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HEADLINE: Peace is a blowin' in the wind again

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The anti-war message is getting an airing from Hollywood to Sydney, writes BEN ENGLISH

One of America's biggest rock starlets wears a provocative antiwar Tshirt, a television commercial featuring a young girl picking daisies warns of apocalypse and activists across California strip bare to make their antiwar point.

On Sydney's streets the peace sign is the most popular form of graffiti, while activists plan a mass rally that will close the city down in a fortnight.

And in Milan, catwalk models emblazoned with antiwar messages march to the peacenik beat.

It could be 1968 at the height of the antiVietnam crusades but these events have all taken place in the past week. Using their pioneering parents as their inspiration, peace activists today are using 1960s imagery to launch a lastgasp attempt to sway world opinion against a war on Iraq.

And, as with Vietnam, it is the arts world which is giving peace some grunt.

LA rocker Sheryl Crow went to the American Music Awards wearing a Tshirt with the message: "War is not the answer".

Tinseltown Alisters to

denounce a military solution

include golden couple Susan Sarandon and Tim Robbins, Uma Thurman, Kim Basinger, Samuel L Jackson and king of violence director Martin Scorsese.

They've been joined by Martin Sheen -- George W Bush's opposite number in TV political drama The West Wing -- Matt Damon, Danny Glover, Anjelica Houston and 90 other US entertainers in a petition against the "alarming and unnecessary" talk of war from Washington.

In Australia, thespians to join the cause include Always Greener's John Howard and film star Judy Davis.

The support for the antiwarriors contrasts with the last time Australia lined up to join battle with Saddam Hussein in 1991.

"Given the depth of public concern about this war, and the broad support for the coalition organising the rally, we expect a huge turnout on February 16," says Greens Senator Kerry Nettle.

"I am constantly approached by people who have never been to a protest before but want an opportunity to express their opposition to this unjust war."

Senator Nettle is helping organise Sydney's Walk Against the War at which more than 50,000 marchers are expected. It is part of an international weekend of action against the war which includes rallies in New York, Oslo, Berlin, Ramallah, Rome, Cairo, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Glasgow, Manila, Amsterdam, Paris, Athens, Antwerp, Skopje and London.

Closer to home protests will also be held in Melbourne, Brisbane, Lismore and Adelaide.

The Sydney rally is being organised by a broad coalition of groups including the "usual suspects" found at leftleaning protests.

Headed by the Greens, they include the Socialist Alliance, the Communist Party and People for Nuclear Disarmament.

But, in a sign this antiwar movement may represent a broader church, the march will also be joined by the Doctors Reform Society, the Flight

Attendants Association, the Uniting Church, the Nurses Association and the Greek Orthodox Community NSW.

The Walk Against the War coalition is also preparing for an "emergency action" to convene at Town Hall at 5pm on the first day of bombing.

Already scores gather each Friday at Sydney Town Hall for antiwar vigils from 5pm.

The local response follows marches across Europe that have attracted up to 400,000 people in each major city. But despite this public display of solidarity, few believe it can make a difference.

In England, where opinion polls suggest more than 50 per cent of Britons oppose military action against Iraq, the antiwar movement has failed to galvanise mainstream opinion in ways likely to worry Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Despite support from such

luminaries as members of the leftwing Redgrave acting family and Damon Albarn, lead singer with the rock band Blur, opposition to the war has remained largely passive amid resignation that battle is inevitable.

Mike Langridge, who works as a controller at a Bedford minicab company, is one of the few leaders of a local protest group with no previous history of activism.

"There is a huge groundswell of people appalled by the prospect of war against Iraq. But all they do is shrug their shoulders and say 'What can I do about it?'," says Langridge.

The Stop the War coalition has failed to create a broad reach. "There has been a sense of rounding up the usual suspects in finding figureheads to represent us," admits one activist.

Concern that protest marches will do little to halt Washington's momentum for war has led some activists to resort to shock tactics.

One grassroots propeace group has remade the 1964 "Daisy" ad, warning that a war with Iraq could spark nuclear Armageddon.

As with the Cold War era original, the 30second ad by the internetbased group MoveOn.org depicts a girl plucking

petals from a daisy along with a missile launch countdown and a nuclear mushroom cloud.

The original ad was produced in the '60s by US President Lyndon Johnson's campaign to paint his Republican rival, Barry Goldwater, as an extremist who might lead the US to a nuclear war with the then Soviet Union.

The commercial created such negative reaction it was pulled after one showing, but Johnson went on to a landslide victory.

MoveOn.org released its version, which will be aired in 13 major US cities at a cost of \$1.2million, on Wednesday.

Its ad includes scenes of military escalation before the mushroom cloud appears. Then the screen goes black, with a warning that a war might end quickly or it might spread to other countries and end with "the unthinkable".

Meanwhile, in California women spelling out the words "**No War**" and "Peace" with their nude bodies have helped draw attention to antiwar activities.

The group, called Baring Witness, is planning a "major" protest action at an antiwar rally in San Francisco today.

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