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Jewel taps technology in pre-release video concert

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Album release parties were once a way to generate buzz and boost sales of new music. These days, they may be one of the few moneymaking opportunities left for the music business.

Jewel is selling tickets to a live video relay of a performance scheduled for Monday in which she will play songs from her new album, "Sweet and Wild." Fifty U.S. venues, such as Morton's steakhouses and private clubs owned by ClubCorp, are participating, along with theaters in Australia.

Free, illegal copies of Jewel's new songs figure to hit the Internet soon after her album's June 8 release. But organizers of Monday's event are betting her loyal fans will pay \$42.50 to be among the first to hear her new album in its entirety before it goes on sale. Or for \$92.50 they can have dinner included. Signed CDs are also being sold for \$7.50 online and at the events.

"A Jewel fan trusts Jewel," said Scott Borchetta, CEO of her label, The Valory Music Co. "They trust that she's going to give them a great record."

Velocity Broadcasting, a company that sets up live, high-definition video presentations for business clients, is putting on the event. Twenty cameras will track the pop/country artist onstage and backstage during the event, which will be shot at a studio in Pittsburgh and transmitted via satellite.

Velocity CEO Philip Elias said the event is a good way to promote album sales by giving ticket-buyers a unique experience. Fans in different locations will also have electronic handsets that will allow them to play trivia games and influence the songs Jewel plays. Some will be able to ask questions to the artist directly.

The system, called First Spin, gives artists a way to showcase a body of work rather than just one song, he said.

"When you listen to one song on the radio and have the ability to download one song, it makes the artist kind of disposable," Elias said. "First Spin is designed to get to the body of work."

Pre-sales of the signed CD topped 5,000 about 10 days before the event, and about 90 percent of those buying a ticket online have elected to buy the album.

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