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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.

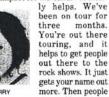
Titled "Fo(u)r Y(m)our(e) (Y)ears"—a pun on both "Four More Years" and "For Your Ears"—the marketing program will focus on four recently released Virgin albums: singer/songwriter Sam Phillips' "Omnipop (It's Only A Flesh Wound Lambchop)" (Billboard, July 6); Van-couver-based modern rock band Pluto's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

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 nonmusic retail outlets and music publications; and a first-quarter promotional

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 roots [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 total-





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 exter principal audience of ers. "College, that's wi music. Then from th something that people v modern rock stations w

On Tuesday (29), Vir begins its first phase, wi ally aired cable show "Th (Billboard, Sept. 14) be

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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, whomever 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 e

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, Elec-

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 cor-porate 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 educationoriented, 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 Buffalo, N.Y. Upon enrollme entrants will be able to information on and music the featured artists.

The contest winners announced on Inauguration January, with the grand-prize to follow, prior to the winning sity's spring break.

For the third step of its p

Virgin has created an eight-c pler CD that comprises two apiece by Phillips, Pluto, Bens

Barry.

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

The poly-bags will be available wi

66 On Tuesday (29), Virgin's campaign begins its first phase, when the nationally aired cable show, "THE STREET BUZZ" (Billboard, Sept. 14) begins airing a segment featuring Pluto, Benson, and Barry. The half-hour program, which REACHES A POTENTIAL AUDIENCE OF 20 MILLION in the U.S., airs three and four times weekly in every market in which it is carried. In terms of content, it is not unlike an infomercial.

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