

Jewel to do duet with technology

Interactive concert is response to changes

By [George Varga](#), POP MUSIC CRITIC

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/ Velocity

Jewel will play an interactive concert on June 7 to promote her new album. The music industry is struggling to deal with changes brought by technology.

DETAILS

FirstSpin live interactive album release concert, with Jewel and special guests Steel Magnolia

When: 5 p.m. June 7

Where: The University Club atop Symphony Towers, 750 B St., Suite 3400, downtown San Diego

Tickets: \$50, plus tax; price includes signed copy of Jewel's new album

Phone: (619) 234-5200 or (800) 755-9001

Online: uc-sandiego.com or velocityboxoffice.com

CORPORATE HARMONY

Novel marketing ideas are nothing new to pop music, as Jewel can attest — she wrote the bouncy title track to her 2003 album, “Intuition,” as the jingle for a national advertising campaign for Schick’s Intuition razor for women. Here are examples of some of the more memorable partnerships between musicians and various nonmusic companies:

1964: The Rolling Stones record a TV commercial jingle for Kellogg’s Rice Krispies.

1968: Levi Strauss & Co. employs San Francisco rock band Jefferson Airplane to record a pair of radio jingles to promote a new line of “white Levi’s.”

1981: The Rolling Stones become the first rock band to have a corporate-sponsored tour, in this case partly underwritten by Jovan perfume.

1997: James Brown licenses “I Got You (I Feel Good)” for a series of TV commercials for Senekot laxatives.

2002: In the wake of Kiss pinball machines, Kiss credit cards and myriad other products, the rock band begins selling Kiss condoms, one year after introducing its Kiss Kasket line of coffins.

2004: Bob Dylan appears in a Victoria’s Secret TV commercial with a young model who cavorts in her bra, panties and angel wings. The lingerie company exclusively sells an eight-song CD, “Victoria’s Secret Exclusive: Bob Dylan, Lovesick.”

— *GEORGE VARGA*

Jewel didn’t try her luck at the gaming tables after her May 16 concert at Pechanga Casino in Temecula.

“I’m in the music business, so I figure I gamble enough,” said Jewel, the veteran singer-songwriter who launched her multimillion-selling career in San Diego in the early 1990s.

But Jewel, who turned 36 on Sunday, is happy to roll the dice to promote her new country-music album, “Sweet and Wild,” in a decidedly innovative manner. If it works, the Texas-based musician and her high-tech collaborators at Velocity Broadcasting may help provide a model for a struggling record industry desperate for creative marketing approaches in the digital age.

On June 7, a day before “Sweet and Wild” is released, Jewel will perform selections from the album to an international audience in what Velocity is promoting as its debut FirstSpin interactive concert.

The “worldwide album launch party” will be broadcast in high definition from a TV studio in Pittsburgh to 75 cities in the United States and Australia. Total attendance could reach as high as 17,500, with ticket prices from \$25 to \$95 — which includes a signed copy of the new album.

Among the venues are San Diego’s upscale University Club, the “Boardroom” private dining areas at 12 Morton’s steakhouse locations (dinner included), and seven Maggiano’s restaurants. The concert also will be beamed into 10 multiplex theaters, including North County’s UltraStar Poway 10.

“The bad news is that downloading has brought the record industry to its knees. The good news is that, if you’re innovative, you can find a lot of new opportunities,” said Jewel, speaking from the Texas ranch where she lives with her husband, national rodeo champion Ty Murray.

Although pay-per-view concerts are not new, FirstSpin offers some twists. Fans will receive handsets that will allow them to ask Jewel questions, request songs and participate in a Jewel trivia contest. (First prize: a Jewel iPad). A second FirstSpin concert, with a yet-to-be-announced Nashville-based country artist, is scheduled for August.

“This is designed to combine mass appeal with class appeal,” said Velocity president and CEO Philip Elias. “We use 7.2 surround-sound and will have 20 HD cameras to capture Jewel from every angle, as well as backstage. And fans can feature themselves live on the air, using additional HD cameras that will be at each venue.”

Velocity, which was founded in 2005, bills itself as the world’s “largest global, private, high-definition broadcasting network.” The company typically works with corporate clients who are rolling out new products or want to address executives and employees nationwide without incurring high travel costs.

In late 2006, Velocity broadcast a prototype interactive HD concert and live Q&A session with jazz trumpet great Wynton Marsalis, who was on the verge of releasing a new album. Marsalis’ performance, which was shown at Morton’s restaurants, was a success.

“It worked for Wynton on every level,” said Edward Arrendell, Marsalis’ longtime manager. “The sound and visuals were great, and it gave Wynton the opportunity to have a dialogue with fans throughout the country. We regard Philip Elias and Velocity as visionaries. We think they’ve arrived early with a great idea.”

That idea has been expanded and enhanced for Jewel, whose FirstSpin performance June 7 will also be broadcast live in 32 high-end clubs owned by ClubCorp. Its University Club atop Symphony Towers in downtown San Diego will open its doors to nonmembers that night.

“We think it’s a groundbreaking event,” said Tommy Trause, University Club’s general manager. “We’re thrilled to be able to offer this new technology to our members and guests.”

Whatever the technology, the battered music industry needs all the help it can get.

So do bands and solo artists, many of whom are struggling as downloading and digital file-sharing have pushed legends such as Paul McCartney and Pearl Jam to try new approaches. The former Beatle teamed up with Starbucks, and Eddie Vedder's band released and promoted its latest album through an exclusive deal with Target, but it still sold poorly.

Album sales have declined dramatically for each of the past 10 years. Artists who had regularly sold in the millions now struggle to sell a fraction as many, including Jewel. Her worldwide album sales have exceeded 27 million since the release of her 1995 debut, "Pieces of You." But none of her subsequent albums have sold nearly as well, including her 2008 country-music debut, "Perfectly Clear." It was her first release for a subsidiary of the Big Machine Label Group, whose roster includes country-pop queen Taylor Swift.

"I didn't realize it until recently, but I'm in some college textbooks as one of the pioneers of 'viral marketing,'" said Jewel, who was dropped by Atlantic Records several years ago. "It wasn't anything I did; it was (the result of) my fans setting up online fan pages and circulating bootleg albums of my concerts. Radio stations started to realize that, 'Hey, there's something going on here,' and had to start paying attention to me, this little folk singer.

"With my singing style, I do best when I'm alone on stage, without a band. It's been a frustration of mine that you can do a great show and only those 3,000 people who were there get to see it. I've always wanted a bigger audience — live — in a bigger way. But playing big venues solo — which I've done — doesn't work. So I hope this will allow me to be intimate with a big audience that is composed of a bunch of small audiences."

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