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THE POST'S GUIDE TO LIVING AND ENTERTAINMENT THURSDAY OCTOBER 24, 2002

Down & 'Dirrty'

Christina's sleazy image has music execs nervous

By JOSEPH STEUER

KNEEPADS, wet T-shirts and more gyrating than a porn star: Christina Aguilera is back — and she's not the sweet, 17-year-old we once knew.

Since the recent MTV debut of the S&M-inspired video for her single "Dirty" — paving the way for Tuesday's release of her second album (on which she appears topless) — many music executives are shaking their heads over the singer's raunchy rebirth.

Albert Sanchez

"There's a huge risk of alienating your core audience when you take such a left turn," says one high-ranking industry source.

"You can scare them when you make such a departure. If I were her label, I'd be nervous."

Especially if your audience is the teenybopper crowd whose purse strings are controlled by Mom.

Execs from Aguilera's own record label admit her new look is a huge gamble, but say it will help sell her album, "Stripped."

"The best artists take the biggest risks," says RCA head of marketing David Gottlieb.

"Madonna took risks. The Beatles took plenty. If an artist can explain themselves and why they are doing something, RCA will kill for them."

They just might have to.

Where it really counts, on the Internet, message boards are filled with anti-Aguilera postings.

"Christina's white trash," says one. "Since when did she become so ghetto?"

"She looks like a hooker," huffs another.

Others, though, stick up for her, saying, "Christina's hot!" and "U go, girl."

While the song, "Dirty," is hovering around No. 20 on the charts — the video, directed by photographer David LaChapelle, is burning up the MTV-waves.

It tops the list for "Total Request Live" — though many credit its sexual content, not the music.

"Adolescent hormonal boys are watching it, sure," said one exec. "But what about the 13-year-old girl whose parents won't buy it?"

Yet even Aguilera's critics agree that one thing puts her above Pink and Britney: her powerful, multi-octave voice.

But will people hear it this time around?

"You don't want the image to overshadow the music," says a source.

"It seems as if Christina is trying to one-up Britney on the sex thing, when it is her voice that she should be competing with."

In the current issue of Rolling Stone, Aguilera reveals her 11 piercings include one "ornament" seen only by, well, intimate friends.

"I've gotten a lot of compliments on it," she says.

"I don't think anybody at her label is happy about something like that," says a record honcho.

But they may have little choice — word is that RCA, and perhaps even members of Aguilera's own camp, cannot control the pop tart.

"It's my way or the highway with her," says a source, who not[illegible] sued past handle[illegible] got in her way.

Her new image [illegible] lutely her own, a[illegible] made her an easy [illegible] for late-night c[illegible] and "Saturday N[illegible] skits, and a [illegible] for fashionistas [illegible] Simon [illegible] Osbourne ("I've [illegible] queens who look [illegible]

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Reuters/Blender magazine

Christina Aguilera (shown at left in 2000) wears handcuffs in a photo for Blender magazine.

Has Christina gone too far?

— Compiled by Maxine Shen

Monica Offreda, 17
East Rutherford, N.J.
Student

"She's dressing provocatively to get attention and sell more albums. She's not a good example to little girls — they're going to think it's OK to dress like that. And it's not."

Justine Hediger, 17
East Rutherford, N.J.
Student

"I think she's showing people who she really is now — she came out and said, 'This is me,' and I really respect her for that. Most likely, when [the album] comes out, I'll buy it."

Chachi Rodriguez, 15
Brooklyn
Student

"It's not like she's on the street selling her body. She's letting it all hang out before she gets old and raggy. Why not? I'll buy the new album. I think it's going to be better, more grownup."

Val Ibrocevic, 13
Manhattan
Student

"She's gone way too far. The genie has come out of the bottle. She used to have a beautiful voice, but she just sounds scratchy now. I used to be a fan, but not anymore."

N.Y. Post photos: Jennifer Hosford