

## Entertainment Briefs

### OPRAH WINFREY GIVES \$1 MILLION TO MUSEUM

CINCINNATI (AP) - Oprah Winfrey has given \$1 million to the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center and is narrator of an educational film for the museum, its administrators said. The \$110 million museum, being built along the Ohio River, commemorates the secret Underground Railroad network that helped slaves escape from the South to the free North during the 1800s. Winfrey, whose donation was announced Thursday, will narrate a short film introducing "Brothers of the Borderland," a film and interactive theater program. A reconstructed slave holding pen also will be part of the museum. Celebrity supporters of the museum, many of whom are expected to participate in the center's dedication ceremonies Aug. 23, include Vanessa Williams, Angela Bassett, Muhammad Ali, Quincy Jones, Bono and Danny Glover. Two of the center's three pavilions will be named after the families of Black Entertainment Television founder Robert Johnson and former Procter & Gamble Co. chief executive John Pepper, who each donated \$3 million to the museum.

### MEN CLAIM 'WHITE CHICKS' IDEA WAS THEIRS

STAMFORD, Conn. (AP) - Four men claim the Ways brothers stole the idea behind the movie "White Chicks" from them: Mario Pittore and brothers Jason, Jon and James Coppola sued last week in federal court, seeking \$15 million in damages. "We feel not only does it rip us off, but it's not even as good" as the Pittore-Coppola script, said Pittore, 30. "White Chicks" stars the Ways as Black FBI agents who pose as young White hotel heiresses. The movie has grossed \$37.3 million since it opened June 23. The mens' script, titled "Johnny Bronx," is about a bumbling Black FBI agent who impersonates a White man to infiltrate the mob.

### COSBY PAYING FOR EDUCATION OF TWO STUDENTS

SPRINGFIELD, Mass. (AP) - Comedian Bill Cosby, who recently said Black children are "going nowhere" because they don't know how to read and write, is paying for the college education of two top high school graduates who support themselves. Cosby, who lives in Shelburne, read a story in The Republican of Springfield about Loren M. Wilder and Jimmy L. Hester, who are also Black. Wilder was 14 when his mother was jailed for dealing drugs, and Hester left home at 15 after years of moving around and fighting with his mother. The young men rented an apartment this winter with another student from Putnam Vocational Technical High School. "Here's a guy who has millions of dollars and he's focusing in on the two of us," Wilder said. The students visited three colleges in a tour arranged by Cosby before selecting Hampton University in Hampton, Va., on Tuesday.

### SOUTH AFRICANS SUE OVER 'LION KING' SONG

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (AP) - An impoverished South African family has filed a lawsuit against U.S. entertainment giant Walt Disney, seeking royalties for its use of a song by a popular Zulu composer in "The Lion King." The estate of Solomon Linda, a Zulu migrant worker turned songwriter who in 1939 wrote the tune that became the world hit "The Lion Sleeps Tonight," filed a lawsuit last week in the Pretoria High Court. The lawsuit seeks \$1.6 million in compensation from Disney, lawyer Hanro Friedrich said Wednesday. Disney denied liability in a statement released Tuesday. Linda died penniless in 1962, having sold the rights to the song to a South African publisher. Originally titled "Mbube," the song generated some \$15 million in royalties after it was adapted by other artists, including American songwriter George Weiss, whose version is featured in Disney's 1994 film "The Lion King." Linda's three surviving daughters and 10 grandchildren, living in poverty in the Johannesburg township of Soweto, have received only a one-time payment of \$15,000 from the present copyright holder, Friedrich said. The daughters decided to seek legal help after realizing they had lost out on millions of dollars in royalties. Their lawyers are bringing a challenge on the basis of law in force in Commonwealth nations at the time the song was first recorded. Under its provisions, the rights to a song revert to the composer's heirs 25 years after his death.

## ENTERTAINMENT

# 'I, Robot' stretches Smith's chops

LOS ANGELES (AP) - Since the mid-1990s, Will Smith practically has owned July, delivering hit after hit, his charm often enough to draw in audiences even for bad movies. This July, Smith is trying something different.

"I, Robot," loosely adapted from the short stories of Isaac Asimov, has more smarts than the usual Smith summer movie, preserving much of the philosophy that made sci-fi master Asimov's tales a blueprint for fiction that followed about human-machine interaction.

Yet "I, Robot" also delivers the brawn, action and wisecracking that audiences have come to expect from Smith this time of year in such flicks as "Independence Day," the "Men in Black" movies and last year's "Bad Boys II."

"I think when we look back in 50 years, the one discernible skill that Will Smith will have displayed is the ability to choose a summer movie. I think that is my skill more than anything," Smith, 35, told The Associated Press, recalling with a laugh how he's scored hits with movies critics trashed, such as "Independence Day" and "Wild Wild West."

"I am a serious summer movie fan, and I know the type of movie that needs to be in July. I have a sense of what audiences want to see. What I hoped to develop with "I, Robot" was the ability to push it forward."



Will Smith poses with a mariachi hat during promotion of his film 'I, Robot' at a press conference Monday in Mexico City. The part-time rapper has become a Hollywood star.

Set in 2035, the movie stars Smith as a Chicago cop with deep mistrust of the robots that have taken over for humans on trash collecting, dog-walking and other menial chores.

The machines are programmed to obey Asimov's famed three laws ensuring they will not injure humans or allow humans to come to harm through inaction. And while no robot has ever committed a crime, Smith's character is convinced one of the machines has carried out a murder.

In between highway chases, car wrecks, explosions and gunfire, "I, Robot" ponders the nature of intelligence, the unforeseen contradictions in machine logic,

and the timely notion of whether individual freedoms must be sacrificed for the good of humanity.

The film even incorporates the irony of a Black cop accused of unreasoning prejudice against robots when Smith's character is told, "I suspect you just don't like their kind."

"What's great about this film is it doesn't compromise the other side. It doesn't compromise the special effects, it doesn't compromise the action sequences. But what it does is it gives a whole other side that's a little smarter," Smith said.

Accustomed to physical training for action roles, Smith said "I, Robot" also required the same level of

dramatic preparation he put in for more serious films such as "Six Degrees of Separation" and "Ali," which earned him an Academy Award nomination for best actor.

While "Ali" was a box-office lemon, Smith's intense performance surprised people, especially considering the advance gripes from fans who felt the Fresh Prince of rap and TV sitcom fame was a lightweight choice to play Muhammad Ali.

Along with picking the right summer movie, the element of surprise has been a consistent strength for Smith, who has confounded doubters with every career turn.

After his 1980s music success as part of the rap duo DJ (See Will Smith, Page 7)

## Parole agents working for Snoop Dogg fired

LOS ANGELES (AP) - Three state parole agents arrested while moonlighting for rapper Snoop Dogg at an awards show have been fired from their corrections jobs.

Corrections officials began a yearlong internal probe after the rapper's caravan was stopped last June after the Black Entertainment Television Awards in Hollywood.

Police arrested three heavily armed bodyguards and confiscated knives, ammunition and handguns. A total of 13 people were detained for questioning; Snoop Dogg, whose given name is Calvin Broadus, was not among them.

Three parole agents were part of the entourage. The investigation found a fourth officer was working for the rapper while on a disability

leave, according to the corrections department.

Officials on Tuesday declined to release the names of the officers and the reason why they were fired, saying they expected the officers to appeal the decision within the next 30 days.

The officers' involvement with the rapper, who was con-

victed in 1990 of felony possession of cocaine for sale, appeared to be in conflict with their duties.

The state agency does not have a specific policy barring outside work for people with criminal records. However, employment is forbidden by state regulations if it's "incompatible or inconsis-

tent" with their duties, a corrections spokesman said.

The Inglewood Unified School District board last year voted to fire eight part-time school police officers, including four who moonlighted as bodyguards for Snoop Dogg when an unknown gunman shot at his convoy in April 2003.

## Snoop, Neptunes team up on album

NEW YORK (AP) - The Dogg will bark yet again. Hip-hop star Snoop Dogg is recording a new album with production powerhouses The Neptunes tentatively titled, "R&G: (Rhythm & Gangsta) The Masterpiece," Geffen Records said in a statement Tuesday.

The album, set for release Nov. 16, is a co-production of Snoop's Doggy Style label, The Neptunes' Star Trak imprint and Geffen Records.

Snoop will serve as executive producer on "R&G," which will feature a collaboration with Gap Band founder Charlie Wilson. The album will be Snoop's latest since the platinum-selling "Paid Tha Cost to Be Da Bo\$\$" in 2002, which yielded the hit single "Beautiful."

Snoop was featured on Dr. Dre's 1992 album, "The Chronic." Since then, he's starred in his own MTV show and created his own clothing line.