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Charley Pride is in the spotlight with upcoming TV specials

By BETH HARRIS and LYNN ELBER February 1, 2019



PASADENA, Calif. (AP) — A roundup of news from the Television Critics Association winter meeting, at which TV networks and streaming services are presenting details on upcoming programs.

PRIDE'S STORY

Paging Terrence Howard. Charley Pride still wants the actor to play him in a movie of the country music star's life.

The project has been discussed for about 10 years. Pride told TV critics Friday that it remains a goal to have it made with Howard, who stars in the Fox music series "Empire."

Meanwhile, Pride finds himself in the spotlight with two upcoming PBS projects: "Country Music," Ken Burns' film on the genre's evolution and the people who created it, and "Charley Pride: I'm Just Me," airing as part of the "American Masters" series on Feb. 22.

The 84-year-old Grand Ole Opry member shrugs off any suggestion of legend status as one of the few African-Americans to find success in country music. His 1971 crossover hit "Kiss an Angel Good Mornin' " earned him Country Music Association Entertainer of the Year honors.

"People say, 'Well, you're a legend,' " he said. "I think, 'Well, you're already dead and gone up there."

Pride initially wanted to make the major leagues and break records.

He used to pick up extra cash by singing before Negro League games. Pride got as far as tryouts with the then-California Angels and New York Mets, but he never made the majors like his idol Jackie Robinson. Eventually, the son of Mississippi sharecroppers began working toward a performing career, already having taught himself to play a \$14 guitar ordered from the Sears catalog by his mother.

"I have no answer to what I've been able to achieve," Pride said. "Once I come out and start singing, it doesn't matter if I was pink. They wanted to hear me sing. That's the way my career has been all these years."

Burns' "Country Music" film is set to air from Sept. 15-18 and Sept. 22-25. Besides Pride, it focuses on Garth Brooks, the Carter family, Johnny Cash, Merle Haggard, Emmylou Harris, Loretta Lynn, Willie Nelson, Dolly Parton, Jimmie Rodgers, Bob Wills and Hank Williams, among others.

POWER COUPLE

Gloria Estefan didn't think she'd get married. Her focus was on attending the Sorbonne in Paris. But Emilio Estefan "landed in her lap," and music became her career.

The native Cubans will receive the Library of Congress Gershwin Prize for Popular Song in May. They are the first married couple (together 40 years) and musicians-songwriters of Hispanic descent to receive the honor.

The couple met when Emilio saw her sing in church. Six months later, he was playing a wedding she was at and he asked her to join the band for a song.

Estefan said Friday that the success of their personal union is due to having the same values and priorities.

“I meet him, and he landed in my lap,” she said. “We’re very different, and it keeps a good balance. The core things we rarely differ on in business or music. Our values and priorities are on the same page. It helps if you don’t fight a lot.”

Estefan said if they were both like her, they’d still be sitting on the couch playing guitar. And if they were both like Emilio, they’d have had heart attacks because of his relentless drive.

“It’s love,” Emilio said. “We were fighting for our dreams.”

The couple’s Miami Sound Machine hit it big in 1985 with Top 10 hits “Conga,” “Words Get in the Way” and “Bad Boy.”

“We knew this would work,” Estefan said of their Latin-influenced music. “That was our biggest challenge, convincing people in charge that were in the way.”

Rita Moreno and Andy Garcia co-host the Gershwin tribute airing May 3 on PBS.

NEW PERSPECTIVE

PBS is launching a weekly series that will link headline-making stories to their historical roots.

The magazine-format program, titled “Retro Report,” will be hosted by journalist Celeste Headlee and artist Masud Olufani, PBS said Friday.

Humorist Andy Borowitz, who writes for the New Yorker magazine, will contribute a weekly segment.

“Retro Report” aims to provide insights on major stories, as well as “correct the record” and expose myths, said Perry Simon, PBS’ chief programming executive.

Four stories will be explored each week, with the goal of widening the discussion beyond what the scope of the 24-hour breaking news cycle, PBS said in announcing the program.

Among the topics to be explored: the connection between Colin Kaepernick’s national anthem protest and the clenched fists of the 1968 Mexico City Olympics; why the government has a multimillion-dollar program to care for wild horses because of a 50-year-old law; and why modern U.S. drug approval laws are so strict.

PBS member stations will develop separate content that focuses on local stories and history, PBS said.

The hour-long “Retro Report” will debut this fall.

EVOLUTION REVOLUTION

Origin stories aren't just for comic-book superheroes, as a documentary about the evolution of animals including elephants and whales intends to show.

The two-hour film will highlight the work of leading scientists worldwide and showcase "spectacular new breakthroughs in evolutionary history," PBS programming executive Bill Gardner said in a statement.

Crocodiles and birds also are a focus of the special with the working title "When Whales Walked: A Deep Time Journey," which will include 3D graphics and special effects to recreate vanished creatures and environments.

PBS, which initiated the project, is working in partnership with the Smithsonian Channel and Smithsonian Institution. The latter will open a new fossil hall June 8, with an educational outreach program produced by the National Museum of Natural History.

"When we marvel at the wonders of the natural world, like an elephant's trunk or the size of a blue whale, we rarely ask, 'Where did that come from?' It turns out, scientists are finding some truly extraordinary answers," said Charles Poe, a production executive with the Smithsonian Channel.

The documentary will debut this summer.

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