

Motown exec makes up with 'Dreamgirls'

NEW YORK (AP) - The studios that released "Dreamgirls" have apologized to Motown founder Berry Gordy Jr. for any confusion the film generated about the label's early days.

DreamWorks and Paramount Pictures offered their apologies to Gordy, whose Motown Records and experiences are widely thought to be the basis of the film, in ads published last week in *Daily Variety* and the *Hollywood Reporter*.

Gordy responded with a statement, praising them for making sure to separate fact from fiction.

"For the past 50 years, I have been protecting the integrity, the love and the talent that is and has become Motown's legacy," said Gordy, 77, who sculpted the careers of acts including the

Supremes, Marvin Gaye, and Smokey Robinson and the Miracles.

"I applaud DreamWorks and Paramount Pictures for doing their part, to clearly differentiate the fictional movie 'Dreamgirls' from the real Motown," Gordy said before Sunday's Academy Awards, adding, "I wish them all the best..."

"Dreamgirls" garnered eight Oscar nominations with one win going to supporting actress Jennifer Hudson, but supporting actor nominee Eddie Murphy did not prevail despite popular opinions expressing anticipation of a victory for his depiction of a colorful, tragic singer.

In the film, Jamie Foxx portrays an ambitious and shady businessman who orchestrates the rise of a Supremes-like group, only to

rise himself as the powerful head of a Motown-like label.

Those parallels bothered Robinson, who said recently that producers owed Gordy an apology. The film, which has amassed more than \$100 million at the box office, was adapted from the Tony-winning musical, which debuted on Broadway in 1981.

"'Dreamgirls' is a work of fiction," said DreamWorks and Paramount in full-page ads, which did not address the negative depiction of Gordy by Foxx. "It is also an homage to Motown... For any confusion that has resulted from our fictional work, we apologize to Mr. Gordy and all of the incredible people who were part of that great legacy. It is vital that the public understand that the real Motown story has yet to be told."

Ali to test dance skills

NEW YORK (AP) - Here's a bet there won't be any Beatles songs on the next "Dancing With the Stars."

ABC announced recently that boxer Laila Ali and Paul McCartney's estranged wife, Heather Mills, will be among the competitors.

Mills will be the first contestant with an artificial limb to compete on the series, which returns for its fourth season March 19. She lost the leg in a motorcycle accident in 1993.

Olympian Apolo Anton Ohno, boxer Laila Ali, former basketball star Clyde Drexler and actor Vincent Pastore, who played gangster Salvatore "Big Pussy" Bonpensiero on "The Sopranos," are also in the cast.

Jerry Springer, one of



LAILA ALI

last season's competitors, teased ABC's "Good Morning America" audience before tossing out Mills' name.

"She may be a sentimental favorite," said Springer, even though Mills has Yoko Ono-like favorability ratings among many Beatles fans. Her selection delivers a message that whatever challenges people face in life, they can dance, he said.

Mills is an activist for animal rights and elimination of the use of land mines.

"Dancing With the Stars" has proved to be a substantial hit for ABC, although this is the first time it will air when a season of Fox's "American Idol" is under way. ABC will air its dancing competition on Monday and Tuesday nights to avoid going head-to-head with "American Idol."

Actor and former country star Billy Ray Cyrus, former 'N Sync member Joey Fatone, Miss USA 2004 Shandi Finnessey, former "Entertainment Tonight" host Leeza Gibbons, model Paulina Porizkova and former "Beverly Hills, 90210" star Ian Ziering round out the cast.

Latifah brings breathing heart to 'Life Support'

PASADENA, Calif. (AP) - Queen Latifah never does the expected. So when asked about the challenges of playing an HIV-positive wife and mother, as she does in HBO's "Life Support," her answer was, indeed, surprising.

"The only challenge was trying to stay in character when you've got people driving past you on the street going, 'Queen!' 'Do it Latifah!' 'That's LATIFAH!'" she says of the on-location shoot in Brooklyn last year.

"Most people try to be respectful, but they're excited to see you and they're hitting you with the name or some record that you did, so that was the greatest challenge," she said. "Playing this char-

acter wasn't."

To play Ana, a peer counselor at an AIDS facility in Brooklyn whose past drug addiction has put a strain on her family relationships, Latifah (nee Dana Owens) channeled the muse of the New York streets where the New Jersey girl hung out as a teenager.

"I grew up around these women and around these streets, so it was probably one of the more relatable backdrops that I've been able to sort of step into," said Latifah, fabulously coiffed in long blonde and auburn curls and a form fitting black dress for a late afternoon press conference here.

"I really felt like I really

could relate to the characters, to the situations, a family disrupted by drug addiction. I could relate to that just in my own family," she continued. "So I could relate to Ana's sense of wanting to get out there and see what life had to offer, although we took dramatically different turns. And redemption as well, having the second chance of really trying to repair those relationships after you feel like, OK, I messed up, but I'm back on track, and I really want to get things back to where they were."

Such street-wise sensitivity was exactly what director Nelson George wanted.

"One of the nicest things about working on the movie

was watching through the monitor — her face — there's so much going on in it and so much thought," said George, who co-wrote the film with the writing team Jim McKay and Hannah Weyer, based on his own HIV-positive sister.

"A good actor thinks, they're not acting, they're thinking, and she thinks all the time. She was definitely one of the few people I thought had that combination of charisma and realness to pull it off. I just knew this was a part that the sister could rock!"

Until now, aside from a few drama-oriented roles, Latifah has gone mostly the laugh route, with a string of comedies ("Bringing Down the House," "Taxi," "Barbershop 2: Back in Business" and "Last Holiday"), but it was time to shed a tear or two.

"I've always enjoyed dramatic roles," said Latifah, who turns 37 in March. "I mean, that's what actually made me really want to get into acting, was me playing this role in high school in 'Godspell.' That director is one of the best directors that I've ever worked with, to this day, and I can't even remember his name."

"But that show, carrying the body of Jesus down the center aisle of the auditorium, crying and singing this song, it just always let me know that I kind of enjoyed that. But I just had a big sense

of humor, so playing the comedies is all fun."

The good times will roll later this year when the Academy Award-nominee will be seen starring as Motormouth Maybelle in New Line's cinematic rendering of

"Hairspray."

"That was a blast," she said. "I mean just getting to do a musical again, a really big fun musical, and (producers) Neil Meron, Craig Zadan and (director) Adam (See *Latifah*, Page 9)



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