

BET makes first scripted series

NEW YORK (AP) - BET is making the first scripted series in its 28-year history, a sitcom about a group of Black slackers.

"Somebodies" is expected to premiere in October, Reginald Hudlin, BET's entertainment president, said recently.

As the first cable channel geared to Blacks, BET featured a lot of music programming, syndicated fare and reality shows, but it was criticized for not spending money to produce original programs. Hudlin's announcement of "Somebodies" was timed to coincide with the network's presentation of its fall plans to advertisers this month.

"Somebodies" is based on a 2006 film that was in the Sundance Film Festival. It will be produced by Pete

Aronson and Warren Hutcherson, executive producers of "The Bernie Mac Show," and it'll be set, and filmed, in Athens, Ga.

"For years people have wanted BET to expand the range of its original programming," Hudlin said, "and now we are doing it."

The network is developing several scripted shows, but this was the first deemed ready to go, he said.

BET — founded in 1979 by Robert Johnson, who sold it to Viacom Inc. for \$3 billion in 2000 — will wait until after the major broadcast networks set their fall schedule before deciding what night and time "Somebodies" will air. "We're a small network," Hudlin said. "We have to look at what the big boys are doing or else we'll get crushed."

Brown's trust owes \$70,000 for funeral

AIKEN, S.C. (AP) - The trust handling James Brown's estate owes more than \$70,000 for his elaborate funeral and care of his body for nearly three months before it was laid to rest in March, according to the funeral director who handled the soul singer's arrangements.

"I'm just waiting on them to get some of this mess straightened out," said Charles Reid, manager of the C.A. Reid Funeral Home in Augusta, Ga., which handled Brown's funeral. "I really haven't pushed the issue, even though I'd like to have my money."

Some of the funeral costs have already been paid and trustees have mailed a check to Reid this week covering the outstanding balance, Brown's longtime advisor and trustee Buddy Dallas said in response.

"It was the children that ran up a funeral bill of over \$150,000, not the trustees," Dallas said.

"We've done our very best to do what we could to accommodate the creditors. There's no great big pile of money or surplus of money just lying around."

Louis Levenson, an attorney for Brown's six adult children, said it is the trust's responsibility to pay for the funeral costs, which he considers a "reasonable"

amount.

Brown's children filed a motion this week asking a judge to provide accounting records of Brown's trust and estate before and after the singer's death, Levenson said.

Brown's children also filed two other subsequent motions.

One claims Brown's trustees have been trying to sell off some of their father's assets against court orders and the second motion asks a judge to modify his previous order that appointed two special administrators to help Brown's trustees settle his estate, giving them more control.

Dallas called the allegations in the motion "bogus and baseless."

"The trustees and the personal representatives are certainly not going to do anything — as much scrutiny as this has been given — improper, inappropriate and certainly not illegal," Dallas said.

Brown died Dec. 25 in an Atlanta hospital and his body was placed in a crypt at the Beech Island home of one of his daughters March 10.

The crypt might not be Brown's final resting place.

Brown's family has said a public mausoleum will be built and its location will be announced once it is completed.

Knight to receive ELLA Award

LOS ANGELES (AP) - Gladys Knight will receive the 16th annual ELLA Award from the Society of Singers. The honor, named after its first recipient, jazz legend Ella Fitzgerald, salutes entertainers for their musical successes and dedication to charitable and humanitarian causes.

"It is a truly awesome feeling to be receiving this honor. Ella was the sweetest and most beautiful person as a talent and as a human being," Knight said.

Knight will receive the award Sept. 10. Past winners include Elton



GLADYS KNIGHT

John, Frank Sinatra and Celine Dion.

"Gladys Knight has one of the greatest and most distinctive voices of our time," said Jerry F. Sharell, the Society of Singers' president and chief executive officer. (The Los Angeles-based nonprofit organization offers services to meet the emergency financial needs of professional singers worldwide.)

Knight, 62, has won seven Grammys in her career, with hits including "Midnight Train to Georgia" and "Neither One of Us (Wants to Be the First to Say Goodbye)."

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