Jackson's Mega-Marketing: Does It Justify the Cost?

by Chris Marlowe

LONDON - Following the release of Michael Jackson's first album in almost five years, it is worth taking an objective look at HIStory. The Epic album was of course audaciously launched by having 10-meter tall Michael Jackson statues appear throughout Europe. Richard Ogden, senior VP of marketing for Sony Music Entertainment Europe Ltd, says, "Did it work? Well, if the front page of every national newspaper and the national television news in every country that a Jackson photo appeared in is considered a success, then I would say it was of course.

Ogden admits, "A number of people don't feel that Scarface has performed quite as well as it should have done, but we knew it was a difficult record for radio—particularly in some parts of Europe where radio tends to be an ACE format."

He emphatically confirms that sales have met all of the label's expectations. "Only two weeks into it we shipped close to three million albums in Europe. Putting that figure into perspective, Ogden says, "Michael Jackson's European sales increased between Bad and Dangerous, which surprises a lot of people. Dangerous has sold almost 10 million in Europe, and it came out in 1991. HIStory has done nearly a third of that in only two weeks." He says it's too soon to give an accurate sell-through figure, but offers an educated guess of close to two million. "So we're absolutely delighted," Ogden says. "Michael Jackson's European sales increased between Bad and Dangerous, which surprises a lot of people. Dangerous has sold almost 10 million in Europe, and it came out in 1991. HIStory has done nearly a third of that in only two weeks."

Ogden adds, "To do that you need to build up much experience with international exploitation, says Zic-Zac radio promotions manager Piotr Rzeplinski. "To do that you need to have international partners in the first place. Not only that, but we don't have any tradition in publishing. Until recently nobody ever thought about selling our music abroad."

The fall of communism has not yet done anything for Polish music export. "Basia might embody Polish music abroad, but as a member of Matt Bianco she was already based in the UK," says Lorentz. "Furthermore Edyta, Poland's entry to this year's Eurovision Song Contest, is preparing an English album (Orcza/EMI), while her current CD Dotyk passed the gold mark in the first week out (110,000 copies). But international exploitation of Polish product stops there."

Formacja Nieswych Schabuff's (the 'Dead Pork Chops') has appeared in the bill in Poland for the last 10 years. "They were very popular some eight years ago, but when their lead singer Jacek Palucha left, the band collapsed. They had to rebuild their popularity," says Polish radio veteran Marek Niedzwiecki, head of music at national ACE Polskie Radio 3. "Suddenly the remaining band members had to take over his responsibilities. Olek Klepeze stepped up like a lyricist and vocalist, while Wojtek Wierus had to write the music."

Poland's Biggest Summer Hit Asks For A Translation

by Robbert Tilli

WARSAW - Ever had a song in your head in a language you didn't understand at all? And did that really matter? You probably just sang along with it phonetically, didn't you? Not many people outside Poland will understand the lyrics, but everyone will dig the melody. "Zic-Zac", the radio summer pop hit of 1995 in the country, seems to be a perfect example of such a song.

"There's a big fascination with 'only original'," says Rzeplinski. "For example, we don't market our music abroad."

"Western artist" seems to be the most accurate sell-through figure, but offers an exaggerated rumour of close to two million. "So we're not particularly accurate sell-through figure, but offers an exaggerated rumour of close to two million. "We don't appear to have a problem," Ogden points out. "The public is proving that with their wallets. So far in the UK, this album has sold about 300,000 copies across the counter/about 65% of what was shipped. And that situation would be true all across Europe."

Sony is planning a strategy of possibly seven singles to carry it through Christmas 1996. Seasonal peaks aside, there is also the tie-in of the second single Childhood with the film 'Free Willy 2' and the probability of a concert tour. It is very much a long-term project. Although the first single Scarface held the number 1 position in Music & Media's EHR Top 40 for five weeks, the general feeling over it has not been entirely positive. Ogden admits, "A number of people don't feel that Scarface has performed quite as well as it should have done, but we knew it was a difficult record for radio—particularly in some parts of Europe where radio tends to be an ACE format."