

Rappers' Rap Sheets

By Reg P. Wydeven
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Last week I wrote about the family feuds involving Chuck Yeager and his kids and Anna Nicole Smith and her late husband J. Howard Marshall II's children. In both cases, wealthy older men married much younger women who fought with their new stepchildren over the money, ending up in court.

When these types of disputes arise, the term "gold digger" often comes to mind. To caution affluent men of these potentially parasitic suitors, hip-hop superstar Kanye West wrote a song entitled "Gold Digger", where he warns, "She takes my money when I'm in need, yeah she's a trifling friend indeed."

What's not so trifling to West is the recent California lawsuit filed against him and his production company, Konman Entertainment, by DCFS Trust for failing to return a 2003 Mercedes G500 when its lease expired in January.

DCFS Trust, which took over the lease of the luxury SUV from Prestige Motors Inc., is seeking a not-so-trifle amount of \$53,747, plus accruing lease payments, late charges, interest, punitive damages and attorney fees. West signed the lease as president of Konman and also as a guarantor.

West was also recently in federal court in Manhattan for a copyright infringement lawsuit. He and fellow rapper Chris "Ludacris" Bridges, known for his music and his acting roles in the Oscar-winning "Crash" and "Hustle and Flow", were sued by the New Jersey group It's Only Family for allegedly copying one of their songs.

In their suit, I.F.O. claimed Ludacris and West's song "Stand Up" mimicked their song "Straight Like That", as the phrase "like that" was repeated more than 80 times in each song, only in I.F.O.'s version the phrase was preceded with "straight" while in Ludacris' and West's hit it was preceded with "just". In less than a day the jury ruled in favor of the rap stars after concluding the two songs were different.

Speaking of rap songs being stolen, rap icon Marshall "Eminem" Mathers recently settled a lawsuit his publishing companies filed against five cellular phone companies, including Colorado-based Cellus US, for illegally selling his songs as cell phone ring tones.

The federal lawsuit claimed that these companies realized hundreds of thousands of dollars per year for selling Eminem's songs as ring tones without his permission. The suit requested an order to prohibit further sales of Eminem's songs and sought unspecified damages. The terms of the settlement were undisclosed.

Finally, rocker Michael Aday, better known as "Meat Loaf", also recently filed a federal lawsuit over rights to the phrase "Bat Out of Hell", the title song of his 1977 album and its 1993 follow-up "Bat Out of Hell II". Meat Loaf is seeking more than \$50 million in damages from Jim Steinman, the song's writer, who Mr. Loaf alleges wrongfully registered the phrase as his trademark in 1995.

As Meat Loaf prepares to release "Bat Out of Hell III" in October, Steinman and Meat Loaf's former manager David Sonenberg, also named in the suit, are contacting distributors to inform them that Meat Loaf has no right to use the phrase. The lawsuit claims the defendants are infringing on Meat Loaf's trademark rights in the phrase and are interfering with distribution contracts.

"You Took the Words Right Out of My Mouth", another Meat Loaf hit also penned by Steinman, now has a completely new meaning.