

Entertainment Briefs

ANDRE 3000 OF OUTKAST PLANS TO VOTE

ATLANTA (AP) - Andre 3000 of the rap duo OutKast says that when it comes to voting, he's been negligent, but things will be different this November. "Stuff came up," the 28-year-old, whose real name is Andre Benjamin, told The Atlanta Journal Constitution. "I was out of town, I couldn't see how my vote would matter. It just wasn't that important to me," he said. But Benjamin, one of dozens of entertainers taking part in a voting promotion, said he has "realized just how important it is." "I'm really excited about voting for the first time," the Atlanta native said for an article published Tuesday. Benjamin recently hosted an event for "Declare Yourself," a national nonprofit group that has raised \$27 million to try to reverse the trend of a declining youth vote. In 2000, only 36 percent of Americans ages 18-24 voted in the presidential election, census figures show. That compares with 50 percent in 1972, the year voter eligibility dropped from age 21 to 18. "Sometimes entertainers - movie stars and rappers - have even more power than politicians. Sometimes all it takes is one or two people in the public eye to get people to vote," said Benjamin.

MONTEL WILLIAMS SUPPORTS MEDICAL MARIJUANA

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) - Montel Williams threw his support behind legalizing medical marijuana in New York, saying pot helps him cope with multiple sclerosis. Williams, who was diagnosed with the neurological disease in 1999, said he uses marijuana every night before bed to relieve the pain in his legs and feet. "I'm breaking the law every day, and I will continue to break the law," Williams, host of the syndicated "Montel Williams Show," said Tuesday. Williams recalled during a news conference how prescription painkillers and even morphine failed to control his tremors and spasms. Nine states - Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, Nevada, Oregon and Washington state - allow medical marijuana use. Williams, 47, said he can legally obtain marijuana in California, where he owns property, but argued that as a New York state taxpayer, he should have the same right there. Opponents of legalizing marijuana for medical purposes fear rogue doctors or patients may abuse it. A proposed law in New York to prescribe marijuana to terminally ill patients to treat pain advanced in the Assembly Health Committee earlier this year, but the measure has yet to reach the floor of the state Legislature for a vote.

WAYNE BRADY JOINS CAST OF 'CHICAGO'

NEW YORK (AP) - TV talk show host Wayne Brady is joining the cast of the long-running Broadway musical revival "Chicago" as the opportunistic Billy Flynn. The performer, star of "The Wayne Brady Show," joins "Chicago" Sept. 7 at the Ambassador Theatre and will continue in the musical through Nov. 11. The 31-year-old Brady will end production of his television show after this season, its second on the air. The Florida native has won Emmy Awards for his talk show and for his work on the ABC comedy series "Whose Line Is It Anyway?" Brady has appeared in Florida productions of "A Chorus Line," "Fences," "I'm Not Rappaport" and "A Raisin in the Sun," as well as in such television series as "I'll Fly Away," "Home Court" and "American Dreams."

B.B. KING TO RECEIVE POLAR MUSIC PRIZE

STOCKHOLM, Sweden (AP) - Former Led Zeppelin guitarist Jimmy Page and conductor Elgar Howarth will award the 2004 Polar Music Prize to bluesman B.B. King and composer Gyorgy Ligeti, organizers have said. Page will read the prize citation for King and Howarth will do the same for Ligeti at the May 24 prize ceremony. King Carl XVI Gustaf will hand out the award to both winners. The award was founded in 1989 by Stig Anderson, manager of Swedish pop group ABBA, through a donation to The Royal Swedish Academy of Music. King and Ligeti will each receive \$130,887. The prize is typically split between pop artists and classical musicians. Previous winners include Paul McCartney, Isaac Stern, Bruce Springsteen, Pierre Boulez and Quincy Jones.

ENTERTAINMENT

Prince denies return is comeback

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) - Sitting in his purple-draped dressing room, sipping tea amid sweet-scented candles, Prince is as peaceful and serene as a superstar could be before showtime - until you utter THAT ONE WORD:

Comeback.

Just mention the idea that his latest album, "Musicology" - coupled with a tour, TV specials and magazine covers - has anything to do with regaining the spotlight, and a slight frown falls over Prince's chiseled, pretty face.

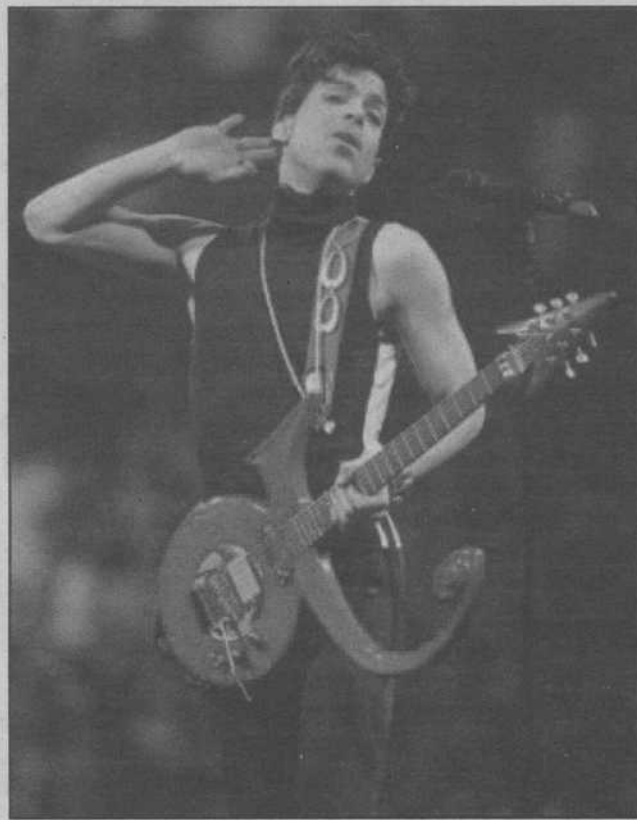
"I would ask people who want to call this a comeback, where they think I'm coming back from?" the 45-year-old star, neatly dressed in a taupe suit with matching heels, told The Associated Press during an interview backstage at the St. Pete Times Forum.

"They want to see me as having failed."

By "they," he means critics, who point out it's been more than a decade since the regal performer dominated the spotlight. His star burned brightest in the 1980s and early '90s as he sold tens of millions of albums behind hits like "Kiss," "Little Red Corvette," and "Purple Rain," from his blockbuster 1984 movie debut.

Back then, Prince's was part of the pop trifecta of superstars - as popular as Michael Jackson or Madonna, yet still in a class of his own. He was considered a musical genius, dazzling audiences with his guitar, piano or feverishly dancing footsteps. He always wrote and produced all of his own songs, which ranged from pop to R&B to rock, and from romance to raunch.

The reclusive musician was always something of an enigma. After his much-publicized dispute with his Warner Bros. record company, he not only became more of a puzzle, but one big unpronounceable symbol (which is what his name became). As he abandoned major record labels and



Prince, who has a new album, "Musicology," and is currently on tour, performs at the Staples Center in Los Angeles in March. The talented artist will also play Vegas.

released music through the Internet and on his own, his star power and sales dwindled to a fraction of their former levels.

But Prince - who in person is chatty, warm and thoughtful, a marked contrast to the unapproachable image of his past - sees it differently. In his eyes, he has been more successful on his own. He mentions two projects that sold more than 100,000 copies. For a superstar like Prince, by industry standards, that would be deemed a failure.

"(But) I get all the money from that, so when you do the math on that, it's a big day at the races," Prince quips in his deep voice. "My bankers are very happy with me."

While Prince stresses he holds no bitterness, he clearly does not regard the music industry with much regard. He likens it to "The Matrix," and in going independent, he decided to take the little blue pill.

He proudly notes that he determines where his records are sold, when he goes on tour and what kind of music

he puts out.

"When you show you can be successful as an independent artist, the umbilical cord is broken," Prince says. "(Record contracts are) a parent-child relationship. An advance is an allowance. Any business situation is restrictive."

Yet for "Musicology," he went to Columbia Records - part of the Sony conglomerate - to manufacture and release it in conjunction with his own label, New Power Generation (NPG) Records.

And the typically reclusive entertainer - who gives few interviews and happily lives life out of the limelight with his wife and former employee, Manuela Testolini, in his hometown of Minneapolis - has suddenly become more visible.

In February, he kicked off the Grammys with a performance with Beyonce; he also made an appearance on Ellen

DeGeneres' talk show. More media appearances followed, and it didn't hurt to be inducted in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in March, where he again wowed audiences.

Seems like a guy who's looking to reclaim his throne. And it seems to be working - "Musicology" debuted on the charts at No. 3, selling about 192,000 copies.

Except Prince says he never stopped being a success - it's just that people weren't paying enough attention.

"Leno - this is the fourth time I've played it," he says of his recent appearance. The Grammys? "Every year they ask me to play the Grammys. I just said yes this year."

And his link with Columbia?

"They're augmenting the project - they're not the promised land," he says. He notes that he had a similar deal with Arista in 1999 and may put out an instrumental release on Blue Note Records this year.

Prince has fashioned "Musicology" as a lesson to new acts who care more about making hits than crafting musical gems.

"I really missed a lot of songwriting in music," he says. "There's not a lot of music. There's grooves, there's hooks. There just isn't any songs out there"

More disturbing to Prince, however, is the content. Rump-shaking video girls and songs that promote violence, sex and drugs - especially in rap and R&B - leaves him shaking his head and chastising record executives who should know better. "What you won't show your kids, don't show ours," he declares.

Of course, this is coming from a man who was one of (See Prince, Page 9)

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