

Focus

Hip-hop Drama to Premier on UPN

Broadcasters are billing 'Platinum' as the first network television show about rap lifestyle

(AP)—"Platinum," A UPN series billed as the first network hip-hop drama, is poised to make its debut on Monday April 14.

Hip-hop is already embraced by movies, fashion and any number of other industries — try counting the commercials with a rap beat — eager to reach young consumers enraptured by the music or the lifestyle.

But risk-averse networks typically drag their heels at innovation. They certainly try to avoid the sharp edges of cutting-edge culture, and hip-hop has been dogged by its share of social controversy and violence.

In the brave new TV world of antiheroes on cable's "The Sopranos" and "The Shield" and broadcast's "Kingpin," however, that issue would seem to be a non-starter.

There's another reason for the lag, suggested "Platinum" co-creator John Ridley: Any genuine hip-hop series has to feature African American characters, and networks have shied away from black-oriented dramas, which they see as a tough sell to general audiences.

Even hip-hop's ethnic diversity — a current star is white rapper Eminem — and widespread appeal



"Platinum" will debut on UPN Monday, April 14 at 9 p.m.

aren't enough for major networks, said Ridley, a screenwriter and novelist whose credits include the critically acclaimed film "Three Kings."

"Hip-hop is very multicultural and we want to make the show multicultural, but it's still ingrained in black culture and there's just not a lot of venues serving people of color," he said. "It's a struggle. A lot of networks are just ignoring a segment of the population."

Nelson George, author of the book "Hip Hop America" and "Night Work," agreed.

"Hip-hop as a dramatic force on TV falls under the banner of black, and black is a problematic issue for

network TV," he said.

That attitude means network executives are ignoring how fluid the issue of ethnicity has become, especially among the younger Americans who are TV advertisers' most coveted demographic.

"There's been such a tremendous paradigm shift," said "Platinum" star Lalanya Masters. "We are not in a society where the number one golfer is African American and the number one rapper is Caucasian."

It took three years for Ridley and co-creator Sofia Coppola to get "Platinum" on the air, during which time a deal with HBO fell through

and the project was at Fox Broadcasting "for a minute," as Ridley put it.

Fledgling UPN will try out six episodes of the drama about an ambitious family's music industry empire.

Masters, Jason George, Sticky Fingaz, Steven Pasquale and Davetta Sherwood, N'Bushe Wright and Vishiss star in the series.

In the ripped-from-the-headlines style of "Law & Order," "Platinum" intends to explore real issues and conflicts in the music industry through the series' fictional characters, Ridley said.

SAMUEL L. JACKSON STARS AS A MISSING SOLDIER IN 'BASIC'

African American star reunites with John Travolta for the first time since 'Pulp Fiction'

Tom Hardy (John Travolta), an ex-Army Ranger turned DEA agent, is drawn into an ever-widening mystery surrounding the disappearance of the feared and often hated Sgt. Nathan West (Samuel L. Jackson), as well as several of his elite Special Forces trainees on what appears, at first, to have been a routine training exercise during a hurricane in the jungles of Panama.

Only two survivors are found, Dunbar (Brian Van Holt), and a badly wounded Kendall (Giovanni Ribisi), the son of a high-profile Joint Chiefs of Staff official. Neither is willing to cooperate with Capt. Julia



Samuel L. Jackson plays the feared and often-hated Sgt. Nathan West who disappears with four Special Forces trainees during a hurricane in the jungles of Panama. The film, also starring John Travolta, opens nationwide on Friday, March 28.

Osborne's (Connie Nielsen) investigation.

So base commander Col. Bill Styles calls in ex-Ranger Hardy, an old friend and a persuasive interro-

gator. Osborne disapproves of Hardy who is on leave from the DEA after having come under suspicion of accepting bribes from local drug traffickers. She is also un-

easy when she learns that Hardy once trained under West and hates him almost as passionately as his current recruits.

With time running out, Hardy and Osborne call a temporary, if uneasy, truce. Hardy cajoles a confession out of Dunbar, who claims that Sgt. West and the missing Rangers have been murdered and their bodies blown away by the hurricane. When they later interview Kendall, he confirms that the other Rangers and West are dead. But, in almost every other way, his story contradicts Dunbar's.

What happened to West and his Ranger team? And what were they really doing out there in the jungle? As each layer reveals more lies and greater deceptions, Hardy and Osborne inch towards the horrible truth about the fate of the missing Rangers. Six soldiers went out. Two came back. What happened to the military's most elite commandos?

Lou Rawls Sued for \$12 Million

Woman claims she gave up her business to be the soul singer's mistress

(AP)—A woman who says she gave up her business to become Lou Rawls' mistress sued the soul singer for \$12 million, claiming he backed out of a verbal agreement to support her financially even if they split.

Rawls' manager said the lawsuit was frivolous, and that the singer was acquainted with the woman but never dated her.

In the lawsuit filed Thursday, Margaret Schaffer said she met Rawls in Washington state at a Valentines Day concert in 1998.

After a courtship, when the 67-year-old singer admitted he was married, Schaffer said, she left her job with a fruit-brokerage business and moved into his Southern California home.

They made an oral agreement in November 1998 "to treat as joint property income and earnings," according to the lawsuit. Rawls also agreed to pay her what she would



Lou Rawls, who has won three Grammys and has recorded such hits as "You'll Never Find Another Love Like Mine" and "Love Is A Hurtin' Thing," is being sued by a woman who claims the soul singer agreed to pay her what she would have earned in her job and that he promised lifetime support even "in the event their relationship should terminate."

have earned in her job, Schaffer said, adding he promised lifetime support even "in the event their relationship should terminate."

Rawls' manager, David Brokaw, said Thursday night the lawsuit "has no merit." He said Rawls and his wife have lived in his Los Angeles home for 20 years.

"He never moved out of that home to live with Mrs. Schaffer,"

Brokaw said. Schaffer said Rawls ended their relationship Jan. 15 and told her never to contact him again and "forget him completely."

The lawsuit seeks \$2 million in compensatory damages, \$10 million in punitive damages and half the worth of the real estate, stocks and vehicles Schaffer says Rawls bought while they were together.



Lenny Kravitz released "We Want Peace" in response to the war in Iraq. The song, only available online, is a free download.

Kravitz Releases Anti-War Tune

(AP)—Lenny Kravitz is the latest singer to release a song in response to the war in Iraq.

"We Want Peace," available only on the Rock the Vote Web site, also features Iraqi pop singer Kadim Al Sahir, Palestinian musician Simon Shaheen and Jamey Haddad of Lebanon on percussion.

"I came to Rock the Vote because of its strong stance with young people as defenders of free expression," Kravitz, 38, said Tuesday. "This song for me is about more than Iraq: It is about our role as people in the world and that we all should cherish freedom and peace."

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