

MINORITY *Enterprise* DEVELOPMENT

BET links with Encore Media Corp. to create first black movie channel

BET Holdings Inc. and Encore Media Corp. (EMC) have joined forces to launch BET Movies/STARZ! (BET Movies), the first urban and black-oriented movie channel devoted to showcasing black film artists.

The BET Movies' venture was announced by BET Chairman and CEO Robert Johnson and EMC Chairman and CEO John J. Sie at a joint press conference today. The channel will launch in February 1997, coinciding with Black History Month.

At the press event, which featured leaders from some of the country's top cable MSOs, Johnson and Sie said BET Movies represents the creation of a major brand dedicated to the development and exhibition of black-oriented feature length films. Additionally, the venture will provide access to the black filmmaking community and gain wider recognition for this long underserved public.

African American entertainers from around the country applauded the announcement and voiced their support of the new service. Stars such as Eddie Murphy, Whitney Houston, Denzel Washington, Whoopi Goldberg ("Congrats, BET! You're all that and a bag of popcorn!"), Alfre Woodard, Samuel L. Jackson, Laurence Fishburne, Jada Pinkett, Vanessa Williams, Morgan Freeman, Will Smith, Lena Horne, Gregory Hines ("I can't wait to watch, and will encourage all of my friends to do the same."), Robert Townsend, Forest Whitaker, Tim and Daphne Reid, writer Terry McMillan ("Finally!"), Charles Dutton, filmmakers Spike Lee ("Long, long overdue"), John Singleton, Bill Duke, Warrington and Reginald Hudlin, Matty Rich, Melvin Van Peebles, George Jackson, and Doug McHenry have all come together to lend their names in favor of this project.

"With EMC as the nation's leading provider of movie channels, and BET's brand reach into more than 46 million homes, the appeal of this service to cable operators, satellite providers and black consumers promises to be phenomenal," said Johnson. "This new service will also provide a unique outlet for the independent black film industry."

"This venture capitalizes on BET's position as the recognized leader in television programming for blacks and clears the way for STARZ! and BET Movies to become "must-have" movie channels in urban centers," said Sie. "BET Movies is not just another movie channel

— it's a service to the black community. Its purpose is to create a showcase for films that feature black creative talent and showcase cultural themes, lifestyles and interests. BET Movies will truly be the destination channel in black households."

In addition, the combination of STARZ! and BET Movies will expand pay TV households in urban markets. Sie and Johnson said two facts demonstrate the need for this channel: Black consumers are great fans of television and avid moviegoers. Sie and Johnson offered statistics that indicate blacks view television programming 50 percent more than non-blacks, and also account for 50-100 percent more movie-going dollars than non-blacks. (Source: TV Viewing Among Blacks, JKB&E Media Group, 2/96).

BET Movies will benefit from STARZ!'s long-term output deals with Hollywood's biggest studios — including Miramax, Universal, Touchstone, Hollywood Pictures and New Line — for exclusive first-run theatrical releases. In addition to the best first-run movie selections, BET Movies will draw upon ENCORE's ex-

tensive library of over 6,000 movies amongst them many landmark black films. Below is an overview of programming viewers can expect from BET Movies:

Seven, Pulp Fiction and Fresh, A Good Man in Africa, Major Payne, Corrina, Corrina, How to Make an American Quilt, Clockers, To Wong Foo..., The Crying Game.

Unique and classic films, such as To Sir with Love, Do The Right Thing, Mississippi Masala, Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman, Women of Brewster Place and Cry Freedom.

Founded in 1980, BET is owned by BET Holdings Inc., a media-entertainment company committed to maximizing its value to shareholders, clients and employers, and to establishing BET as the most-valued consumer brand within the Black marketplace. BET Holdings' core business is Black Entertainment Television Inc., an advertiser-supported, basic cable television programming service launched in January 1980, that serves as both an entertainment and information source for Afri-

can Americans. The BET Cable Network airs a variety of music video shows, as well as originally-produced and syndicated programming, 24-hours a day to more than 46.4 million cable households. BET Holdings Inc. also owns and operates BET On Jazz: The Cable Jazz Channel, Action Pay-Per-View, BET On Jazz International, BET Direct - its direct marketing arm, as well as three publications, YSB, Emerge and BET Weekend.

EMC is the largest provider of cable and satellite-delivered tele-

vision channels in the U.S., currently counting more than 25 million pay units through its ownership of ENCORE(R), an affordable premium service featuring hit movies of the '60s, '70s and '80s as well as plex, theme by day (combined over 10 million pay units); six Thematic Multiplex services — Love Stories-encore 2(R), Westerns-encore 3(R), Mystery-encore 4(R), Action-encore 5(SM), True Stories & Drama-encore 6(R), and WAM! America's Kidz Network-encore 7(R) (combined them-

channels have over 10 million pay units); STARZ!-encore 8(R), the first-run premium multiplex movie service (over 4.5 million pay units). In addition, EMC's International Channel(SM) offers multi-lingual basic cable programming in 26 different Asian, European, and Middle Eastern languages to 7 million subscribers in the U.S. and Latin America. EMC's latest service, STARZ!-encore 8(SM), featuring "prime time any time," was launched March 15, 1996.

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