'Surreal Life' gives former stars a chance to regain fame

By DANIEL FIENBERG KRT CAMPUS

Even when they were at their most famous, the cast of VH1's "The Surreal Life" weren't A-list celebrities so much as they were internationally recognized curiosities.

Brigitte Nielsen starred in a movie with the future Governor of California and had an ill-fated and brief marriage to Sylvester Stallone. Flava Flav instructed people not to believe the hype and clowned around the stage with Public Enemy. Charo appeared on a record number of "Love Boat" episodes. Dave Coulier was "that funny guy" on "Full House." Jordan Knight made the Tiger Beat as a member of New Kids on the Block. Ryan Starr changed her name from Tiffany Montgomery, but still somehow was beaten by R.J. Helton on the first season of FOX's "American Idol."

six recognizable As personalities living some distance from their moment of greatest fame, they aren't surprising choices for VH1's first season of "The Surreal Life," a show whose M.O. is to poke the most gentle of fun at people who were once admired. What's more surprising is that the sextet agreed to go on the show and follow in the footsteps of Corey Feldman, Ron Jeremy and those two girls from "Baywatch" whose names we've already forgotten.

"It sounded like a lot of fun, so I just did it," explained Starr. Like Jerri Manthey in the show's first season and Trishelle Cannatella in its second, Starr is a reality contestant surrounded by people who, in their prime, had vastly more clout. Still working on her first album, Starr just wants to extend her first 15 minutes of fame long enough to get a more legitimate shot at the limelight.

Jordan Knight has been there and done that. He heard arenas of teenage girls squeal his name, became the punchline of jokes, release a not-entirely-unsuccessful solo album and is looking to promote his second solo joint.

"My manager called me and said that VH1 called him and never in my life would think that I would do a reality show. I'm a private person."

Knight admits that in the end, he had to be coerced by his manager into doing the show. "Promotion, promotion,

promotion," he sighed.

Charo doesn't need to promote anything. The cuchi-cuchi legend sells out regular Vegas concerts. She had a two-week break during the summer and decided to use the time to show America that there's more to her than scary kitsch.

"No matter how many concerts I do, everybody on the way out, when the show is over, they say the same thing, 'I never expected that. I didn't know she had that talent," Charo said. "It's not a bad idea to really introduce to the audience that I like fun, I like comedy, I'm such a different person than they think I am."

Nielsen is a reality television veteran. She did the Italian version of "The Mole" and the Danish celebrity take on "Big Brother." Happy for the excuse to return to Los Angeles, Nielsen echoes Charo's sentiment that there's more to her than what people have seen over the years.

"I'm always the villain, I'm always the tough girl. It's been so many years that I've not been here and basically the image is the exwife of Stallone who took the \$100 million," she said.

For Coulier, "The Surreal Life" is just a resting point in the midst of a lengthy comedy touring schedule. Someday he admits that he'd like to do another sitcom, but for now everybody's Uncle Joey understands the way the TV business is heading.

"Right now, sitcom is not the king of television," Coulier said. "It's not at the top of the heap. programming is. Reality Television is so cyclical that that

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effort. 'Tweens sophomore everywhere will likely be begging their parents for money and a ride to the music store (Sept. 28).

Marilyn Manson - He may be past his headline making prime, but the king of '90s shock rock returns with a greatest hits collection, "Lest We Forget: The Best of" (Sept. 28).

OCTOBER

George Strait - One of country music's main hit makers releases a hefty collection of hits. Strait's "50 #1's" includes all the chart-topping favorites from his 20-plus years in the business (Oct. 5).

R.E.M. - The torchbearers of alternative rock return with "Around the Sun." Rising from the college music scene in Athens to iconic status as rock innovators, Michael Stipe and company will also appear with Bruce Springsteen on MoveOn.org's swing state tour (Oct. 5).

Duran Duran — As their first studio record in 21 years, "Astronaut" features the group's five original members. They join their blast-from-the-past counterparts, Tears for Fears, as an '80s pop act back from the bargain bins (Oct. 12).

Elliott Smith - One of rock's tragic heroes, Smith returns postmortem with a final release, "from a basement on a hill." The record has been assembled from material he

completed before his death (Oct. 19).

NOVEMBER

Ja Rule - The rapper and 50 Cent rival returns with "R.U.L.E.," a week before his label mate Ashanti drops a new record (Nov. 9)

Ashanti - The R&B songstress who broke onto the scene in 2002 releases her third album, the follow up to her successful "Chapter II," which generated hits such as "Rock Wit U" (Nov. 16).

Black Eyed Peas - The funkinfused hip-hop act returns with "Monkey Business," the follow up to last year's "Elephunk" (Nov. 16)

U2 — The legendary Irish rock band releases its heavily anticipated follow-up to "All That You Can't Leave Behind." The as-yet-untitled record is set to include 11 new tracks (Nov. 23).

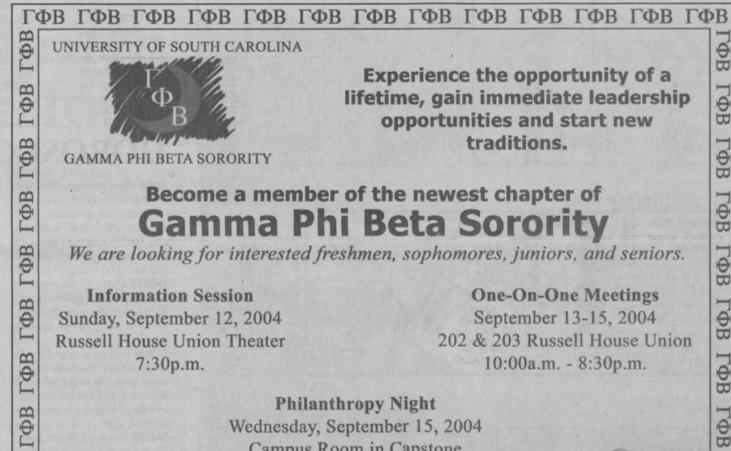
Gwen Stefani - No Doubt's leading lady hopes to make her mark as a solo artist this fall, releasing her as-yet-untitled debut. The first single, "What You Waiting For?" is set to hit airwaves in early October (Nov. 23)

Rob Thomas - Another usually band-backed crooner will make his solo debut this fall. The matchbox twenty frontman is set to release an also as-yet-untitled album this November. He debuted the track "Ever the Same" at a benefit concert in August (Nov. 23).

Comments on this story? E-mail gamecockfeatures@gwm.sc.edu



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asked if I wanted to do a 12-day reality show," he says. "My initial answer was 'Definitely not.' I

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First-year criminal justice student Gabe Temple "followed the entire Republican Convention on 'The Daily Show.""

But college students aren't the only ones who take "The Daily Show" so seriously.

Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry made "The Daily Show" his first televised interview since his appearance on the "Tonight Show" in November 2003.

Kerry sat down with Jon Stewart on Aug. 25 to defend his campaign from attacks launched by Bush

"(Jon) Stewart's show was a great way to reach young voters."

LISA DE MORAES

JOHN KERRY REPRESENTATIVE, ON KERRY'S APPEARANCE ON 'THE DAILY SHOW' WITH JOHN STEWART

advocates.

One of John Kerry's justified the representatives unconventional choice in a Washington Post article by Lisa de Moraes:

"Stewart's show was a great way to reach young voters." Moraes also quoted another Kerry representative who noted that "another presidential candidate --- that would be Bill Clinton - went on Arsenio Hall's late-night show in 1992."

Such late night comedic interpretation of political events seems to engage college students and those with progressive political views especially.

Thus an unconventional source of world news has become a

Comments on this story? E-mail gemecockfeatures@gwm.sc.edu

Wednesday, September 15, 2004 Campus Room in Capstone 6:00p.m. & 8:00p.m.

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