

Demand soars for Jackson music after singer's death

27 Jun 2009 00:26:57 GMT

Source: Reuters

* Death sparks renewed interest in albums, videos

* Sales spike on Internet and at major retailers

By Robert MacMillan

NEW YORK, June 26 (Reuters) - Michael Jackson's pop music legacy stretches back 40 years and could extend well into the future as music companies and retailers reissue CDs, repackage his songs and resell memorabilia after his sudden death.

In dollar terms, Jackson, who died at age 50 after going into cardiac arrest on Thursday, justified his title as the "King of Pop." He was believed to have sold 750 million records and had the No. 1 bestselling album of all time, "Thriller."

His death has sparked renewed interest in his albums and videos. Everyone from the labels that produced his albums to media outlets, retailers and street vendors selling Jackson T-shirts is set to cash in to the tune of millions of dollars.

"Michael pulled an Elvis. It's probably the best thing that happened to them this year," Wayne Rosso, a music industry consultant and publicity executive, said of various Sony Corp<6758.T> <SNE.N> record labels that own Jackson's music.

Jackson's hitmaking reliability faded over time, with albums such as 1995's "HIStory" and 2001's "Invincible" failing to top earlier pop music landmarks such as "Thriller" and "Off the Wall," and Jackson 5 hit singles like "One More Chance."

But when an artist of his stature dies, it revives sales of once mediocre albums, spurs a hunt for unreleased tracks and jump-starts efforts to do repackage albums and singles.

Apple Inc's <AAPL.O> iTunes, the biggest music retailer in the United States, reported on Friday that Jackson albums accounted for the top-nine sellers, led by a hits package and his 1982 blockbuster "Thriller."

A Sony spokesman said the label had not decided what to do with its Jackson record catalog. A spokeswoman for Universal, which owns the Motown label that produced the Jackson 5's albums, did not return a telephone call seeking comment.

What likely will happen, Rosso said, is that Sony and Universal will let fans mine Jackson's existing catalog.

"And then a year from today, they will come out with some sort of memorial box set," he said.

SALES SPIKE

Sales of Jackson's music, videos and other goods are spiking on the Internet and at major retailers.

"We have seen a significant increase in sales of Michael Jackson CDs at our stores within the past day or so," said Joshua Thomas, spokesman for retailer Target Corp <TGT.N>.

At online retailer Amazon.com Inc <AMZN.O>, Jackson CDs and DVDs sold out in the first few minutes following reports of Jackson's death. Amazon sold more Jackson merchandise in the past 24 hours than in the prior 11 years, a spokesman said.

Online auction site eBay Inc <EBAY.O> also reported a spike in Jackson products, with new listings up 61 percent.

The world's largest retailer, Wal-Mart Stores Inc <WMT.N>, declined to comment on sales of Jackson albums and products.

AMI Entertainment Network said its 15,000 digital jukeboxes across the United States saw a 2,000 percent increase in Jackson

song downloads on Thursday. People ordered more than 50,000 songs, with "Billie Jean," "Thriller" and "Beat It" the most popular.

Media outlets are also meeting the anticipated demand.

Time magazine will issue a commemorative issue on Monday for \$5.99. Newsweek, owned by The Washington Post Co <WPO.N>, will give Jackson its cover and an essay for its new edition.

Rock magazine Rolling Stone plans a special "book-a-zine" issue, with 450,000 copies planned at a price of \$9.99 each.

Pop music history is sprinkled with artists from Elvis Presley to Marvin Gaye whose work earns cash long after they die. When their unexpected deaths make big news, some say thinking about profits might be unseemly, but inevitable.

"I don't think you can avoid the fact that whenever a major icon dies, you're going to have a huge amount of marketing and figurines and all that junk," said Elayne Rapping, an American studies professor at the University of Buffalo in New York.

David Glew, former chairman of Epic Records and a music executive who worked with Jackson, said record companies handled those situations differently, but they had to respond.

"People want some tangible connection to their hero," said Dennis McNally, Grateful Dead biographer and ex-publicist for the popular band. "The merchandising departments of his record companies will be glad to oblige." (Additional reporting by Alexandria Sage and Nicole Maestri in San Francisco, Gina Keating in Los Angeles, and Anupreeta Das and Derek Caney in New York; Editing by Peter Cooney)



URL: <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/N26339748.htm>

For our full disclaimer and copyright information please visit <http://www.alertnet.org>