

Entertainment Briefs

CORONER: ACCIDENTAL RX MIX KILLED GERALD LEVERT

CLEVELAND (AP) — R&B singer Gerald Levert's death last fall was an accident caused by a fatal combination of prescription narcotics and over-the-counter drugs, a coroner said.

The drugs in his bloodstream included the narcotic pain relievers Vicodin, Percocet and Darvocet, along with anxiety medication Xanax and two over-the-counter antihistamines, Geauga County Coroner Kevin Chartrand said. The official cause of death was acute intoxication, and the death was ruled accidental.

Chartrand said his office received a report Thursday from the Cuyahoga County coroner's office, which conducted the autopsy.

Levert, 40, son of O'Jays singer Eddie Levert, died Nov. 10 in his suburban Cleveland home. He was a member of the R&B trio LeVert, whose hits included "(Pop, Pop, Pop) Goes My Mind" and "Casanova." He sold millions of albums and had numerous hits over his career.

His soulful voice powered his appeal and in 1991 he made his solo debut with the album "Private Line."

That included a hit duet with his dad, "Baby Hold on to Me."

Andy Gibson, a family spokesman, said Levert was taking the pain medication because of chronic pain from a lingering shoulder problem and surgery in 2005 to repair a severed Achilles tendon. The autopsy revealed that Levert had pneumonia. Levert also took Xanax for anxiety attacks, Gibson said.

CURRY TALKS ABOUT ACCIDENT, SUICIDAL THOUGHTS

NEW YORK (AP) - Comedian Mark Curry, who starred in the 1990s sitcom "Hangin' with Mr. Cooper," says that without the support from some of his comic friends, he probably would have committed suicide last spring after a freak accident landed him in the hospital with second-degree burns.

Appearing on "The Montel Williams Show," Curry, 42, said he suffered burns over 18 percent of his body after a falling can of spray starch ruptured near a heat source and sparked a fire in his California home.

It was so bad ...that pain was so excruciating that I just threw it out," said Curry, recalling the moment when he woke up from a three-day, medically induced coma.

"I wanted to kill myself and, by the fourth day, I said, 'I can't do this.' I felt less than a man. I couldn't even look at my own body. I saw my hand with the peeling skin and threw up, and I didn't look at myself again."

He then decided to hoard his pain medication and commit suicide by overdosing on it, he said. But Curry, who also appeared on TV's "Fat Actress" and "The Drew Carey Show," said he changed his mind after talking to some funny friends, like Sinbad and Bill Cosby.

"They made me laugh, and that helped a lot," he said.

BEYONCE ON COVER OF SPORTS ILLUSTRATED ISSUE

NEW YORK (AP) - Beyonce has hit another high note, claiming the coveted cover shot of this year's *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue in a yellow-and-pink bikini.

"The Dreamgirl As You've Never Seen Her," a cover headline teases.

There's also a five-page photo spread inside the magazine, featuring Russian Anne Vyalitsyna, shot at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland in September.

"Once the decision was made to have a music hook, one of the first settings to come up was the Rock Hall, because it's such an iconic place," said *Sports Illustrated* spokesman Rick McCabe. "It was a natural fit."

Vyalitsyna posed with Jon Bon Jovi's motorcycle and other Rock Hall items.

The magazine portrayed the museum with respect, said Todd Mesek, Rock Hall spokesman.

"We felt it would've been an omission if we weren't included," he said.

Braxton contract suit over

NEW YORK (AP) - Toni Braxton has settled her multimillion-dollar lawsuit against her former personal manager, representatives of both parties said.

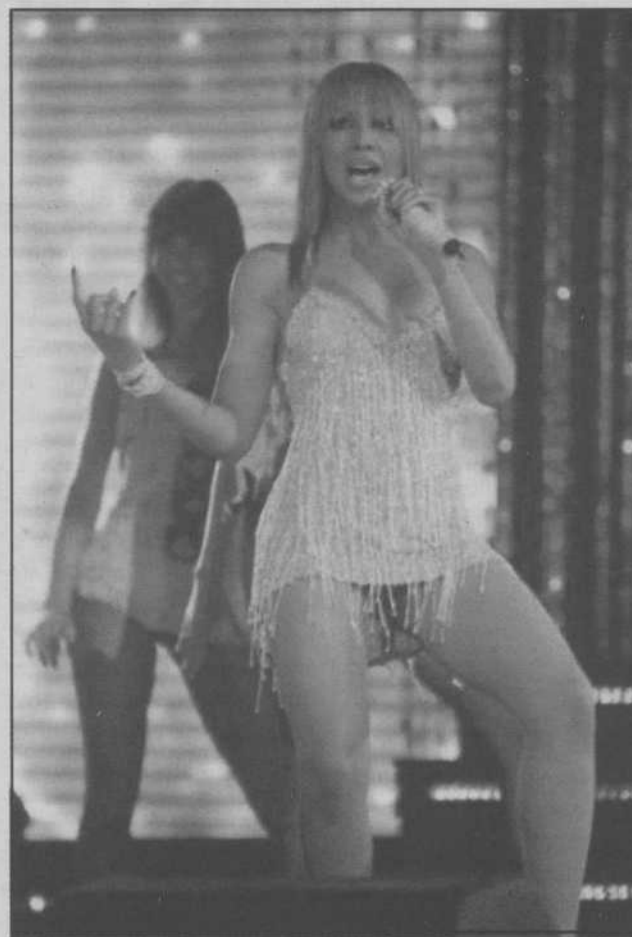
Under the settlement, the 39-year-old R&B singer is free to pursue new projects following her return of a \$375,000 advance to manager Barry Hankerson, Braxton representative Michael Sitrick said recently.

Hankerson had previously demanded an additional \$1 million to provide the singer with only a partial release from her contract, Sitrick said.

A Hankerson attorney, Samuel Chilakos, disputed that description of the settlement, saying he was unaware of a demand for additional funds and that the agreement limits the companies with which Braxton can work.

Braxton would be responsible for paying royalties from her next album to Hankerson, both parties said.

Braxton's lawsuit claimed that Hankerson owed her at least \$10 million for dirty



Vegas headliner Toni Braxton performs during half time the NBA All-Star basketball game in Las Vegas on Sunday.

dealing that caused her to abandon a long relationship with Arista Records, a Sony

BMG Music Entertainment label, for Blackground Records, the manager's

record label.

The lawsuit accused the manager of putting his financial interests ahead of Braxton's and inducing the singer to leave a lucrative deal with Arista through fraud, deception and double-dealing.

Hankerson told AP last week that he disputes the allegations.

"She was dropped from Arista because of record sales," he said, adding that Braxton did not want to move to Blackground Records but "there was nowhere else for her to go."

He said his relationship with the singer soured because of her insistence that she involve her husband, Keri Lewis, in her albums.

Braxton's 1993 debut album, "Toni Braxton," rose to No. 1 on the Billboard 200 and sold more than 10 million copies worldwide. Braxton received the Grammy Award for best new artist in 1993, and she won Grammys that year and the next for best female R&B vocal performance.

Spike Lee wins media Polk Award

NEW YORK (AP) - Director Spike Lee was named recently as a winner of the annual George Polk Awards for his documentary on life in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.

Lee, the director of "Malcolm" and "Do the Right Thing," was honored for "When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts," along with its producer, Sam Pollard. They won the award for documentary television for illustrating evidence of the government's poor performance in the aftermath of the August 2005 storm.

Another suit filed in Brandy's crash

LOS ANGELES (AP) - A second wrongful death lawsuit has been filed against actress-singer Brandy in a December freeway crash.

On Jan. 30, a \$50 million lawsuit claimed Brandy was driving recklessly when her sport utility vehicle struck the back of a Honda driven by Awatef Aboudihaj, 38. The new lawsuit was filed Feb. 8 in Los Angeles Superior Court on behalf of her parents, Aboudihaj Ahmed and Labridi Zohra, who reside in Morocco.

The suit filed by attorney Paul N. Philips said the entertainer recklessly caused

Other 2006 winners included *New York Times* correspondent Lydia Polgreen, honored in foreign reporting for her reports on the carnage in Sudan's Darfur region, and the staff of the free-circulation weekly *Lakefront Outlook in Chicago*, cited for its exposé on cronyism at the Harold Washington Cultural Center.

The 12 awards, considered among the top prizes in U.S. journalism, were announced last Tuesday by Long Island University. The Polk Awards, created in 1949 in honor of CBS reporter

George W. Polk, who was killed while covering the Greek civil war, will be presented April 12 in New York.

Lee made eight trips to New Orleans and interviewed about 100 people while filming the documen-

tary, which aired on HBO. Pollard is Lee's longtime collaborator, and the pair worked together previously on "Mo' Better Blues," "Jungle Fever," "Girl 6," "Clockers" and "Bamboozled."

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