

Badu jokes about her relationships

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Erykah Badu doesn't want you to believe the gossip rags when it comes to her friends — but when it comes to the singer herself, that's another story.

"Don't believe the tabloids," Badu told an audience as she performed recently for VH1 Soul.

But she said: "It is true what they say about me and men — [I] make them wear crocheted pants and shin guards!" She broke out into laughter, then added: "But they souljas, though."

Badu has a child with eccentric dresser Andre 3000 from OutKast, and had a long relationship with another rapper, Common, who is still laughed at for wearing crocheted pants when they were dating.

Badu, 36, was serious though as she defended the honor of her friend, R&B singer Eric Benet, who took

a beating in the media when ex-wife Halle Berry accused him of cheating on her. "He's a very responsible person," she told the crowd.

A jovial Badu, wearing a huge Afro wig, performed in New York City borough of Brooklyn for the cable network's "Soulstage" concert series. She sang old hits like "On & On," but also new songs, including "Honey," from her newly released album "New AmErykah, Part One (4th World War)."

Badu called the record "my magnum opus... the album I wanted to do all my life. I'm a touring artist who records on the side," she said.

"New AmErykah" is only her fourth studio album in her decade-plus career. But Badu says that's because she's more of a jam artist who thrives musically when she's onstage.

The "Soulstage" concert with Badu aired on Tuesday.

AIDS

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word about what's going on," said Harper.

The organizations announced goals to test 1 million Blacks by June 2009 and facilitate HIV counseling, testing and linkages to care for an estimated 250,000 Blacks. The aim is also to provide health information and education to at least 77,000 people in Black communities; host and conduct 600 national health forums over the next year, and produce 30 public service announcements.

"While we're nowhere near where we need to be, and many more organizations and leaders must join this battle if we're going to reach our goal, the era of Black America turning a blind eye to the AIDS epidemic is over," Wilson said.

Activists blame the stigma attached to HIV/AIDS for the rising rates of infection. Rev. Sharpton noted people have not been honest about what they thought they knew about how AIDS originated, supposedly as a White, gay male's disease, and that has caused a greater problem and threat to testing and seeking treatment, he said.

Rev. Sharpton called the report's findings astounding. "If this statistic was of another race, there would be a national disaster called. The president would be calling a joint meeting of the Congress. The fact that it is Black is almost like it is, at best, a ticker tape news item at the bottom of the screen rather than a national disaster, which it is," he said.

People must dramatize the issue of AIDS in the Black community and press the issue with the presidential candidates, he added.

If the mass mobilizations are successful, the AIDS pandemic can be cut in half in five years, Wilson said.

In addition, Blacks need to seek treatment, he said. Blacks are not seeking treatment. Though in many communities, it is affordable and accessible, said Wilson.

He was highly critical of President Bush's last budget, saying it ignored the AIDS epidemic in the U.S., which is slap in the face to Blacks. "It is a national shame that in 2008 people are still dying from this disease in this country at the rate Mr. Wilson said.

Spencer Collins, of the Minority AIDS Project, said that 20-plus years into the epidemic, high infection rates signal something is missing. "A startling discovery that we made is that a lot of our youth can't even tell us the difference between HIV the virus and AIDS the disease. Until we figure out a way to reach them on a deeper level than just passing out products, then we'll keep losing people and getting high numbers of infection," he said.

Charlene Muhammad writes for the Final Call.

NYPD

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dent.

Isnora and Detective Michael Oliver have pleaded not guilty to manslaughter; Detective Marc Cooper has pleaded not guilty to reckless endangerment. Oliver fired 31 shots, including the one that killed Bell, and Cooper fired four times.

Testagrossa said that once the evidence is heard, "It will be clear that what happened cannot be explained away as a mere accident or mistake."

The prosecutor also said Oliver would have found there was no threat if he had "paused to reassess" while firing, but defense lawyer James Culleton estimated that it took as little as nine seconds for Oliver to fire the 31 rounds from his semiautomatic pistol — even with reloading — giving him no time to reassess.

Culleton said Oliver saw Bell's car pulling away and

heard Isnora yell "He's got a gun! He's got a gun!"

He said Oliver will testify that he saw Joseph Guzman, one of Bell's companions, start lifting his arms. He said Oliver was convinced that if he hesitated "He'd be looking down the barrel of a gun and he'd be a dead man."

Investigators found no gun at the scene.

Isnora's attorney, Anthony Ricco, said there was evidence that Bell was drunk and "out of control" when he left the club. Witnesses overheard Bell exchange curses with another patron and heard Guzman tell someone "Go get my gat," slang for gun, Ricco said.

Ricco said Bell, at Guzman's urging, tried to strike Isnora with his car. "When there is a confluence of alcohol and ignorance, there's always a tragedy," Ricco said.

Oliver and Isnora face up to 25 years in prison if convicted; Cooper faces up to a year on the lesser endangerment count.

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