

## QVC discovers the "groove"

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QVC, the TV network most often associated with discount jewelry and collectable dolls, might seem an unlikely place to sell jazz CD compilations.

But Rafe Gomez, host of the "Groove Boutique" on WQCD (101.9 FM), thinks the new QVC show he launches tonight - at 5 a.m. - will do just that.

That is to say, he thinks QVC viewers are hipper than some people might suggest, and he thinks jazz, properly presented, has a lot of appeal for the masses.

The hour-long show will combine sales pitches with entertainment, says Gomez. He'll have guests like Bobby Caldwell performing, and he'll be selling, at first, six "bundles" - three-CD sets with lifestyle themes like the kitchen ("Chef's Delight"), romantic encounters and so on.

"We're not selling 'jazz' per se," says Gomez. "We're selling the experience of listening to music. We're selling music that listeners can enjoy from the first note, regardless of whether they've ever considered themselves 'jazz fans.'"

"I'm sure many of them, particularly in the red-state part of the country, never have. But they'll feel very comfortable with it. It can enhance their lifestyle."

Ironically, jazz was once considered mainstream popular music. But in recent decades it has acquired an elitist reputation, as if a listener needs advanced musical training even to understand it. That's a perception battled by stations like WQCD, whose long-time "smooth jazz" format has tried to emphasize accessible artists like Kenny G or Chris Botti.

Some jazz purists have grumbled that this really isn't jazz at all, but WQCD has done well for years, often finishing in the city's top 10 stations among its target audiences of 25- to 54-year-olds. Recently, it has been adjusting its "chill" sound as ratings have dipped a bit.

Gomez thinks a big part of the problem for jazz today is accessibility. "If people don't have a CD101.9-type station in their market, they have no place to hear contemporary jazz," he says. "So it's a tough-selling environment for the labels."

Accordingly, he thinks his QVC show could be "a big breakthrough" in nudging jazz back to the mainstream.

"It's good for the artists, good for the listeners and good for smooth jazz radio," he says.

If his bimonthly show gets a good response, he adds, he would also see a direct benefit: "We can move to an earlier time slot!"