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Ranville compares the growing popularity of aboriginal music to the rise of Motown.

# CD Plus, broadcasters unveil plan to rack up aboriginal music sales

By Melissa Martin

IT'S tough for anyone to compete with Rihanna and the Jonas Brothers when it comes to retail muscle. And if you're an aboriginal artist? Forget about it.

"The American Top 40 rules," music industry leader Errol Ranville says of the challenge in securing album distribution for aboriginal artists. "They're the ones on the radio, and that's what's generating their sales. We in the aboriginal community have never had our music on mainstream racks across Canada."

Maybe that's about to change. Yesterday, Ranville and music retailer CD Plus unveiled a new joint project: an aboriginal music rack to be featured in CD Plus stores across Canada.

It isn't just a piece of furniture. The rack will primarily serve as an integrated promotional tool. To increase visibility, Ranville secured the support of Newcap Radio (which runs 90 Canadian stations, including local country outlet Hank FM) and the Winnipeg-based Aboriginal People's Television Network. Each broadcaster will donate \$120,000 in cross-Canada advertising for the rack.

The rest will be left in the hands of the musicians themselves.

"Artists will still be responsible fo

their own promotion," Ranville says, noting that he will receive weekly sales reports from CD Plus, and rotate underperforming titles off the rack to give others a shot at the spotlight.

He should have a lot to choose from.

"I believe we are witnessing an aboriginal music explosion similar to the rise of Motown in Detroit," Ranville says.

There are currently 37 featured titles on the rack, including discs from Manitoban singer-songwriter Don Amero, Northwest Territories vocalist Leanne Goose, and — of course — Ranville's own band, C-Weed. More space is available for self-referring artists on a first-come, first-serve basis.

CD Plus media buyer John Toews, who collaborated with Ranville to launch the project, says that it wasn't hard to convince company brass that an aboriginal rack was a good idea.

"We managed to prove pretty well that there was a lot of viability," he says. "Our initial plan is to keep it for a least a year. If it's successful, we'll have no problems extending it and making it a permanent part of CD Plus."

It seems like a small step, but it could have big potential, Ranville says. "We've embarked on a history-making journey that will help the national aboriginal music industry for years to come."

melissa.martin@freepress.mb.ca