

# Marky Mark threatens to give the church a good name.

BY ADAM BLOCK



"We've been working on that Madonna song 'Like a Virgin,'" Milly Del Rubio confided recently. I suggested that she listen to John Wesley Harding's acoustic solo of "Like a Prayer." Harding sang it straight—like a folk song. Del Rubio's group, the Del Rubio

Triplets, could do them both as a medley. "Yes," she considered, "but we'd have to make up our own arrangement."

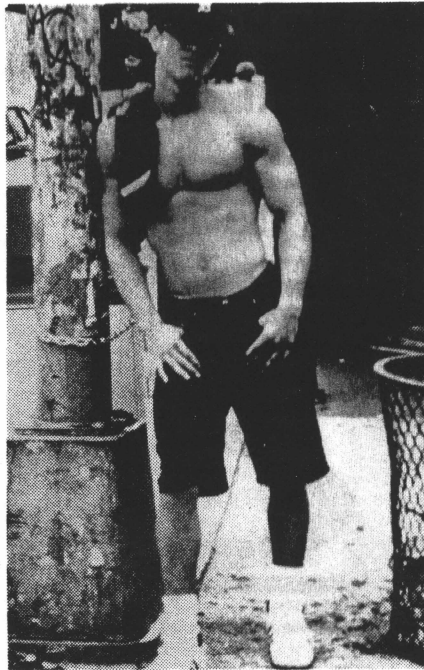
"Not with Madonna," I assured her. Still, it would be a perfect fit.

Milly is one of the triplets: three ageless glamour gals who never miss morning mass or let down an audience, whether at a suburban old folks' home, a big-city queer bar, or a Tower Records parking lot. With three acoustic guitars, matching low-cut outfits, platinum hair, and a rhythmic sensibility that owes a lot to the polka, they come on like Madonna's mercurial maiden aunts.

The gals have just put out two new CDs (shades of Springsteen) on their own label. Both discs find them fearless in their choice of material. *Christmas Belles* was pressed a bit late for the holidays, but even in July who could fail to marvel at a disc that covers "The Chipmunk Song" and Elvis's "Blue Christmas" on successive cuts?

Matching their talents against alien material never daunts the Del Rubios. In the course of *Whip It's* 14 cuts, they cover James Brown ("I Feel Good"), Aretha Franklin ("Chain of Fools"), the Rolling Stones ("Satisfaction"), and Devo (the title cut). And the arrangements are their own. The a cappella break on the Everly Brothers' "Wake Up, Little Susie" approaches glossolalia. The Andrews Sisters, or even the Gabor sisters, seem strangely sterile next to the Del Rubios. I can't wait for them to do Madonna.

Marky Mark is a practicing Catholic who threatens to give the church a good name. The buffed pud-boy is getting as famous for



Rapper Marky Mark

"I'm glad gay people are not hiding."

flashing his underwear as he is for his endearing musical chops. Sampling Loleata Holloway's 1980 disco hit "Sweet Sensation," he crafted "Good Vibration," last year's smash hit from his debut LP, *Music for the People* (Interscope). He has since followed up with "Wildside," where he samples Lou Reed's 1973 queer classic "Walk on the Wild Side."

Appearing shirtless in an iron-pumping video and in a savory Bruce Weber portfolio in the recent issue of *Interview* has helped him become a ubiquitous pinup boy on homos' refrigerators: the Soloflex boy of the '90s.

Thus, it's swell to find that while he goes to confession, he features a pro-condom pep talk in his stage show. Although he's hetero, he's quick to say that he is comfortable around queers and is even flattered that they find him attractive. He recently told a reporter from the *San Francisco Bay Times*, a gay newspaper, "I'm glad that gay people are so free with their words, and they're not hiding.... If I were gay, I wouldn't want to have to hold it in."

It's rare for a male pop star with teen appeal to be so plainspoken and supportive

about queers. It's rarer still in the world of rap, where Mark has at least one foot tapping.

In their welcome new work, *Bring the Noise* (Harmony Books), authors Michael Gonzales and Havelock Nelson chronicle the last decade of hip-hop culture in over 80 profiles of prominent rappers. The authors are streetwise rap partisans. They are also keen critics, alert to the sexism and homophobia that riddle rap music.

Hear Gonzales and Nelson on the duet that Too Short and Ice Cube crafted in defense of calling women bitches ("Ain't Nothin' but a Word to Me"): "The rhymes are are nothing more than sexist garbage that could cause leading feminists like Queen Latifah and Monie Love to jump them both in some dark alley and feed their balls to other dogs."

At a recent press conference held for the release of the Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy's new single, "Language of Violence," black gay filmmaker Marlon Riggs noted a tradition "of hip-hop lyrics that seem to empower the black man by dissing 'hos, bitches, and faggots." Riggs admitted his amazement that lead singer Michael Franti's "notion of liberation and humanity included lesbians and gay men." Added Riggs: "This is an exceptional single, which I believe will make history." [See story on page 87.]

The cut is powerful, disturbing, and effective. It deserves to be heard by every school kid and teacher, fag and fag basher in the country. Its success may provide some measure of how deep-seated homophobia remains in the hip-hop community.

Franti's group has toured with "electric socialist" Billy Bragg (another rare hetero who has written songs sensitively from a queer's perspective), but that's a long way from hip-hop's home base. Can the Disposable Heroes tour with Ice Cube, Ice T, Queen Latifah, or Public Enemy and put a gay-positive message across to an audience that hasn't heard it and probably doesn't want to? If Disposable Heroes is going to make history, the band had best come up with a video as engaging as Marky Mark's. Hell, maybe he'd even appear in it. ▼