

Entertainment Briefs

GROUPS TO MAKE MOVIES FOCUSED ON BLACKS

LOS ANGELES (AP) - The founder of the Black Entertainment Television network and the founders of independent-film giant Miramax are forming a movie company to distribute family comedies centered on Black characters. Recently, RLJ Cos. LLC and the Weinstein Co. said they will launch Our Stories Films to produce and acquire the movies. Robert L. Johnson, founder of RLJ and BET and owner of the NBA's Charlotte Bobcats, will oversee the film venture. The movies will be distributed by Dimension Films, a unit of the Weinstein Co., formed last year by Harvey and Bob Weinstein after they departed their original movie outfit, Disney-owned Miramax. The company's DVD releases will be distributed by Genius Products Inc., which also handles video distribution for Weinstein Co. titles. Johnson has lined up \$200 million in capital, including up to \$175 million in financing from JP Morgan Chase. The company expects to open for business within six months.

'IDOL' WINNER FANTASIA BARRINO IN TV MOVIE ABOUT OWN LIFE

PASADENA, Calif. (AP) - "American Idol" winner Fantasia Barrino had to be persuaded to play herself in a television movie about her hardscrabble life. "Life Is Not a Fairy Tale," to air Aug. 19 on Lifetime, is inspired by the R&B singer's autobiography about the obstacles she has overcome, including dropping out of high school and becoming an unwed mother at 17. "I didn't think it was going to be tough going back playing myself, but it was because I had to relive those moments," Barrino told the Television Critics Association's summer meeting Friday. "At the end, I began to cry and I said, 'I went through all those things, but I know why I share my life.' I'm thankful that I was able to do it." A rape scene was particularly unnerving for Barrino, who initially told director Debbie Allen she wouldn't do it. "She talked to me, and she helped me out a lot," Barrino said. "The good part about it is her son played the part. He was so warm and funny... So it made it a whole lot easier for me." Barrino was the third season winner of "Idol" and released her debut album "Free Yourself" in 2004.

HIP-HOP JEWELER PLEADS NOT GUILTY TO MONEY LAUNDERING

DETROIT (AP) - The man known throughout the hip-hop world as Jacob Arabo or "Jacob the Jeweler" pleaded not guilty recently to money laundering charges. Yakov Arabov, 41, was arraigned before U.S. Magistrate Judge Virginia M. Morgan, who continued his bond at \$100,000. Arabov was arrested June 15 at his store in New York on a warrant issued in Detroit by federal authorities, who accuse him with conspiring with others to launder money in connection with a jewelry business. Authorities say the 16 people indicted for conspiracy and laundering are connected to a drug organization called the "Black Mafia Family." The gang dealt cocaine in the Detroit metropolitan area beginning in the early 1990s, extending across the country. Arabov, a Russian immigrant, became popular among hip-hop and R&B artists in the mid-1990s after he attracted the attention of Notorious B.I.G., according to the Jacob & Co. website. Sean "Diddy" Combs, Kanye West, Madonna and Sir Elton John have all worn his gem-encrusted baubles.

CANCER CLAIMS ORIGINAL COMMODORE MILAN B. WILLIAMS

HOUSTON (AP) - Milan B. Williams, one of the original members of the Commodores, died after a long battle with cancer. He was 58. Williams died Sunday at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, said JoAnn Geffen, a spokesperson for the band. Williams, who played keyboards, was one of the founding members for the Commodores, which formed in 1968 while all the members were in college at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. The group, whose best-known member was singer Lionel Richie, had a series of hits during the 1970s and 1980s, including "Brick House," "Easy" and "Three Times a Lady." He is survived by his wife, Melanie Bruno-Williams, and two sons from previous marriages, Jason and Ricci. The funeral will be on Friday in Okolona, Miss., where Williams was born. There will be a memorial service in Los Angeles in August.

'Little Man' short on large fun

By Kam Williams
Special to Sentinel-Voice

In "White Chicks," producers Shawn and Marlon Wayans dressed in drag and donned whiteface to play FBI Agents undercover as dumb-blonde debutantes. In "Little Man," another freaky farce directed by their big brother Keenen, only Marlon appears in an elaborate disguise. This slaphappy misadventure features him as a foul-mouthed midget masquerading as a baby in order to retrieve a pilfered diamond from a childless couple.

The picture's plotline is a slight variation of "Free Eats" (1932), the Little Rascals classic about a pair of "fidget" conmen who decide to relieve some compassionate society women of their jewelry by posing as adoptable infants. "Free Eats," by the way, marked the introduction of the character Spanky. It also starred an exasperated Stymie, supposedly an inveterate liar, telling the truth — for the first time — as his dire warnings about the dudes in diapers fell on deaf ears.

"Little Man" is also suspiciously similar to "Baby Buggy Bunny" (1954), a Bugs Bunny cartoon that relied on essentially the same theme. Here, as the movie opens, we find pint-sized Calvin (Marlon Wayans) partnered with Percy (Tracy Morgan) and about to steal the priceless jewel. But the robbery goes wrong and the two part company in a convenience store. As he is about to be caught by the cops, Calvin surreptitiously slips the stone into the pocketbook of Vanessa Edwards (Kerry Washington) a customer shopping with her husband, Darryl (Shawn Wayans).

As luck would have it, the Edwards have been trying to have a child, which makes them open to the idea of caring for Calvin when Percy leaves him on their doorstep in swaddling clothes with a note pinned to his diaper. Darryl talks his hesitant wife into taking the tot in, thus enabling this over-the-top shock comedy to embark into uncharted comedy waters where we find some unseemly sexual and bodily-function humor.

For instance, under the guise of being a baby, Calvin proceeds to feel up one of Vanessa's friend's mammaries, to suckle another's breasts, and to have sex with his adoptive Momma herself. While



'Little Man' captures the Wayans brothers' penchant for inane, gross-out, physical comedy.

Darryl remains clueless about the true nature of the impersonator, his father-in-law (John Witherspoon), ala Stymie, figures out the ruse, but, alas, his complaints are conveniently ignored.

While this is admittedly a gross-out flick, there's something about a dwarf baby-

faker tongue kissing, molesting and mating with unsuspecting women that struck me as just a little too gross. So, although the audience at my screening apparently appreciated all the venereal, homophobic, fart, feces, urination, and swift kick to the crotch sequences, this critic


couldn't see anything about this creepy retread to recommend to readers besides Kerry Washington and some seamless special effects.

Fair (1 star). Rated PG-13 for profanity, drug and alcohol abuse, slapstick violence, crude humor and pervasive sexual references.

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