

It's Donna Summer at the moment, but the Beatles, Stones even Lena Horne have all run into radio censorship. So this week,



● BANNED: DONNA SUMMER ("Love To Love You Baby")/10cc ("Rubber Bullets,")/JUDGE DREAD ("Big Six", etc)/CANNED HEAT ("Amphetamine Annie")

ROCK MUSIC, says David Bowie, is the devil's music. Evil and nasty. Bowie has always been one for extreme stances, but ever since Elvis caused an outrage by moving in a provocative manner, rock music has been under close scrutiny from an establishment convinced of its subversiveness.

The changing moral attitudes that have occurred in the last ten years don't appear to be portrayed in music, the evidence suggesting that the BBC has eased its standards very little in deciding permissibility.

The case in the news at present concerns a black American singer called Donna Summer and her single, "Love To Love You Baby," which the BBC are declining to play (they never actually "ban" a record).

The lyrics are tame, and the controversy has been caused by a bout of heavy breathing, intriguingly explained away by Donna as being exaggerated through suffering from an unpleasant toothache.

Radio Luxembourg must be delighted it has become a hit as they're the one station who came out unequivocally in support of the record.

The BBC's Charles McLelland explains that it's unsuitable for family listening, but there's no bar on it being played in the evenings—yet Radio 1 gets very little airplay in the evening.

London's Capital Radio have adopted a similar attitude. The single is certainly less explicit than the Jane Birkin hit, "Je t'aime," which was also banned, but the dubiousness of the BBC's banning policy is not particularly in the act of banning but in the sheer inconsistency of it.

In the current chart there are two examples of records which, by their ambiguity, are as suggestive as the Summer disc—"We Do It" by R. & J. Stone ("what a lovely record that is," Tony Blackburn) in which the happy couple blissfully tell us they do it every night, every day, every possible way," and

Who's "Squeeze Box" which drips with double meanings. "Only people with a poet's minds could read anything into that," John Entwistle has said of "Squeeze Box," but when informed it was the one with the heavy breathing she said she'd heard about it. She thought the association had received complaints about it but considered that if the BBC had banned it they must have a very good reason.

"This is something that recurs from time to time—not regularly, but every so often we receive complaints about a certain record and we follow it up from there and take it to the appropriate authority.

"We're not here to ferret things out. We haven't got time to sit listening to every programme on pop music, waiting for something we thought would be undesirable.

"Certainly not recently, when we've been so involved with the Linda Lovelace thing and the other things. In recent times I think Top Of The Pops has been much more middle of the road and there have been less complaints in general recently. People are very more alert than they were when they were often far more offensive than the others.

Lou Reed's "Walk On The Wild Side" broke every code of good taste going, by referring directly to transvestites, homosexuals, prostitution, male and female, and hard drugs—the lot.

The BBC played it frequently, without a blush. We attempt here to give as thorough a list as possible of those records refused a hearing on the radio, bearing in mind that a growing number of potentially offensive but obscure songs, particularly

album tracks, were never even considered for airplay in the first place.

The feature wouldn't be complete, however, without comment on one of the most celebrated "dirty" discs of the lot—"Wet Dream" by Jamaican reggae singer Max Romeo.

For ingenuity, Romeo's explanation of what the song was about deserves some sort of award, and is worth repeating here. Please bear in mind the title and the fact that the main lyric of the song was Romeo repeatedly urging "push it up, push it up."

It's not a dirty song at all. It's only immoral people who think it is dirty. I never had any bad ideas when I wrote the song. I dreamt that I was asleep, lying with my girlfriend, and it was raining, and the roof leaked, and I got wet.

"That was what I meant by 'Wet Dream.' And then I asked my girl to move over so I could get a stick and the happy couple blissfully tell us they do it every night, every day, every possible way," and

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"The problem here is that the individual producer or deejay may himself not be aware of the danger. I'm all for the BBC and ITV drawing a very clean line on this."

"And when you have a record about sex, death, it depends solely on how you treat it. Some of our great poetry has dealt with death and there's nothing wrong if it is done in the right way. It's the same as sex, isn't it? They're essential parts of life."

"O'H MY God," groaned controller of BBC Radio One and Two, when the name of Donna Summer was brought to his attention.

"It's a bit more complicated than you might imagine," he said. "The official policy with records of this nature is, there is no policy—each one is judged purely and simply on its own merits."

"Sometimes there are 80 singles a week released, and you can't have a policy on all of them. Every record is treated on its own individual merits."

"I certainly never use the word 'ban,' anyway. With the Donna Summer record, I merely said I considered the record unsuitable for family listening. The sex bit was far too overt."

"I mean it's... it's... SIMULATED ORGASM. There's no doubt about that. There's nothing to stop the record being played at suitable times when there will not be a family audience—that's up to the individual producers."

"Basically, with all records we leave it up to the sense and responsibility of the individual producer to decide whether a record is suitable for playing."

"After all, he's a pro, and by and large that's how it's dealt with, but in the Donna Summer case, one or two things were brought to my attention to ask for a directive. I don't think 'Do It' or 'Squeeze Box' are comparable."

"It's all in the mind, really. If you have a dirty mind then yes, you will make those assumptions about the records, but there's absolutely no doubt about what's supposed to be happening on the Donna Summer record."

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"We feel, and quite rightly so in my opinion, that certain records are not suitable for the majority of our audience. Personally, I should be most perturbed if my son heard the Donna Summer record."

"We have a responsibility to our listeners, and we consider that this record is only suitable for programming at times when mainly adults will be listening."

"It's a question of opinion whether you think 'We Do It' is specifically about sex. In my opinion it's suitable for us."

"It's c'e 'Head Room' will not be played. We would not consider playing it. I heard the record and formed the opinion that it is unsuitable for general programming."

Politics are also out.

"I don't care, I really don't. It can't harm sales—you only need to sell to one per cent of the population to get a gold disc, apart from exhortations like the Queen record, and I don't see any need to feature them."

Records with "four letter words" are, however, "a different story." The use of "language which might be offensive to our audience," he says, "is usually blatant and totally unnecessary."

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NOT so with London's Capital Radio. Programme controller Aidan Day told MM:

"The thing is, what you don't know won't harm you. The BBC used to play 'Walk On The Wild Side,' which referred to lots of things, and it's really silly they should ban the Donna Summer record. We all know what she's doing and that she hasn't just got bad toothache, and if some people find it erotic, good for them."

"It's like on 'Head Room,' saying 'a flick of the wrist would do.' We all know what it means—you've done it, I've done it, we've all done it, but a kid probably wouldn't understand it, so where's the harm?"

"I don't think you suffer too much if a record is banned. In some cases it can enhance it and give an air of mystique. I certainly can't see anything wrong with commenting on a political situation. This is part of our job."

RADIO LUXEMBOURG has been a more relaxed attitude to the subject of questionable records. Said Ken Evans, head of the English language service: "When it comes down to it we endeavour to maintain a very open policy. We did not ban either 'Je t'aime' or 'Love To Love You Baby.' I find nothing at all objectionable in the Donna Summer record."

He believes that material of a similar nature is widely available through television and literature and has played both on Luxembourg.

In fact, the only records he remembers having been thought unsuitable are Judge Dread's various epics. "The lyrics are quite blatant. We decided not to feature them."

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