

...pic Records Group. "Ultimately, we see this as a tremendous word-of-mouth record. Once her fans hear how truly special this project is, they'll undoubtedly spread the word."

"Alma Caribeña" (Caribbean Soul) boasts a wide range of Caribbean hybrids, melding sounds and influence from music of Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Panama.

"This album shows Gloria returning to her roots," says Oscar Llord, president of Sony Discos, which will be handling the project's promotion and marketing in Latin America. "This is such an incredible time within the industry worldwide in terms of awareness and love of Latin music, and that makes the timing of this record perfect. It's an opportunity to expose Gloria in the light of her true artistic spirit."

To that end, Estefan will aggressively promote "Alma Caribeña" at various levels. Llord reports that she will spend "an incredibly generous" amount of time working the Latin American market, with an emphasis on press and television.

Actually, television is a key element to the overall marketing strategy behind the album. During the week of release, Estefan will appear on "Cristina" (May 22), "Late Show With David Letterman" (May 24), and "The Rosie O'Donnell Show" (May 25). She's also slated to perform during the "Today" show's summer concert series on June 2, and she'll tape an appearance on PBS' "Sessions At West 54th" for a still-to-be-determined airing.

The centerpiece of the singer's television campaign will be her first network special, "Gloria Estefan, Caribbean Soul: The Atlantis Concert." The CBS-TV program will premiere May 12, with a rebroadcast on June 2.

Estefan will tape the show in the Bahamas during the weekend of April 29. She'll be joined by 'N Sync, Marc Anthony, Celia Cruz, and José Feliciano. Cruz and Feliciano, both of whom also appear on "Alma Caribeña,"

## 'This album shows Gloria returning to her roots'

—OSCAR LLORD—

will be seen only on the Latin American version of the television special.

"We believe that we're perfectly poised for another groundbreaking, career-enhancing project with Gloria, and this show is a key element in its launch," says Steve Barnett, executive VP of worldwide marketing at the label. "There's already a tremendous amount of passion for this album—both within and outside of the label—and we believe that bodes extremely well for its future."

For many retailers, a new Estefan set—particularly one that's Latin-focused—is good news.

"Her fans are extraordinarily loyal," says Andrew Pollock, HMV's VP of marketing for North America. "They seem to have tapped into the fact that she enjoys performing Latin music as much as—if not more than—pop music. And they clearly support that."

Further tweaking the interest of consumers is the single "No Me Dejes De Querer," which went to Latin radio March 27. The midtempo track, which has been remixed as a dance anthem for club consumption by Pablo Flores, is currently No. 10 on Billboard's Hot Latin Tracks chart.

"Alma Caribeña" is Estefan's third Spanish-language album. In 1993 she issued "Mi Tierra," which has sold 1.1 million copies, according to SoundScan. She then issued "Abriendo Puertas" in 1995, which sold 400,000 copies. Estefan says these albums have provided her with the opportunity to introduce various strains of Latin music culture to a fairly broad audience.

"Latin music culture is so rich and so diverse, there's no way to capture it

all on one record," she says, adding that she believes that people are drawn to her Latin projects—and the Latin genre in general—because "it's let-it-all-hang-out music. It's passionate, and it is a lovely marriage of various rhythms."

"Alma Caribeña" dabbles in several intriguing areas. "Punto De Referencia" has elements of *maya* and salsa, while "Nuestra Felicidad" is rooted in bolero sounds, and "Te Tengo A Ti" is fueled by *bachata* and salsa sounds.

Estefan's husband and longtime producer/manager, Emilio Estefan Jr., was at the studio helm of "Alma Caribeña." The two approached this project differently from previous recordings—starting with the fact that they gradually assembled the set over the course of approximately four years.

"It's was an incredible luxury for me," she says. "Given a choice, most singers would rather cut a song after having sung it for a year on the road. That's when it truly becomes yours. But the business doesn't work that way. With this album, we decided that I wasn't going to record a song until I felt like every word and note was completely mine."

Estefan adds that her freedom to interpret the set's material was enhanced by her decision not to write any of its material. "That allowed me to treat each song like an actress dealing with a mini-script," she says.

Estefan has also been nurturing her budding acting career. She was first seen last year in the Meryl Streep film "Music Of The Heart," and she recently completed "Havana Nocture"—an HBO biopic on the life of Arturo Sandoval that stars Andy Garcia. "I play his wife's best friend," she says.

Estefan reports that she and Emilio have also purchased the film rights to the Brian L. Weiss novel "Many Lives, Many Masters."

"It's such a great book, and I think we're going to come up with an excellent film version," she says.

## JOINT CAMPAIGN IN ASIA LAUNCHED FOR MACY GRAY ALBUM

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international female artist at the Brit Awards 2000, has "sold exceptionally well in Europe, America, and Australia," says V director of music and artist relations Ruuben van den Heuvel. "But the markets in Asia and Latin America have not caught on yet. Macy Gray is an amazingly talented artist who is yet to be truly discovered in this part of the world."

Andy Yavasis, VP of marketing for Sony Music Asia, rejects suggestions that Gray's relatively weak sales in Asia are due to the region's different musical taste. "Although the album has been out for 12 months [in Asia], she has not really exploded in the region compared to sales in America and Europe," Yavasis says. "But it's all about timing and how an artist develops. America and Europe have the benefit of having her available in the market for promotions. Asia doesn't."

Yavasis says the Buy It and Try It promotion is "the next best thing to bringing her out to the forefront without having [her available in the Asian market]."

Says Mike Jansta, Tower Records international franchises marketing

manager, "I am extremely excited that Sony Music Asia and Channel V share our enthusiasm for Macy Gray. We plan to have great success with this promotion."

"The main reason Tower got involved with this promotion is because of the Macy Gray album itself," Sacramento, Calif.-based Jansta explains. "I personally love it, we believe in it, and we want to be a part of its success in Asia. As the only truly regional music software retailer in Asia, we have the ability to implement programs such as these. We have done other regional promotions that focused on a music genre, the Grammy Awards, etc. . . . but this is the first on this scale for a single artist."

Yavasis hopes the promotion will see the markets in Hong Kong, Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Thailand catch up to Singapore's lead, where "On How Life Is" recently reached gold status (7,500 units). "I think Singapore has the advantage of good radio support," he says.

By comparison, Gray's album has reached quadruple-platinum (1.2 million) in the U.K. and double-platinum (2 million) in the U.S.

Both van den Heuvel and Yavasis are confident that the return rate of Gray's album will not be high, despite the fact that piracy is rampant in Asia and the dubbing of audio and visual works is common practice.

"We feel that the quality of this album is so good that people will want the original version, not an inferior, dubbed copy," van den Heuvel says. Yavasis adds, "If people don't like the album, they're still paid for a CD. So it's not like they're getting it for free."

Jansta reveals Tower is planning similar promotions in the future. "Our main slogan at Tower is 'No Music No Life,' and for this promotion it was Macy Gray's music that was the true catalyst bringing Sony Music, Channel V, and Tower Records together," he says.

Channel V will support the Buy It and Try It campaign by showcasing exclusive interviews, live concert footage, and heavy video rotation on five of its six services: the international, Greater China, Thailand, Philippines, and India beams.

Assistance in preparing this story was provided by Steve McClure in Tokyo.



by Geoff Mayfield

WITH ALL THE FRILLS UPON IT: Easter week always stuffs extra sales into music merchants' baskets, but the draw is even more powerful when Peter Cottontail joins forces with the Pied Piper. That's the case this year, with 'N Sync's already huge "No Strings Attached" playing the role of the mystical flutist who enticed children to vacate a village. In this instance, the album—which had already sold more than 4 million units in its first month—lured dollars from the wallets of kids and parents alike. In doing so, this monster seller managed a seemingly impossible accomplishment: a substantial gain over prior-issue sales.

With so many copies sold already, to see even a tiny increase would have been impressive. To manage a 55% boost over the previous issue is practically frightening. Thus 'N Sync cements its hold on The Billboard 200's crown, as its sales rise from 422,000 pieces to an astounding 654,500.

To be sure, the teens were active during Easter 1999, when 'N Sync labelmate Britney Spears tightened her grip on No. 1 with a 62.5% gain (Billboard, April 17), but her resultant haul for that holiday week—278,000 units—isn't even in the same ballpark as this issue's chart-topping sum. Thus, 'N Sync alone takes much credit, not only for pushing business way ahead of the comparable calendar issue last year (see Market Watch, page 134) but for mounting a substantial zing over last year's Easter rise.

Standing next to the third week of April 1999, album sales for the tracking period that closed April 23, 2000, were up by 37%. Compared with last year's Easter parade, which ended April 4, 1999, this year's album sum was ahead by almost 9%. In fact, this is the biggest Easter frame in SoundScan's nine-year history. The obvious difference between last year's handsome healthy Easter take and this year's heartier feast is "No Strings." The album's SoundScan total to date: 4.84 million units—not bad for five weeks out.

With 'N Sync galvanizing the pop crowd, The Billboard 200 sports plenty of youth-appeal albums with eye-catching gains, as Will Smith (158-114), Vitamin C (91-61), and the first 'N Sync album (96-73) each post increases in excess of 80%. Likewise, Christina Aguilera (14-6), M2M (116-91), the Radio Disney compilation (114-92), the soundtrack from MTV's "2gether" (132-103), and 98° (173-127) are each up by 70% or more—in an issue in which The Billboard 200's volume was up by 33% over the previous issue—even as top 40 music directors fidget with the worry that their programming might skew "too teen." Go figure.

Not that the first half of last year was devoid of pop magnets: Ricky Martin and Backstreet Boys staged an impressive one-two punch last year; but both blockbusters arrived several weeks after the holiday. Had either or both come to stores earlier, the gap between Easter 2000 and Easter 1999 would have been at least somewhat slimmer.

CHURCH SCHOOL: As mentioned here last issue, Easter also brought Charlotte Church a starring role in a frequently run Target Stores ad. That campaign continued as the young singer showed up on morning shows "The View" and "Later Today," the Dove Awards' syndicated telecast, and a rerun of "Touched By An Angel." Thus, both of her albums continue to churn, her first more than doubling its sales (104%) and rising 119-80 to win The Billboard 200's Pacesetter award. Her more recent self-titled set bullets 160-107 on a 97% gain.

MY NAME IS: For the second week in a row, an album that starts with a sum that might typically ensure a bow at No. 1 on the big chart has to settle for second place, as Joe follows No Doubt's footsteps. Joe's label can't go away mad because a) the start of "My Name Is Joe" displays vast career growth for the R&B crooner, and b) Jive is also the home of monster chart-topper 'N Sync.

The new Joe set ropes 286,000 first-week consumers, more than four times the units that 1997's "All That I Am," his label debut, had in its biggest week, when 67,000 units put it at No. 13 on The Billboard 200. The best that his first album on Mercury, 1993's "Everything," could do was 11,000 copies, the week it peaked at No. 105.

Another soulful singer off to a fast start is Bad Boy/Arista rookie Carl Thomas, whose debut album enters at No. 9 on The Billboard 200, with 115,000 fans on board. Thomas and Joe each owe a debt to radio: The former's "I Wish" is No. 1 on Hot R&B Airplay with 51 million listeners, and Joe's "I Wanna Know," with 45 million listeners, is No. 2 on that radio list.

BATTLE OF THE SEXES: Although VH1's "Divas 2000: A Tribute To Diana Ross" has garnered more viewers to date than the related "Men Strike Back," first seen April 18, "Men" appears to deliver more spikes. Then again, the second special ran during the robust Easter week bonanza. Some of "Men's" bulleted acts—Sisqó (4-3, up 44% in sales), Enrique Iglesias (38-33, up 50%), and the aforementioned Christina Aguilera—already showed momentum in recent weeks. Better proof of "Men's" impact are the turnarounds by Backstreet Boys (20-17, up 59%) and D'Angelo (63-55, up 42%), who had each been trailing off. At press time, "Divas," which first ran April 11, had been seen by 16 million viewers, "Men" by 12 million.