

ENTERTAINMENT



Whitney Houston and her husband, Bobby Brown, perform during the 'VH1 Divas' duets show in this May 22, 2003 file photo in Las Vegas.

Singer Bobby Brown charged with battery

ATLANTA (AP) - Singer Bobby Brown was charged with battery Wednesday, three days after he allegedly hit his wife, singer and actress Whitney Houston.

Fulton County police spokesman Kurtis Young said Brown, 34, turned himself in. Brown and Houston left Fulton County Magistrate Court together after they and their attorneys met with police.

Brown is scheduled to appear at a preliminary hearing Jan. 7.

Brown's lawyer, Maurice Bennett, told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution that his client and Houston were trying to work out the problem "as husband and wife."

Houston, 40, declined comment, but her lawyer, Mark Trigg, echoed Bennett's comments, saying: "She is trying to resolve the matter privately."

Houston told police Sunday that Brown had struck her on the left side of her face with an open right hand at the couple's home near Alpharetta. Brown then went to the airport for a flight to Los Angeles, the police report said.

Police said Houston had a bruised cheek and a cut inside her upper lip.

Simple battery is punishable by up to a year in jail and a \$1,000 fine. Normally on a first offense in domestic violence cases, the charge is dismissed if the defendant undergoes counseling.

Brown served seven days in DeKalb County Jail in August for violating his probation for a 1996 drunken driving conviction. He also served 26 days in a Florida jail in 2000 for an earlier probation violation.

Houston and Brown have been married since 1992. They have a 10-year-old daughter, Bobbi Kristina.

Hip-hop dominates Grammy nods

NEW YORK (AP) - Rap and R&B have been consistent chart-toppers for the last few years, but in 2003 they took over pop music - and the Grammy nominations.

The year's top-selling artist: rapper 50 Cent. Two of the year's biggest hits came from R&B singer Beyonce. In October, every spot on Billboard's top 10 singles chart was held by a rap or R&B artist.

Grammy voters took notice, doling out six nominations each to Beyonce, Jay-Z, OutKast and Pharrell Williams.

"Hip-hop is at its most commercial point," Andre 3000 of the rap duo OutKast told The Associated Press. "It's pretty poppy, and it's popular this year."

Five nominations apiece went to Missy Elliott, Eminem, Evanescence, 50 Cent, Chad Hugo, Ricky Skaggs, Justin Timberlake, the ailing Luther Vandross and the late Warren Zevon.

Four of the five nominees for record of the year fell into the rap or R&B category: Beyonce's "Crazy in Love," "Where Is The Love," by The Black Eyed Peas & Justin Timberlake, "Lose Your-

self," by Eminem and "Hey Ya!" from OutKast. The brooding rock group Coldplay's song "Clocks" was the only exception.

And rap and R&B also dominated the album of the year category: Missy Elliott's "Under Construction"; "Speakerboxxx/The Love Below" by OutKast; and "Justified," from Timberlake, which had the former boy-band star reach into R&B for his first solo effort. The White Stripes' "Elephant" and "Fallen" from goth rockers Evanescence rounded out the category.

However, in somewhat of a surprise, 50 Cent's "Get Rich or Die Tryin'," which sold more than 6 million copies, was shut out of the major categories.

It was nominated exclusively for rap awards, although 50 Cent himself was nominated for best new artist, along with Evanescence, R&B singer Heather Headley, the alt-pop group Fountains of Wayne and the dancehall artist Sean Paul.

Beyonce's nominations were no real surprise - her solo debut apart from Destiny's Child, "Crazy in Love," has sold more than two

million copies and made her a superstar. Jay-Z's "Blueprint 2: The Gift & The Curse" was also a multiplatinum disc, and OutKast's highly acclaimed "Speakerboxxx/The Love Below" was mentioned as a Grammy favorite even before its release this fall.

Unlike the other leading nominees, Pharrell - rhymes with "sell" - is not a household name.

Yet he had just as much of a presence on the music charts - or perhaps more - than any of his counterparts this year. His ubiquitous falsetto was featured on the hits "Frontin'" with Jay-Z and "Beautiful" by Snoop Dogg; he wrote or co-wrote hits for artists like Justin Timberlake; and, along with cohort Hugo, he produced for a variety of artists, including Mary J. Blige and LL Cool J.

While Pharrell and Hugo have been making innovative hits for the past few years, they weren't nominated for any major awards last year because the various record companies they recorded for didn't submit their names for consideration.

This year, after helping to announce the Grammy

nominations, Pharrell said the awards made him feel "validated."

"It's recognition for all the hard work that we put into it. And if we never win anything and never get nominated again I can go to a book somewhere in somebody's library and see our name - I'm validated."

Vandross' nominations - his first in any major category - came in his most difficult year.

The R&B crooner suffered a debilitating stroke in April, two months before the release of his new album, "Dance With My Father." The album went on to become Vandross' fastest-selling disc.

Sentimentality may have also been a factor in the nominations for Zevon. The wry musician, best known for songs like "Werewolves of London" and "Excitable Boy," recorded his final album, "The Wind," as he was battling lung cancer.

It was released this summer to critical acclaim, and he died less than a month later.

The awards will be presented live by CBS from Los Angeles on Feb. 8.

R. Kelly's legal team presses for client

CHICAGO (AP) - Attorneys defending R&B star R. Kelly against child pornography charges have filed a host of motions, including one contending the alleged victim could have been old enough to legally consent to sex.

Also included in the 11 motions Kelly's attorneys filed Monday in Cook County Circuit Court is the argument that the case should be dismissed because prosecutors failed to specify the date of the alleged crime in their in-

dictment against Kelly, 36.

Kelly, whose first name is Robert, was arrested in June 2002 after a videotape surfaced that allegedly showed the Grammy winner having sex with a girl.

By alleging that the illegal acts happened between November 1997 and February 2002,

Kelly's attorneys argue, the girl could be anywhere from 13 to 17 years old. If she was 17 at the time, she would have been old enough to consent to sex.

Further, they argue, such a large window of time makes it impossible for Kelly to mount a fair defense.

"It's no secret that Mr. Kelly is a well-known musician, who frequently travels," the motion states. "By failing to narrow the date of the charged defense, Mr. Kelly is wholly deprived of the opportunity to bring an alibi defense."

The attorneys also raised questions about the law that allows for a man to have sex with girls 17 and older but

illegal to videotape such acts with girls 17 and younger.

"It is illogical, irrational and disproportionate to subject one to a criminal conviction for taking pictures of conduct that does not otherwise violate the law," they said.

Defense attorney Edward Genson said he could argue the motions as early as Kelly's next scheduled court appearance on Feb. 6.

Prosecutors have declined to comment on any of the motions.

Embattled label drops 'Murder' from name

NEW YORK (AP) - Rap-er Ja Rule's record label was cleared of "Murder." The company behind the multiplatinum rapper and singer Ashanti announced it had changed its name to The Inc., moving away from its previous incarnation as Murder Inc.

"Over the course of the years, it seems as though no one is really looking at the talent ... more so than that damn word 'murder,'" label founder Irv Gotti told a mid-

town Manhattan news conference. "All of these big records, and people would still come back and focus on the negative word 'murder.'"

Gotti, flanked by Ja Rule and Ashanti, announced the label's name change at a crowded event attended by hip-hop entrepreneur Russell Simmons and Hip-Hop Summit Action Network head Benjamin Chavis.

The label's name, according to Gotti, came to him as he watched a television docu-

mentary on the original crew of mob hit men. He liked the title's double-meaning, referring to both the mob and making hits for the radio.

"I wanted to shock people. I wanted people to remember," said Gotti, who billed Murder Inc. as "the world's most dangerous record company" when it was founded in 1997. The label's first release under its new name was already in stores: Ashanti's "Christmas Album."

The mellower release was

not a signal that the label intended to change its music or its message.

"The lyrical content is going to stay the same," Gotti said. "I don't tell my artists to do anything. They have lyrical freedom, 100 percent. They say what they want."

Gotti, whose real name is Irv Lorenzo, said he had no intention of changing the nickname he shares with the late Gambino family boss John Gotti. Rapper Jay-Z first began calling him "Gotti."

Friends focus on helping Bryson at Atlanta auction

ATLANTA (AP) - Friends of Peabo Bryson stepped in to help the award-winning singer keep some of his prized possessions, including at least one of his two Grammys. Bryson's Grammy Awards for "Beauty and the Beast" and "A Whole New World" were auctioned during the weekend to help pay his \$1.2 million tax debt. The Internal Revenue Service seized all of Bryson's property from his Atlanta home in August.

A woman who cast the winning \$9,400 bid for one of the Grammys identified herself and her associates only as "very close friends of the family. We're giving it back to him," she told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. Bryson's 1992 Grammy sold for \$15,500 and one of his gold records went for \$3,000. The IRS said it would not disclose the amount raised through the sale.