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"THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE"



A voice described as heavenly, Luther Vandross became one of the most celebrated singers in R&B history.

Vandross' talent left long legacy

NEW YORK (AP) - Luther Vandross' style harkened back to a more genteel era of crooning, with songs that spoke to heartfelt emotions and gentle pillow talk rather than explicit sexuality.

"I'm more into poetry and metaphor, and I would much rather imply something rather than to blatantly state it," the Grammy award winner once said. "You blatantly state stuff sometimes when you can't think of a poetic way to say it."

Vandross, whose deep, lush voice on hits such as "Here and Now" and "Any Love" provided the romantic backdrop for millions of couples, died Friday. He was 54.

The singer died at John F. Kennedy Medical Center in Edison, N.J., said hospital spokesman Rob Cavanaugh. He did not release the cause of death but said in a statement that Vandross "never really recovered" from a stroke two years ago.

Since the stroke in his Manhattan home on April 16, 2003, the R&B crooner stopped making public appearances — but amazingly managed to continue his recording career. In 2004, he captured four Grammys as a sentimental favorite, including best song for the bittersweet "Dance With My Father."

Vandross, who was in a wheelchair at the time, delivered a videotaped thank you.

"Remember, when I say goodbye it's never for long," said a weak-looking Vandross. "Because" — he broke into his familiar hit — "I believe in the power of love."

Vandross also battled weight problems for years while suffering from diabetes and hypertension.

He was arguably the most celebrated R&B balladeer of his generation. He made women swoon with his silky yet forceful tenor, which he often revved up like a motor engine before reaching his beautiful crescendos.

Jeff O'Conner, Vandross' publicist, called his death "a huge loss in the R&B industry." O'Conner said he received condolence calls Friday from music luminaries such as Aretha Franklin, Patti LaBelle, Michael Jackson and Quincy Jones.

Singer Roberta Flack, on tour in Japan, said she was mourning the loss of her friend of more than 20 years.

"He was a musician who couldn't help but give you all he had," she said by telephone. "He was the kind of guy who was born to do what he did musically and let the world know about it. He was not born to keep it smothered in the chest."

(See Vandross, Page 7)

Stamps irk Mexican Blacks

MEXICO CITY, Mexico — Mexico's tiny Black community demanded Monday that President Vicente Fox apologize for a set of stamps featuring a Black comic book figure that U.S. civil rights groups have slammed as racist.

The Asociacion Mexico Negro, which represents some 50,000 Blacks living on the Pacific coast, said in a letter to Fox that Memin Pinguin, a 1940s comic book character drawn with thick lips and a flat nose, was stereotypical and racist.

"Memin Pinguin rewards, celebrates, typifies and cements the distorted, mocking, stereotypical and limited vision of Black people in general," said the letter signed by leaders of the association.

The letter marks the first official complaint from a Mexican group over the stamps, which went on sale last week and provoked a storm of controversy in the United States. U.S. civil rights groups said they should be withdrawn.

Fox has said the stamps

are not racist and ignored calls to pull them from circulation. His Foreign Minister Luis Ernesto Derbez said the affair was exaggerated by "specific groups in the United States who make a living from this kind of scandal."

"They look more ridiculous than we do," he said in a radio interview.

Political correctness is barely existent in Mexico, where there are few Black immigrants, Caucasians are commonly addressed as "Guero" ("Whitey"), and

dark-skinned locals are nicknamed "Morenito" or "Negro" without causing offense.

Generations of Mexicans grew up reading the cartoon strip escapades of Memin Pinguin, a mischievous Black boy whose looks and monkey-like antics are endearing but embody outdated ideas about Blacks, like many comic books of the time.

"The stamps are 101 percent offensive; there is no doubt about it," said Rev. Glyn Jemmott, a Catholic (See Stamps, Page 4)



Five stamps released last week for general use by the Mexican government depict an exaggerated black cartoon character known as Memin Pinguin, a child character from a comic book started in the 1940s and is still published in Mexico.

Rapper Lil' Kim gets year for perjury

NEW YORK (AP) - Grammy-winning rapper Lil' Kim was sentenced Wednesday to a year and a day in prison and fined \$50,000 for lying to a federal grand jury to protect friends involved in a 2001 shootout outside a Manhattan radio station.

While many rappers have served time in prison, Lil' Kim is the first big-name female to do so.

Lil' Kim (real name: Kimberly Jones) could have gotten up to 20 years — five years each on three counts of perjury and one count of conspiracy — at her sentencing before U.S. District Judge Gerard Lynch. She was convicted of the charges in March.

As a solo artist, Lil' Kim, who turns 30 next week, has become known for her revealing outfits and raunchy lyrics. She won a Grammy in

2001 for her part in the hit remake of "Lady Marmalade."

The rapper told the grand jury she did not notice two of her close friends at the scene of the shootout — her manager, Damion Butler, and

Suif Jackson, known as "Gutta." Both have pleaded guilty to gun charges.

Jurors at Lil' Kim's trial saw radio station security photos that depicted Butler opening a door for the rap star, and two witnesses who

once made records with Lil' Kim said they saw her at the station with Butler and Jackson.

The gun battle happened outside WQHT-FM, known as Hot 97, when Lil' Kim's entourage crossed paths with a rival rap group, Capone-N-Noreaga.

Lil' Kim's group confronted the others about the Capone-N-Noreaga song "Bang, Bang" that contained an insult to Lil' Kim from rival Foxy Brown. One man was hurt in the shootout that followed.

Hot 97 is the same station where the posses of 50 Cent and The Game traded bullets in February.

At the trial, Lil' Kim testified that she had a falling out after the shooting with Butler and with Antoine "Banger" Spain and James (See Rapper, Page 4)



Lil' Kim, whose real name is Kimberly Jones, with her attorney Mel Sachs, left, exits Manhattan federal court following her sentencing Wednesday, in New York. She was given a prison sentence of one year and one day, as well as a \$50,000 fine for lying to the grand jury in connection with a shootout outside a Manhattan radio station in 2001.