

Entertainment Briefs

LL COOL J, BILL WITHERS TO BE HONORED

LOS ANGELES (AP) - Rapper LL Cool J and R&B crooner Bill Withers will be honored for their musical contributions by the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers, the organization announced Friday. LL Cool J will receive the Golden Note award and Withers will be presented with the Rhythm & Soul Heritage award at a June 26 ceremony at the Beverly Hills Hotel. ASCAP president Marilyn Bergman called LL Cool J "one of the most important figures in the history of hip-hop." "He has weathered all the trends in the rap world and is as commercially viable today as he was when he started out in 1985," she said in a statement. Past recipients of the Golden Note include Sean "Diddy" Combs, Tom Petty, Quincy Jones and Stevie Wonder. Withers is "one of America's premier singer-songwriters," Bergman said. "Bill's music and lyrics have extraordinary accessibility and universal appeal," she said. Withers joins previous Rhythm & Soul Heritage winners Chaka Khan, Peabo Bryson and Earth, Wind and Fire.

YOUNGBLOODZ FACE DRUG, WEAPONS CHARGES

ATLANTA (AP) - The two members of the rap group Youngbloodz and their 12-person entourage face drug and weapons charges after being stopped while on their way to a concert. Jeffrey Ray Grigsby, 29, who performs using the name J-Bo, and Sean Paul Joseph, 27, who performs as Sean Paul, were arrested Thursday on I-85 on the way to Columbus, Ga. All 14 were charged with possession of marijuana with intent to distribute and possession of firearms. They posted bond Friday. Coweta County Sheriff's Deputy Clinton Reynolds said he pulled the tour bus over because it had an expired Florida tag but immediately noticed the odor of burning marijuana. After a search of the vehicle, Reynolds said deputies found two firearms and about a half pound of marijuana divided into 11 plastic bags. The group, whose hits include "85 South" and "Cadillac Pimping," will be exonerated, said Tice Merriweather, a spokesman for the group's record label, Jive Records. "The guys have never had any trouble with the law," Merriweather said in a statement.

BEYONCE PLANS

'B'DAY' SOLO ALBUM

NEW YORK (AP) - Beyonce Knowles will celebrate her 25th birthday with the release of "B'Day," her second solo album. The album will be released internationally on her birthday, Sept. 4, and in the United States on Sept. 5, Columbia Records announced recently. "B'Day" has all new music co-produced, written and arranged by Knowles, the record label said. The first single, "Deja Vu," features Knowles' boyfriend, rap mogul Jay-Z, as a guest artist. Knowles, who fronted R&B girl group Destiny's Child, won five Grammy Awards for her top-selling solo debut, 2003's "Dangerously in Love." She stars opposite Jamie Foxx and Eddie Murphy in the Hollywood adaptation of the Broadway musical "Dreamgirls," slated for release Dec. 25. Her screen credits also include roles in the comedies "The Pink Panther" and "Austin Powers in Goldmember."

RAP STAR DMX HAS DATE IN TRAFFIC COURT

WHITE PLAINS, N.Y. (AP) - The rap star DMX has again been charged with traffic infractions, this time after being pulled over in downtown White Plains. DMX, whose real name is Earl Simmons, was stopped on Friday afternoon for driving his 2001 Chevy Suburban at unreasonable speeds and making unsafe lane changes, Deputy Commissioner Daniel Jackson of the White Plains police said Monday. Once he was stopped, police found he was not wearing a seat belt and did not have a driver's license, Jackson said. The 35-year-old rapper was ticketed and told to come to court on June 16. Last year, DMX served 70 days in jail for violating his parole following a 2004 incident in which he posed as an undercover federal agent and crashed his SUV through a security gate at Kennedy International Airport. A week after he pleaded guilty in that incident, state police accused him of driving over 100 mph on Interstate 684 in North Castle, in Westchester County. DMX also had a recent problem with another mode of transportation. Last month, he was arrested in London after allegedly refusing to put on a seat belt and becoming abusive on a flight from New York.

Curry uses comedy to recoup

By Genoa Barrow
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Comedian Mark Curry is recuperating after an April accident at his Oakland home left him with burns on 18 percent of his body.

The "Hanging With Mr. Cooper" star is even at a place where he can find humor in the situation, although he openly admits that it took him a while to get to that point.

"I was depressed," he said. "I thought about committing suicide, but where in a hospital room is a man who's 6' 6" going to hang himself?"

In an exclusive interview with the *Sacramento Observer*, Curry shared the details of the accident and how it has given him a "new lease on life."

On April 17, an aerosol can fell behind Curry's hot water heater and exploded. Curry, who was doing laundry at the time, was burned on his arm, back and side. His family was able to escape unharmed.

Curry underwent surgery on April 24 and has since gone to Europe to seek other recovery and treatment options.

"I'm getting stronger day by day," he shared.

Curry says he wants to clear up any misconceptions people may have developed since word of the accident got out.

"I don't want people to think that I'm disfigured, because I'm not," he said. "And everything is OK in the plumbing department. Black people want to know that kind of stuff," he added.

Curry said he's taking the freak accident as a sign.

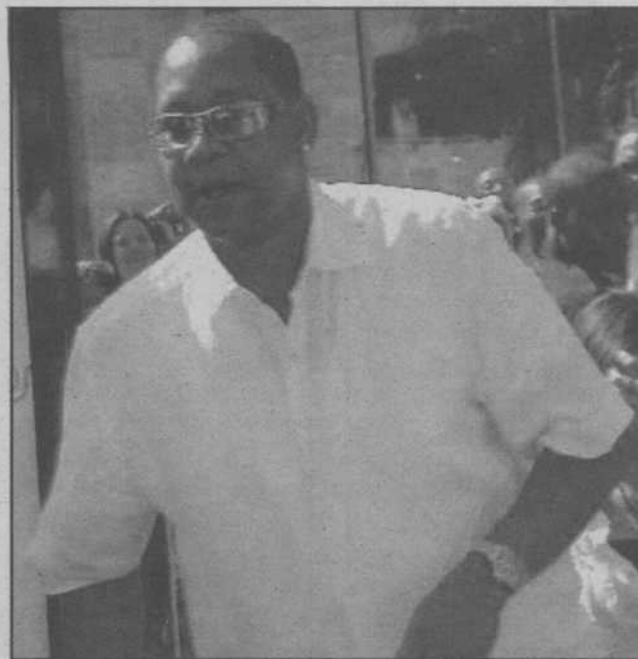
"It was a warning. There's about a one percent chance that I'd be doing laundry and an even less chance that I'd be doing the laundry with my shirt off," he shared.

Helping in Curry's early recovery were numerous calls he received from his comedic colleagues; folks like Chris Tucker, Sinbad, Martin Lawrence, Kim Wheatley and his idol Bill Cosby.

Others, he said, were thinking of him, but couldn't bring themselves to call, for fear of finding him in grave condition.

"They didn't know if I was dead or just burnt up. They heard the rumors, but they didn't know what happened."

Another famous Black comedian, the late Richard Pryor, turned his own near tragic experience with fire into laughs, often speaking



Mark Curry was injured in a fire at his home in Oakland.

frankly about it on stage, particularly in his concert film "Richard Pryor Live on Sunset Strip."

Will Curry incorporate his accident into his own stand up act? "Of course. I'm using this as fuel," he said.

All jokes aside, Curry said the accident is serving as a catalyst to make some changes in his life. He's found two new causes —

raising money for burn victims and bringing attention to depression, which is still a huge taboo in the African-

American community. He's also lost more than 20 pounds.

Curry, who celebrated his 42nd birthday on June 1, has a resumé that includes appearances in films such as "Armageddon" and Martin Lawrence's "Talking Dirty After Dark" and television shows such as "Fat Actress," "Less Than Perfect," and "The Drew Carey Show."

At one point, he hosted two shows at once "Animal Tails" on PAX and "Coming to the Stage" on BET.

In a business where appearance is everything, Curry counts himself lucky that he wasn't burned on his face or severely enough to keep him from returning to work.

Curry says he's only taken the stage once since the accident. He stopped by his "home club," the San Francisco Punchline Comedy Club one evening and ended up, as he has so many other times, using it as therapy.

"I was so tired, but I had to get it out," he shared.

Now on the mend, Curry is planning a regular show at the SF Punchline, "Mark Curry Mondays." The show's format will feature a 10-minute set by an up-and-coming comedian, followed by an hour-long set by Curry. Part of the proceeds will go to burn victims.

"That first day (in the burn unit) I said bring me a notebook and I've been writing ever since."

"Mark Curry Mondays" made its debut at the SF Punchline on May 22 with Curry working out new material every second and fourth Monday of the month. For more information, visit sf.punchlinecomedyclub.com.

Genoa Barrow writes for the *Sacramento Observer*.

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