Welcome to The Tangled Web, a weekly column launched with the recent redesign of Billboard.com. Each Tuesday, it will get you up to date on the Web's most intriguing music-related happenings and destinations.

LIKE A PREVIEW: While it's a given that any new Madonna album will debut at or near the top of The Billboard 200, this time the Internet will likely play a role in the immediate success of her latest Maverick/Warner Bros. effort, "American Life." The album is due in stores today (April 22), but MTV.com has been streaming it for more than a week, and Launch.com, America Online (AOL), and MSN have each featured a different track over the same period. Madonna's voice repeatedly cuts into each stream to introduce the album, with the hope that fans will buy the set to get uninterrupted versions of the tracks.

The massive Web campaign was designed in part to keep the album from leaking to peer-to-peer sites, as was the case of the pop star's 2000 album "Music." But it also has meant huge exposure for the new songs. A spokesperson for MTV.com says "American Life" has been streamed more than 700,000 times in the past week, which is "definitely a record for MTV." Jay-Z's "The Blueprint 2: The Gift and the Curse" (Roc-A-Fella/Def Jam) is a distant second.

With MTV streaming the full album, one might think the individual tracks available at AOL, Launch, and MSN may not have held as much appeal, but an AOL representative says Madonna's "Love Profusion" was streamed more than 500,000 times in two days, and was quickly approaching 1 million streams by the end of last week. To put that number in perspective, P.O.D.'s "Sleeping Awake" topped AOL's audio chart last week with less than 300,000 streams.

At Launch, Jay Frank, the site's head of artist and label relations, says Madonna is on pace to be one of the "three most successful" artist-of-the-month promotions in the site's history, (Linkin Park being the record-holder). The site's exclusive stream of "X-Static Process" was accessed more than 100,000 times in two days, which Frank says in an impressive number because Launch is known for its radio and video services, not on-demand audio. The site has more than 40 Madonna videos available, and in the past two weeks the clips have been streamed more than 1 million times. During the same period, users have requested Madonna songs from Launch's radio services more than 2 million times.

Stats from MSN were not available.

SALUTING THE SITES: The Webby Awards, the annual survey of the Internet's best destinations, has revealed its nominees for the 2003 edition of the competition. The five sites nominated in the music category are:

- **FlamingLips.com**: The official Web site of the experimental pop group Flaming Lips, this brightly colored, fanciful site is concerned with the usual artist news, tour dates, downloads, etc. But it is about as entertaining to the eye as the band's music is to the ear, splattered with original artwork.

- **Metacritic**: This site aims to serve as a one-stop for shoppers or fans looking for media reviews. It condenses and compiles criticism from a wide variety of sources and groups them by album (or movie, video/DVD, or game). Each review is given a number score, so it is easy for browsers to see what the bulk of critics thought of a particular release.

- **Okayplayer.com**: Okayplayer is a pioneering online hip-hop community centered around artists such as the Roots, Common, and D'Angelo. The site hosts Web
homes for like-minded artists and also features news (Roots drummer ?uestlove is a frequent contributor) and well-attended message boards.

- **Pinknoises.com**: Pinknoises has a specific subject matter: women in electronic music. The site features profiles of female electronic artists and DJs, a guide to common DJ gear, essays, interviews, reviews, RealAudio clips, and message boards.

- **Tech.Nitions**: This site brings together a community of radio mix-show, club, and street DJs from across the U.S. Tech.Nitions features bios and contact information for dozens of "member" DJs and updates its own set of hits charts based on its contributors' own music knowledge and taste rather than strict sales figures. The site also has streaming music, industry news, and message boards to help attract and build bonds within the DJ community.

The International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences presents the Webbys, while an industry panel votes to determine awards winners, to be announced at a June 5 ceremony in San Francisco. The event's site, however, does have a people's choice award, which allows registered users to vote for any site nominated for the seventh annual honors.

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**2 VIDEOS DOWN**: The patriotic slant of 3 Doors Down's "When I'm Gone" has driven the Southern rock band's single up Billboard's Hot 100, reaching a new peak position last week at No. 4. A video for the song, featuring the group performing to U.S. troops aboard an aircraft carrier, is in heavy rotation at VH1. Yet its ascent to the top of singles tally is largely due to some savvy marketing executives at Universal, as "When I'm Gone" was not written as a pro-war anthem.

Head to the band's Web site, and you'll see two videos for "When I'm Gone." One contains the aforementioned live footage, while the other features the band in a far less political posture. Filmed last year, the clip shows 3 Doors Down being buried alive in a swamp. Yet after the group staged a number of concerts for U.S. soldiers, radio stations began adding sound bites of President Bush into the song, and the video for "When I'm Gone" was retooled as a patriotic rallying cry. Now, the only place to see the original clip is online, unless, of course, you live in any other country than the U.S., where the swamp burial is the preferred video.

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-- Todd Martens, L.A., Troy Carpenter, N.Y.