet; it is clearly about hate and the misrepresentation of history."

Karen Gordon, a CBC music and arts critic, says the idea that rock music provides a handy and legitimate vehicle for sedition may itself be outdated.

"Pop music, which was once a music of rebellion, has been co-opted by the marketing people, so I'm not certain that this notion of it being a taboo thing exists any more," Gordon says.

Hate rock isn't art, she says. "It's another marketing device. If you want to sell your beer to 18-to-24-year-old men, you sponsor a rock tour, and this is just another vehicle for selling hate propaganda. This shouldn't be confused with artists doing legitimate protest music, such as rallying cries for the oppressed. This is propaganda, not artistry."

Resistance Records is the brainchild of 23-year-old skinhead George Burdi. Known as Reverend Eric Hawthorne to his followers, Burdi is also head of the Toronto branch of the militant white power group Church of the Creator and lead singer of the "racialist rock" band RaHoWa (an acronym for Racial Holy War).

"Music is the ultimate form of bringing a message to the masses," Burdi says. "Youth seek role models through musicians. They say, 'Wow, I love this band and if this is the opinion of the band, then it is my opinion too.'" The label, North America's first to trade exclusively in hate rock, was started last spring with \$50,000 in seed money and a Detroit box office number. From there, tapes from the label's eight bands are shipped to Canadian destinations.

Bands with names such as Nordic Thunder, Aggravated Assault, Aryan and the Voice have all been signed to Burdi's label. "The market's phenomenal," he says. "We have a monopoly on it and it's virtually untapped."

Burdi says the label's Detroit address allows Resistance Records to dodge Canada's strict laws and take advantage of America's more liberal rights to free speech.

Tapes are also easily shipped over the border and are rarely checked by customs agents, he says. That allows the free flow of material to Canada that, if produced here, would likely be banned under Canadian laws.

In recent years, obscenity laws were used in both the U.S. and Canada to crack down on recordings considered objectionable. Three years ago, an album by Miami rappers 2 Live Crew called *As Nasty as They Wanna Be* was found to be obscene by a U.S. federal court judge.

Though it would be a stretch to label race rock as obscene, minority rights advocates say that Canada's hate laws should be used to crack down on white supremacist bands.

Bernie Farber of the Canadian Jewish Congress says he resents suggestions that banning albums by hate groups is an attack on free speech. "Canada is not the United States. We happen to have laws dealing with forms of speech and it is a law that has finely balanced our sacred right to free speech with the rights of minorities not to be harmed or vilified."

Gordon agrees. "These groups are selling hatred so it should fall under the laws dealing with hate propaganda; it's not music."

American jazz writer Nat Hentoff says he can see only danger in curbing free speech rights. "There is no legitimate rationale for censorship. Once you start saying what speech is okay and what is not you're setting up a chilling effect."

Hentoff says hatemongers must be countered in open forums rather than driven underground. "I would rather have the kind of society where as awful, as wrong, as hateful as that kind of speech is, you rebut it. The Canadian Jewish Congress have access to forums, why come down and prosecute speech when you can rebut it."

Songs with titles such as "Coon Hunt," "Race Riot" and "White Revolution" will certainly never zoom to the top of the mainstream charts. Nevertheless, Farber says, racial rock poses a very real threat.

"It's literally the new wave in hate promotion," he says. "They know that the best way to attract young people today is through music, hard-driving, hard-hitting music. And it's not as if it is being done underground. It is being done in full view of the authorities. It is almost taunting society in many respects."

Farber says police appear reluctant to press charges against racial rock bands - even though a man arrested in the vicious beating of a Tamil dishwasher was seen hours before at a RaHoWa concert in Downsview last month.

"Parents have to be concerned that kids just wanting to attend a rock concert can be easily manipulated by these various groups into a hateful mindset ripe for indoctrination," Farber says. "This is not about equal rights for whites; it is about straight discrimination."

Bill Bobek, publicity manager at Much Music in Toronto, says he believes that artists must be allowed to express their points of view. "For me, it is a free speech issue," he says. "Anyway, who is going to judge what is appropriate? Someone who doesn't know what a 17-year-old is going through because they have forgotten?"

Much Music does have a committee that vets videos and Bobek admits that controversial videos are rarely aired. But he doesn't see this as a form of censorship. Much is merely exercising its right to choose what it will show in the same way that newspapers and magazines select what material will run in their publications.

A show called Too Much for Much airs videos considered too hot for regular programming on the music station. But generally, Much refuses to play any videos that don't meet community standards, Bobek says.

"Racist" rock lyrics are replete with what Burdi admits are offensive words and images, guaranteed to attract the young and offend the old: "Some of the music being put out is raw hatred. It is just so offensive, it is just so crude that it can't help but attract attention just by the sheer audacity of having the guts to be so politically incorrect."

Burdi said that no matter what the Canadian authorities decide to do with their music - ban it or ignore it - it will sell. "I invite the system to try to stop it. I invite them to, if they did ban an album, everyone would want to have it, and it would spread like wildfire in the underground.

"Music is fed on controversy. Ignore us and we get huge because we can develop unhindered. Attack us and we get huge because you create controversy and the youth want to hear us. Either way, we win."

He points to sales of an album by U.S. rapper Ice-T that included a song called "Cop Killer." The album shot to the top of the charts when community groups demanded it be banned.

Bobek agrees that young people will seek out music that has been driven underground. But he sees only a very small market for racist music. "I don't think you can legislate this away. The best thing the authorities can do is show young people how wrong this is." Racial rock is big in Europe. Two labels, Rock-O-Rama and Rebelles Europeens, have bands that regularly crack the Top 10 in Germany. RaHoWa, which was signed to Rebelles Europeens, jumped labels in the spring. But Burdi said his band along with several others on Resistance Records will be distributed by the French company in Europe.

Other European skin-head groups such as No Remorse (which played in Ottawa several years ago), Skrewdriver, Brutal Attack and Skullhead, draw crowds in the thousands at their concerts in Britain, Burdi says.

Bound for Glory, a racial rock band from Minnesota, sold more than 20,000 copies of its last album through the mails. "That's pretty big for a band with a European label, for a record that can't be put on record store shelves," he says.

"You have to also remember that there's probably 10 copies dubbed for every copy sold, especially because of its lack of availability. So 20,000 copies is just the tip of an iceberg. It could be more like 200,000."

Caption: Star color photo (RANKIN): RACISM ROCK: The members of Toronto white supremacist band RaHoWa . Star drawing on page B5 (Raffi Anderian): rock guitar.

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