

Snap! It's a queen's gesture of dismissal and defiance. It's also the name and logo of a rap group whose club-anthem single, "The Power," conquered European and U.S. radio. On July 19 the group's lead singer snapped, and gay activists snapped right back with a vengeance.

Snap played a benefit for a local gay community health center at the Boston club Buddies. It was their second gig that night, and they were tired. After the group's brief set, lead singer Turbo Harris claims, "someone grabbed at my ass." Exhausted and enraged, he called for the club manager, demanding to know if Snap's management had been told this was a gay club.

At this point, accounts diverge. Harris says he was so angry, he can't remember any details. Seven witnesses claim that he throttled club owner Dennis Moreau, kicked bar back Kevin Riley, and shouted, "Do I look like a fucking faggot to you?"

Robert Levy, a 22-year-old columnist for the gay paper the *Boston Mirror*, was one of the seven who witnessed the outburst. Within hours, he was telephoning the press and radio stations. A member of the direct-action group Queer Nation, Levy quickly organized a boycott movement, ZAP Snap, with 75 fellow activists and became its spokesman.

Within days of the incident, Boston's WXKS-FM dropped the group from its playlist. WILD-AM followed suit. "I saw the incident, and it struck close to home," Levy says. "Boston has seen an explosion of gay bashing lately, and stations and deejays were receptive [to the boycott]."

Arista Records' dance-music promo man George Hess could see he had a problem: a boycott proliferating before his eyes. Hess was promoting the band's second single, "Oops Up," and had 80 deejays reporting it to *Billboard's* dance chart. "It was headed for number one, no question," he recalls. "I watched 18 deejays dump it that week. That put it to bed."

On July 27 the *Boston Herald* quoted Harris's offer of apology. On July 30 he released a letter to Moreau that insisted, "My actions were irrational and unexplainable." Harris extended his "humble apology" and offered to perform a benefit concert at the club.

ZAP Snap accused Harris of "lame and insulting excuses and apologies." The boycotters didn't buy the plea of panic and ignorance "from a performer who has been largely supported by lesbian/gay clubs and fans." The New York chapter of Queer Nation issued a demand that Snap record an anti-gay-bashing song. Snap has agreed to produce an "antiviolence/antidiscrimina-

tion" song.

ZAP Snap may have exaggerated the group's dependence on gay clubs and fans, but it wasn't alone in rejecting the apology. On Aug. 3 Newbury Comics, a seven-store chain, pulled Snap's records from its shelves. Maurice Starr, a partner in Snap's management firm and producer of New Edition and New Kids on the Block, told reporters, "A lot of people snapped at were friends of mine. I told my partner, Dick Scott, that he should relieve the group, but the decision is his."

ZAP Snap has been feeling a bit intoxicated with the success of its efforts, and it has a right to, despite Snap's continued success on mainstream radio.

Activists do well to pick their targets carefully. In this case, the enemy is gay bashing and homophobia and not Harris, however handy an object lesson he may seem to provide. On record, Snap never degraded gays or lesbians, which can't be said of Axl Rose, Sam Kinison, Andrew Dice Clay, Big Daddy Kane, Eddie Murphy, Heavy D., 2 Live Crew, or Audio Two. None of them has ever publicly apologized to the gay community or offered to perform benefit concerts. ZAP Snap has proven a bit blind to this larger perspective. "I saw what Turbo did in that club," Levy retorts, "and I want to destroy his career."

Harris deserves to be prosecuted for both the alleged assault and hate crimes. But ZAP Snap might be advised to initiate a dialogue out of this incident rather than

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hunger for revenge against a young man suffering from homophobia.

In his July 30 letter, Harris offered to perform a benefit concert "for a nonprofit organization involved in gay rights activism or the fight against AIDS." In our interview, Harris denied that he was ready to sing for gay rights.

"I'm not gonna stick my neck out for *one* group of people," Harris said. "It can't be that I'm just doing this for the black people or the gay people or the Muslims. This is a world problem."

If Harris wants to make a universal appeal for tolerance and empowerment that explicitly includes gays and lesbians, I've got no problem with that. But the conversation does lead one to wonder how well Harris even read the letter he signed.

"I never intended to [disrespect] the gay community," Harris carefully explains. "I'm like a mirror, though. Whatever you put in a mirror, you're going to get back a reflection of it. If I'm approached on an ignorant or violent basis, you can expect that back. But if I'm approached on a positive basis, I welcome it."

Harris approached club owner Moreau and his employee Riley on "an ignorant and violent basis." He got back a massive lawsuit and an angry boycott. I would like to think of his apology, though, as a positive approach that can be usefully reflected in kind. He is no hero, but he could become an ally. That's where the real power is.

—Adam Block



Harris: "Someone grabbed at my ass."