

# Rights icon Odetta passes at 77

*Special to Sentinel-Voice*  
WASHINGTON

Odetta, the deep-voiced folk singer whose ballads and songs became for many a soundtrack to the American Black Civil Rights Movement, has died at age 77, her manager said.

Douglas Yeager said Odetta passed away last Tuesday at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York, after a decade-long fight with chronic heart disease and pulmonary fibrosis in her lungs.

"May Odetta's luminous spirit and volcanic voice from the heavens live on for the ages," Yeager said in a statement. "Her voice will never die."

Odetta Holmes, born in Birmingham, Alabama, on December 31, 1930, told the *Times* in a 2007 interview the music of the Great Depression, particularly the prison



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songs and work songs from the fields of the deep South, helped shape her musical life.

While she recorded several albums and sang at New York's Carnegie Hall among other prominent venues, Odetta is perhaps best remembered by most Americans for her brief performance at the August 1963 march on Washington, a piv-

otal event in the Civil Rights Movement at which she sang the song "O Freedom."

The *Times* said Rosa Parks, the woman who launched the boycott of segregated buses in Montgomery, Alabama, was once asked which songs meant the most to her. "All the songs Odetta sings," was Parks' reply.

Odetta, who moved from Alabama to Los Angeles with her mother in 1937, earned a music degree from Los Angeles City College. But she told the *Times* her training in classical music and musical theater "was a nice exercise, but it had nothing to do with my life."

She said she found her true voice by listening to blues, jazz and folk music from the African-American and Anglo-American traditions.

Odetta began singing professionally in a West Coast production of the musical "Finian's Rainbow," but said she found a stronger calling in the coffeeshops and nightclubs of San Francisco.

In the early days of the movement, Odetta said her songs channeled "the fury and frustration that I had growing up" in segregated America.

# Relative arrested in Hudson killings

*Special to Sentinel-Voice*

CHICAGO — Police arrested the estranged brother-in-law of Jennifer Hudson on Monday in the deaths of the entertainer's mother, brother and young nephew, taking him from a prison where he had been held on a suspected parole violation.

William Balfour was arrested at Stateville Correctional Center and released to detectives as he awaited formal charges in the shooting deaths of the singer and Oscar-winning actress' relatives, said Chicago police spokeswoman Monique Bond.

Until Monday, police had identified Balfour, 27, only as a "person of interest" in the investigation. He had not been charged by late Monday afternoon, said Andy Conklin, a spokesman for the Cook County state's

attorney's office.

The bodies of Jennifer Hudson's mother, Darnell Hudson Donerson, and brother, Jason Hudson, were discovered Oct. 24 at the family's home on the South Side of Chicago. The body of 7-year-old Julian King was found three days later in a sport utility vehicle on the West Side. All three had been shot.

Police took Balfour into custody the same day the bodies of Donerson and Hudson were discovered. After 48 hours — the longest Chicago police can hold a person without charges — Balfour was taken by the Illinois Department of Corrections on the suspected parole violation.

Balfour — Julian's stepfather and the estranged husband of Jennifer Hudson's older sister, Julia Hudson — served seven years for a 1999

attempted murder and vehicular hijacking conviction.

His mother, Michelle Balfour of Chicago, has denied that her son had anything to do with the deaths. Telephone numbers for Balfour's mother and sister were disconnected Monday.

Balfour had refused to take a lie-detector test and stopped cooperating with detectives in the case, a police official, who was not authorized to discuss the case publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity, has said.

Police have confirmed they found the gun used in the killings. The .45-caliber gun was discovered Oct. 29 in a vacant lot in the Westside neighborhood where King's body was found a few days earlier.

Bond declined to discuss any evidence Monday. But after a hearing at the prison, the chairman of the Illinois

Prisoner Review Board said a woman had told authorities that a gun used in the slayings was "identical" to the gun that was recovered.

At the time, board Chairman Jorge Montes said the evidence was key to a decision finding probable cause that Balfour violated his parole and should remain locked up pending a Dec. 3 hearing before a review board panel.

Balfour did not have an attorney at the November hearing, and the Cook County public defender's office said at the time that nobody from the office had been assigned because he was not formally charged with a crime.

No one in the public defender's office was assigned to Balfour's case late Monday, and it was not clear whether he had other representation.

# Bits 'n' Pieces

BY TAYLOR MEDIA SERVICE

## BET founder Bob Johnson moves to start a new Urban Television Network

The man who founded Black Entertainment Television (BET) made important steps last week to launch another urban television network. Billionaire Robert L. Johnson formally asked the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to approve plans for a new urban television network which a spokeswoman said "would cater to a multicultural audience interested in health, lifestyle, education and other issues." Traci Otey Blunt also said the new Urban Television LLC was "not intended to compete with BET or TV One." However, media experts said it would nearly be impossible to avoid competition with the other two Black-oriented television outlets. Johnson sold BET to media giant Viacom in 2000 for an estimated \$3 billion. The FCC is expected to act on the petition by early spring.



Bob Johnson

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## Hip Hop mogul Jay-Z and singer Beyonce anointed entertainment's richest couple



Beyonce and Jay-Z

According to *Forbes* magazine's latest list of Hollywood's 20 Top Earning Couples, Hip Hop mogul Jay-Z and singer Beyonce Knowles are the highest earning couple in the entertainment industry. *Forbes* places the couple's estimated earnings at \$162 million between June 1, 2007 and June 1, 2008. Jay-Z and Beyonce were followed by rapper-turned actor Will Smith and his actress wife Jada Pinkett with an estimated \$85 during the same period. Income spots three, four and five went to soccer great David Beckham and his wife Victoria; country music couple Tim McGraw and Faith Hill and non-married super stars Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie.

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## FCC still chasing Janet Jackson for "Nipple Gate" 2004

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) just cannot seem to get over Janet Jackson's decision to expose her breast during the Super Bowl halftime show of 2004. The agency announced last week that it was appealing all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, a lower court's decision throwing out its \$550,000 fine against CBS Television for airing the incident. The federal appeals court in Philadelphia threw out the fine ruling, in effect, that the two second breast exposure was too "fleeting" to be worthy of a fine. But the FCC maintains the act was indeed indecent and that the fine should stand.



Janet Jackson exposed at 2004 Super Bowl

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## Reports swirl that Whitney Houston and Bobby Brown may re-marry



Whitney Houston and Bobby Brown

Reports began swirling in the entertainment media last week that once troubled couple Whitney Houston and Bobby Brown are on the verge of re-marrying. All that can be confirmed is that the two have been dating. A spokesperson for the Grammy award winning Houston would only say the two remained divorced but are "still good friends." Meanwhile, MediaTakeOut.com is quoting a source close to Brown as saying, "They're more in love than ever and Bobby is going to re-marry her." After years with Bobby, Whitney's singing career took a nose dive driven by a crack cocaine addiction. Bobby continues to have run-ins with the police.

# Museum

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cities, and short video series delve into emerging music styles from the past five decades and how they correspond with pop culture.

For example, the 1960s brought protest songs and music festivals that fueled the counterculture movement.

The '70s gave us corporate rock and its antithesis: punk.

The '80s ushered in gangsta rap and MTV, the '90s were all about grunge and the new millennium

brought the iPod and digital downloads. The custom-made videos are among 30 films created just for the museum.

"What we've tried to do, in a very large snapshot, is give you an overview of the depth and diversity of the great music that this country has created, and other countries, too," Santelli said.

One floor is dedicated to songwriting and the recording process.

Profiles of producers and industry-shaping executives

fill the walls, while eight, simulated sound booths beckon visitors to try their hand at rapping, singing, mixing songs, building beats and mastering recordings.

There's also a Grammy-centric display, complete with photos and footage of the show's most memorable moments, along with actual Grammy trophies from 1958 to the present.

Another floor hosts special exhibits — like the current one highlighting music and politics — and a 200-seat

theater for lectures, meetings and intimate performances. More than 100 events are already planned for 2009, Santelli said.

Though artifacts aren't the focus of the museum, unique bits of history are sprinkled throughout. Look for a 1943 poster touting Frank Sinatra's appearance at the Hollywood Bowl (general admission: 75 cents), Elvis Presley's guitar, Miles Davis' trumpet, Stevie Wonder's harmonica and handwritten lyrics to Eminem's hit song, "Stan."