

TV Sunday

It's beginning to sound a lot like...

By MICHAEL GILTZ

TV viewers watch the same specials every holiday season, turning "A Charlie Brown Christmas," "It's a Wonderful Life" and other shows as visual comfort food.

The commercials that run during the holidays are also comfortingly familiar: Macy's will seemingly always use that same jingle to promote its sales and that electric razor will always glide through the snow, to name just two.

Reaching the status of a holiday tradition is difficult. But over the last few years the Gap has done just that, smartly combining rising musical talent like Rufus Wainwright and Badly Drawn Boy with legends like Lena Horne to create memorable musical spots people can actually look forward to seeing.

"There's been an establishment of this campaign, especially at Christmas time," says Brian Garrity, an editor at Billboard who covers marketing in the music industry.

"I don't know if I'd want to say prestige. But people look out for those Gap ads and they almost seem to take some musical cues from them."

This year's batch — pegged "Give Your Gift" — is no exception. In this campaign, artists like Dwight Yoakam, Sheryl Crow, Macy Gray, India.Arie and a hilariously funky Shaggy croon the Supertramp classic "Give a Little Bit" in solo spots or



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grouped with others.

The song was picked before September 11, but strikes just the right tone of wistful earnestness. And the ads feature so many artists that one would never expect to see in an ad — such as Liz Phair, Alanis Morissette and Robbie Robertson of the Band — that apparently the idea of "selling out" is passé, at least when it comes to the Gap.

"The fear of the sellout is less than it used to be," says Garrity. "The whole notion of 'cred' has changed, especially for mainstream pop artists."

Not only is being in an ad not selling out, for big pop stars like Britney Spears (who bares her belly for Pepsi), appearing in TV ads for other products may even be an important part of selling a blockbuster album.

With ads giving new prominence to artists like British folkie Nick Drake, Yello and Enya, it's no surprise that Gap — which has the bonus of a reputation for good musical taste — would be approached by record companies and publishers hoping to get them to use one of their songs in a campaign.

"You won't believe the number



In this year's Christmas campaign for the Gap, artists like Shaggy (top), Sheryl Crow and Dwight Yoakam croon Supertramp's "Give a Little Bit."



of requests we get to use certain songs," says Peter Hempel, the executive vice president of marketing, who says they thought of using Supertramp's first Top 20 hit on their own and then approached the act.

In years past, they've had visually striking ads, such as an all-white spot with Wainwright crooning "What Are You Doing New Year's Eve?" This fall alone, Gap had a sweet winner featuring Carole King singing with her daughter. Getting the artists to sign up is easier and easier.

"I sort of feel like Steven Spielberg with this brand," says Hempel, "because [the people I contact] takes the call immediately."

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Simona Aviram, 22, Fashion, Long Island