

FOCUS

Cher Supports Better Helmets for Soldiers

Doesn't back down on war opposition

(AP) — Cher, who opposes the war in Iraq but supports the troops, says using her celebrity to promote effective helmets for U.S. soldiers is rewarding - and "the right thing to do."

"To be able to use your celebrity for something that you really think is worthwhile is so rewarding," the 60-year-old singer-actress said in an interview June 21 on CNN's Anderson Cooper 360.

"It just makes you feel like this is the right thing to do. This is the American thing to do," she said.

Cher says it makes her angry "when people say that if you're not for the war, you don't support the troops. And I'm not for the war. And I really support the troops."

A week earlier, she attended a



Cher sits before the House Armed Service Committee on Capitol Hill to promote the distribution of safer helmets for soldiers that are better able to absorb shock from a bomb blast. (AP photo)

hearing in Washington, D.C. on whether to modify helmets for soldiers in Iraq. The entertainer has donated more than \$130,000 to the group Operation Helmet, which pays about \$100 to modify the inside of soldiers' helmets to make them better able to absorb shock from a bomb blast.

Cher tells Cooper she "was astounded at the price that could save someone's life. ... Or, you know, that such a little price had to be used to - to save someone's life."

The Army now equips its soldiers with padded helmets designed to be shock absorbent. The Marine Corps has commissioned a study to determine whether to change its helmets but has said the ones Marines use now are effective.

Cher won a best-actress Oscar for her role in 1987's "Moonstruck." She is known for songs in the 1960s with Sonny and Cher and more recently hits such as "Believe" and "If I Could Turn Back Time."



Mary J. Blige

Diva to Perform on Soap Opera

(AP) — Though she famously sang about wanting "No More Drama" in her own life, Mary J. Blige is about to be transplanted into a world of crime, scheming, back-stabbing and scandal. She's taping an appearance on ABC's "One Life to Live."

The 35-year-old R&B diva, whose latest album, "The Breakthrough," has sold more than two million copies, will perform two hits from that disc for an episode set to air July 28.

"The cast and I, being huge fans of Mary J. Blige's tremendous talent, are thrilled that she will be appearing on 'OLTL,'" said executive producer Frank Valentini in a recent statement.

Erykah Badu and Chris Botti have also performed on the show.

Jackson Accuser Charged with Fraud

Must pay or stand trial

The woman who claimed Michael Jackson molested her son, leading to the sensational trial a year ago at which the singer was acquitted, was ordered Wednesday to stand trial on a charge of welfare fraud.

The attorney for the 37-year-old woman entered a not guilty plea on her behalf. She did not speak during the arraignment.

She is accused of one charge related to accepting \$8,000 in fraudulently obtained assistance and four charges of committing perjury on welfare applications.

Prosecutors say she hid the fact that she received a substantial settlement in a lawsuit against J.C. Penney before she filed for welfare.

Her lawyer, Patricia Hattersley, said outside court that she hopes the case can be resolved without a trial. "We are open to discussions," she Hattersley. "Her position is she never misrepresented anything intentionally."

The prosecutor's office said the case will go to trial unless she makes restitution. The trial is scheduled for Aug. 7.

After Jackson's trial last year, many jurors said a lack of credibility on the part of the woman and her children were major factors in the verdicts. The defense portrayed her as a con artist who schemed to get money from celebrities and through fraudulent legal claims.

Life Story Coming to Film

(AP) — Missy Elliott will star in the big-screen version of her life story. Universal Pictures has announced. The untitled project is in the development phase, studio spokeswoman Jennifer Chamberlain said Wednesday.

The Elliott biopic will be produced by Robert De Niro and Jane Rosenthal through their company, Tribeca Films.

Elliott, 34, began her music career with the all-girl group, Sista. She has won four Grammys, including best rap solo performance for "Get Ur Freak On" in 2002.

She has released six solo albums, including last year's "The Cookbook." Her production credits include tracks for Janet Jackson, Justin Timberlake and Destiny's Child.



Rapper Missy Elliott stars in the big-screen version of her life story. (AP photo)

Studdard Wins \$2 Million Claim

(AP) — American Idol winner Ruben Studdard has been awarded \$2 million in his lawsuit against his ex-manager for misappropriating the singer's money and credit cards.

Studdard, 26, of Birmingham, Ala. won the television talent show in 2003 and judge dismissed Edwards' promoted suit last year against ex-man-



Ruben Studdard

ager Ronald W. Edwards and Edwards' promotions company, Sez Inc.

An Alabama judge Thursday awarded Studdard \$500,000 for his actual losses and another \$1.5 million in punitive damages. The judge dismissed Edwards' promotions company from the suit.

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