By JENNIFER ORDONEZ The Wall Street Journal ith sales down a second year in row, the music business is gambling on

an all-star blitz for the holidays. The music industry is scrambling this season to make a haul with holiday shoppers. With album sales down 10 percent in the U.S. so far this year on top of a 3 percent slide in 2001, record companies plan to hit shoppers with an unusually heavy blizzard of A-list releases.

Like holiday guests, everyone from U2 to Eminem to Whitney Houston will be arriving in stores practically all at once, along with a barrage of marketing tactics like free DVDs and Internet come-ons. Of course, the holiday season has always been important to the music business, with nearly a third of music sales typically coming in the fourth quarter.

But lately, the stakes have gotten even higher, with music executives fretting about everything from Internet piracy and thinning margins to the last pop of the once-profitable teen acts. According to Nielsen SoundScan, U.S. consumers have so far bought about 57 million fewer albums than in the same period last year. So the industry is turning to its proven winners for help.

The intense competition this season will bring some perks for shoppers. Several releases, like the soundtrack for "8 Mile." the movie starring rapper Eminem, and the new album from the rock band Foo Fighters, will reward early buyers with a bonus CD or

To make shopping more smooth, here's a handicap of the holiday music available. We surveyed record executives, retail mavens and radio heads about some of the biggest players in each genre. We also found some wild cards, albums that have a shot at blazing up the charts if their holiday stars align.

CONTENDERS: Christina Aguilera, "Stripped" (RCA); Justin Timberlake, "Justified" (Jive); Various artists, "Now That's What I Call Music! 11" (Universal)

THE BUZZ: With boy bands waning and Britney on hiatus, pop

A guide to the holiday season's hottest CDs these days is more awkward than a middle-school dance. Indeed, this quarter could signal how much of a future there is for teen pop's graduates. Mr. Timberlake is regarded as the most gifted of the 'N Sync crew, and his "Justified" is seen as a bellwether for the genre's fate. Some early buzz has the album resembling "Off the Wall" era Michael Jackson. Aguilera, meanwhile, has delivered another racy-themed dance album that retailers say should be among their top sellers — even with teen pop fading, there are plenty of 14-year-old girls out

WILD CARDS: Jennifer Lopez, "This Is Me ... Then" (Epic); Mariah Carey, "Charmbracelet" (MonarC/Island Def Jam). J-Lo puts out more music between films while Ms. Carey, rested after her public meltdown, looks to make her big comeback.

CONTENDERS: Santana. "Shaman" (Arista); U2, "The Best of 1990-2000" (Interscope); Bon "Bounce"

(Interscope/Island)

THE BUZZ: Aging guitarist Carlos Santana is the favorite here. and he's sticking with the formula of pairing up with other artists, just as he did on his successful "Supernatural." This time around, he skews even younger on some tracks, sharing tunes with the likes of teen singer-songwriter Michelle Branch and hardrock band P.O.D.

WILD CARDS: The Wallflowers. "Red Letter Days" (Interscope); Matchbox Twenty, "More Than You Think You Are" (Atlantic). Straightforward rock likely to get good radio airplay.

### CLASSIC ROCK

CONTENDERS: Elvis, "30 #1 Hits" (RCA); Rolling Stones, 'Forty Licks" (Virgin)

THE BUZZ: Aside from remastered sound, there's not much new here — and that's exactly why these records will sell. "Light users," referring to the roughly 76 percent of households that purchase music yet make up only 36 percent of music sales. Many of those light users are baby boomers with more disposable income to spend on music than their younger counterparts and less time or inclination to download or burn CDs. Plus, having all the hits newly packaged gives parents a new excuse to try and influ-

ence their children's tastes. WILD CARD: Paul McCartney. "Back in the U.S. Live 2002" (Capi-

### ALTERNATIVE ROCK

CONTENDERS: Nirvana, "Nirvana" (Geffen): Foo Fighters. "One by One" (RCA); Audioslave, "Audioslave" (Epic); Pearl Jam, "Riot Act" (Epic)

THE BUZZ: Grunge is back. The Nirvana compilation, including one track that was never released was delayed until now because of a recently settled lawsuit by Courtney Love, widow of Nirvana singer Kurt Cobain. Meantime, former Nirvana drummer Dave Grohl's band, the Foo Fighters. puts out a record so carefully crafted it was recorded twice. And another grunge pioneer, former Soundgarden lead singer Chris Cornell, joins up with former members of Rage Against the Machine to release the highly anticipated debut of their new band, Audioslave.

WILD CARD: Beck, "Sea Change" (Interscope). Beck trades in electronica-laced party songs for maudlin tales of heartbreak laced with slide guitar.

CONTENDERS: Whitney Houston. "Just Whitney" (Arista); Toni Braxton, "More Than a Woman," (Arista); TLC, "3D" (Arista)

THE BUZZ: This is the music husbands will buy for their wives, daughters will buy for their mothers. and sisters will buy for each other. Whitney returns from the tabloid headlines to her R&B roots, while Toni Braxton, pregnant with her second child, celebrates motherhood, among other things. But perhaps the loudest buzz is for TLC, the biggest-selling female group in the world, which earlier this year lost member Lisa "Left-eye" Lopes in an auto accident. Ms. Lopes' vocals are more prominently featured on this album than on past efforts and she'll also have a posthumous presence in the group's first video. "On everything we do there will be representations of Lisa," said TLC Manager Bill Diggins.

WILD CARDS: Craig David, "Slicker Than Your Average," (Atlantic); Monica, "All Eyez On

### RAP/HIP HOP

CONTENDERS: "8 Mile" soundtrack (Interscope); Jay-Z, "Blueprint 2: The Gift & the Curse" (Roc-a-fella/Def Jam); Ja Rule, "The Last Temptation" (Murder Inc./Def Jam)

THE BUZZ: It's the most crowded category in music this year, and that's cause for anxiety among record execs and elation among radio programmers. Retailers agree that "8 Mile," the soundtrack to the movie starring Eminem, should dominate — even if it is the second dose of the rapper's music in less than six months. The not-quite-autobiographical movie chronicles the bare-knuckled rise of a streetsavvy rapper from Detroit. "It's definitely going to introduce him to a much wider-ranging audience." said Interscope marketing chief Steve Berman.

WILD CARDS: Nas, "God's Son" (Columbia); Missy Elliott, "Under Construction" (Elektra/Asylum).

### COUNTRY

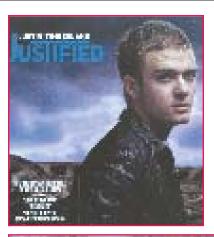
CONTENDERS: Shania Twain, Up!" (Mercury); Faith Hill, "Cry" (Warner Bros.)

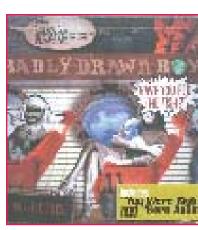
THE BUZZ: Though there are a few differences — Ms. Twain's last album sold 14 million copies in the U.S. to Ms. Hill's 6 million, according to Nielsen SoundScan, and Ms. Twain's first single from the new album leans way uptempo, while Ms. Hill gets introspective on hers — it's the similarities that are striking. They're both comely country divas looking to cross over to a global mainstream audience. Ms. Twain is going so far as to make her release a double album: Buyers will get the same 19 songs twice, with separate country and pop versions of each.

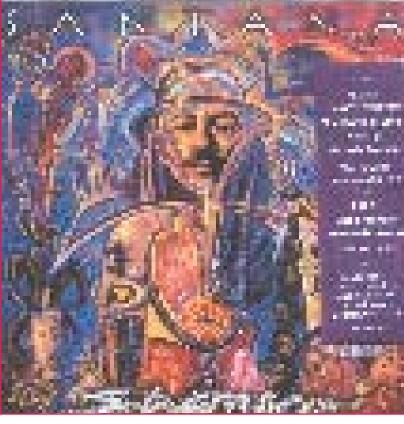
WILD CARD: Tim McGraw, "Tim McGraw & the Dancehall Doctors" (Curb). It's hard to compete with divas. A big hit single will help, but odds are Mr. McGraw — who also happens to be Faith Hill's hubby — will be a distant third.

### HIPSTER

Last, but not least, here's an eclectic selection to juice up your music collection this holiday sea-







A blizzard of holiday releases this year include, clockwise from the top, Justin Timberlake's solo debut, "Justified," Badly Drawn Boys' "Have You Fed the Fish" and Santana's latest, "Shaman."

Album/Artist: Jurassic 5 "Power in Numbers" Interscope

Comments: Indie sensibility meets major-label backing. Smart, well-produced melodic hip-hop is heavy on soul and won't offend the brunch guests.

Album/Artist: Willie Nelson & Friends, "Stars & Guitars," Lost

Comments: Flat-toned legend sings country standards with all his celebrity friends. Best cut: Rvan Adams, Keith Richards and Hank Williams III teamed up on

"Dead Flowers."

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Album/Artist: Badly Drawn Boy, 'Have You Fed the Fish?" Artist Direct/BMG

Comments: A follow-up to the most critically acclaimed ambient rock album of 2000. Badly Drawn Boy, actually a songwriter maestro named Damon Gough again teaches boys that soft rock isn't always wuss rock.

Album/Artist: Liza Minnelli "Liza's Back," J Records

Comments: This stable of standards like "New York, New York" and "Cabaret" is both kitsch and

## **DVD** box sets do big business

By VALERIE LEMKE Copley News Service

oming to a video store near you in plenty or time to liday gift-giving: a whole array of new and reissued movies on DVD.

You don't have to be in the vanguard of this quick-moving trend away from video —the Consumer Electronics Association anticipates sales of 15.5 million DVD players compared to 13.2 million video cassette recorders this year you just have to know that the person on your gift list owns a DVD player. The rest is easy.

Film aficionados have gone to DVDs, because they offer a better sound and picture than VHS, never wear out and there's no rewinding necessary, according to Elden Whiting, video sales manager at Tower Records-Video-Books in San Diego.

Box sets — collections of several movies with bonus materials such as deleted footage, an interview with the director or interactive games for the viewers will take center stage during this holiday season.

And you can delight a friend or family member with any number of new offerings at prices that won't destroy your gift budget. Here are some of them:

"Back to the Future — The Complete Trilogy," filmed years before DVD made its entrance on the home entertainment scene, is a blast from the past, present and future. The three-disc box set of this humorous, sci-fi thriller starring Michael J. Fox and Christo-

pher Lloyd is priced at about \$57. And it's hot. "We've been waiting on this for about three years," said Whiting.

- A new four-disc box set of the beloved fantasy "Lord of the Rings" includes a 30-minute director's cut — extra footage that has been put back into the movie — and sells for about \$25.
- James Bond diehards are in for an embarrassment of riches as "Dr. No," "Golden Eye," "Goldfinger," "License to Kill," "Man With the Golden Gun," "The Spy Who Loved Me" and "Tomorrow Never Dies," enter the living room in a special edition rerelease this holiday season. The seven-film gift set sells for about \$125 and includes audio commentaries, documentaries, featurettes, music video, TV and radio spots, original theatrical trailers, storyboards and more.
- A trip down memory lane is in store for the recipient who grooves on musicals. Marking the 100th birthday of Richard Rodgers, six of his classics are being issued on DVD for \$20 each. Any one of the unforgettable films - "Carousel," "The King and I,"
  "Oklahoma!," "The Sound of Music," "South Pacific" and

**Only \$95** 

"State Fair" — will have your happy recipient humming, dancing and singing out loud.

- "Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron" is still an in-theater fave, but DreamWorks Home Entertainment has already launched a DVD destined to become one of the biggest family releases this holiday. For \$20, you can gift a family with the film, plus the allnew DVD technology, "Spirit's Make-a-Movie Studio," that allows kids to create their own personalized film. Another program in the package features a children's class on how to draw Spirit from hoof to tail and is "guaranteed to let their creativity run wild."
- Classics, such as the groundbreaking 1940 animated musical, "Fantasia," and "Ben Hur," the epic winner of 11 Oscars, are also available on DVD, as are many silent movies. Most are priced at about \$20.

If you want to set the holiday mood early, wrap up such DVDs as "It's a Wonderful Life," "A Christmas Carol" and "The Grinch Who Stole Christmas" and deliver your gift with an "open before Christmas" sticker affixed.

Many of this year's Academy Award-winners can be purchased on DVD, including "A Beautiful Mind," with Russell Crowe as a schizophrenic mathematician who is awarded a Nobel Prize, and the modern war movie, "Black Hawk Down.



## 'Moonlight' just in time for holidays

"Escanaba in da Moonlight," the deer camp comedy starring, written and directed by Jeff "Dumb and Dumber" Daniels is now available on DVD.

Shot on location in Escanaba by local filmmaker Rich Brauer, the DVD is available in stores such as Blockbuster, Best Buy, Circuit City, Meijer and Borders. Prices vary but are comparable to other new DVD releases.

The comedy starred Daniels as a hapless hunter in perennial pursuit of a buck during deer season and offered slap local "yooper" humor as well.

# Look for the second in the gift guide series Thursday, Dec. 5 in the Record-Eagle ୬୦୦୦୦୦୦୦୦



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