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"Passion" soundtrack inspiring almighty sales

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By Sue Zeidler

LOS ANGELES, March 17 (Reuters) - The soundtrack to Mel Gibson's movie about the final hours of Jesus graced U.S. pop charts for a third week in a row, showing moviegoers' passion for the film and its music.

"The Passion of the Christ" soundtrack, which features a score by composer John Debney, sold 39,000 copies in the latest week ended March 14, bringing its tally to 100,000 units since its release on Feb. 24, according to Nielsen SoundScan.

Gibson lent his voice to the score's vocals and chants, performing with a choir, said Sony Music, a unit of Sony Corp. (6758.T: [Quote](#), [Profile](#), [Research](#)) and private label Integrity, which released the record.

The album ranked No. 23 on the top 200 U.S. album sales chart in the latest week, and No. 1 on the U.S. soundtrack charts for a third week running, said Nielsen SoundScan.

"The soundtrack is doing amazingly well. Hollywood is just waking up to the fact that there is an audience for religious films and content and the music is such a prominent entity in the film. It's like a character unto itself," said Dan Goldwasser, editor-in-chief of SoundtrackNet, an online soundtrack information site.

"It's one of those scores that affects you viscerally. It's got a nice fusion of tribal ethnicity combined with a traditional epic religious film score. It works well as a modern film score and it also works completely independently from the film," said Goldwasser.

Debney, who formerly scored films like "Bruce Almighty" and "Elf," heavily employed electronic music, Indian ragas and other percussive and world-music elements to score the film.

The movie, released on Feb. 25 in North America by Newmarket Films, a unit of closely held Newmarket Capital Group, has already generated more than \$264 million at the box office, fueled in part by a storm of controversy and protest by various religious leaders.

The film has also stirred a resurrection in sales of faith-based products and is also inspiring a soon-to-be released second album titled, "Songs Inspired by 'The Passion of the Christ,'" featuring music from artists like Bob Dylan, Elvis Presley and Leonard Cohen.

The second CD was compiled by Lian Lunson, a documentary filmmaker and music video director, who worked closely with Gibson.

Universal South Records, a Nashville-based label and unit of Vivendi Universal (V.N: [Quote](#), [Profile](#), [Research](#)) (EAUG.PA: [Quote](#), [Profile](#), [Research](#)), plans to release the second album on April 6. A spokeswoman for Universal South said the aim of the dark, reflective album was to honor the emotional voyage experienced by watching the film.

"Gibson felt the songs should complement the message in the film and inspire spiritual reflection," the spokeswoman said.

In other music news, Norah Jones' "Feels Like Home" topped the U.S. album sales chart for a fifth straight week, selling 183,000 units in the latest week, pushing the album's cumulative sales to over 2 million copies.

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