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## Virgin Promotes Developing Artists

BY CHRIS MORRIS

LOS ANGELES—Virgin Records will take four of its developing artists directly to the consumer with an ambitious marketing campaign centered on the '96 election race and continuing



PLUTO

through the Christmas selling season into 1997.

Titled "Fo(u)r Y(m)our(e) (Y)ears"—a pun on both "Four More Years" and "For Your Ears"—the marketing program will focus on four recently released Virgin albums: singer/songwriter Sam Phillips' "Omnipod (It's Only A Flesh Wound Lambchop)" (Billboard, July 6); Vancouver-based modern rock band Pluto's self-titled release (Billboard, July 20); San Francisco-based pop-rockers Brendan Benson's "One Mississippi" (Billboard, July 27); and rock-edged Seattle singer/songwriter Kristen Barry's "the beginning, the

middle, the end."

The four-tiered campaign includes an infomercial-styled cable TV program; a contest aimed at colleges featuring a grand-prize award of cash toward school tuition or expenses and a free concert; strategic placement of a CD sampler with consumers via non-music retail outlets and music publications; and a first-quarter promotional tour.

Virgin senior director of marketing and artist development (U.S.) Bruce Henderson explains, "We recognize that, even when it's not the fourth quarter, it's really competitive at radio, and retail is having their own problems. The thing that drives any project, really, is the consumer. I think that a lot of companies end up ignoring that they don't really market to the consumer."

Barry's manager, Colleen Combs of Curtis Management in Seattle, notes, "With new artists, you have that sort of Catch-22 thing. Where once upon a time you used to be able to get airplay based on listener response and if the programmer actually liked it, now you get caught in that rut—MTV doesn't want you if radio hasn't added you, and radio doesn't want you if MTV hasn't added you... It's always been sort of crowded out there, but with that aspect

of it, you have to go back to... grassroots [marketing] and actually go for the consumer market and really go out there and work."

Ian Jones, guitarist/vocalist for Pluto, says the program should have a positive impact for his band: "It totally helps. We've been on tour for three months. You're out there touring, and it helps to get people out there to the rock shows. It just gets your name out more. Then people can explore it for themselves, and eventually, they'll find out that it rocks, and they'll buy it."

Jones adds that the campaign could have an effect extending to the principal audience of college students. "College, that's where the music is. Then from there, it's something that people at modern rock stations will pick up."

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BARRY

year-end issues of Alternative Press, Kulture, and Magnet. Virgin will run ads supporting the marketing campaign in Slant, Giant Robot, Cake, and Might.

"Also, the samplers are being used in two other ways," Henderson says. "Through some independent sources, we're using them to get into nonmusic retail outlets for in-store play, like clothing stores and hair salons. They'll have stickers available there as well as bounce-back cards, so that people can send back for some of the cool stuff that we've made. In addition to that, whenever our corporate sponsor is may take a quantity and use those in their stores as a premium as well."

Nonmusic outlets in the same 20 markets that will serve as the focus of the concert contest will be serviced

### VIRGIN PROMOTES DEVELOPING ARTISTS

(Continued from page 11)

segment featuring Pluto, Benson, and Barry. The half-hour program, which reaches a potential audience of 20 million in the U.S., airs three or four times weekly in every market in which it is carried. In terms of content, it is not unlike an infomercial.

Henderson says, "It plays their videos, it has interviews with the artists, and it gives you information about touring and other little interesting things, just to get to know the artist better. When you do the program, it also gives you pricing and positioning at all Sam Goody and Musicland stores."

Virgin will utilize its college department to stoke the second phase of the campaign, which kicks off Nov. 5, Election Day.

This part of the campaign entails a national competition with a grand prize of \$2,000 in tuition or expenses to the winning student, plus a free concert for the student's school by some of the featured acts and one of Virgin's top acts. Second prize will be supplied by a corporate sponsor yet to be determined and could take the form of a school

wardrobe. Virgin will also hand out 10 third-prize awards of inclusion on the label's product list for a year.

Says Henderson, "The concept came from the Rock the Vote thing that MTV does. I wanted to tie it into the whole political season, which is where the 'For Your Ears'/'Four More Years' thing came from—which is, by the way, nonpartisan... I'm pretty education-oriented, so we wanted to give students some personal incentive and also incentive for their schools to have a group of Virgin artists perform."

From Nov. 5 to Dec. 6, more than 100,000 four-color fliers promoting the contest—including album artwork for the four featured acts and an 800-number and E-mail address for enrollment—will be distributed in 20 major U.S. college markets: Boston; Washington, D.C.; Portland, Ore.; Sacramento, Calif.; Toledo, Ohio; Seattle; Houston; New York/Long Island, N.Y.; Athens, Ga.; San Francisco; Denver; Salt Lake City; Chicago; Greensboro, N.C.; Philadelphia; Atlanta; Los Angeles; Miami; San Diego, Calif.; and Buffa-

lo, N.Y. Upon enrollment, entrants will be able to get information on and music from the featured artists.

The contest winners will be announced on Inauguration Day, January, with the grand prize to follow, prior to the winner's spring break.

For the third step of its promotion, Virgin has created an eight-page sampler CD that comprises two pieces by Phillips, Pluto, Benson, and Barry.

Henderson says, "We're doing that in several ways. One, using it as a sales premium for the artist at certain stores. Two, using it as a poly-bag opportunity with several publications... Included in the poly-bagging will be about the campaign and the artist and a bounce-back coupon that can send back to get unavailable music or merchandise on each of the artists. Also included in the poly-bagging will be stickers on all of the artists."

The poly-bags will be available wi

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