

# Does BET Have Any Vulnerability? Rodgers And TV One Are About To Find Out

By David Bauder  
AP Television Writer

NEW YORK (AP) - Jonathan Rodgers will tell anyone who listens that his new TV network aimed at black adults is not, repeat NOT, trying to compete with BET.

Not everyone is buying the pitch, certainly not the Black Entertainment Network. But Rodgers' ability to say that with a straight face speaks volumes about what BET has become and the glimmer of hope that offers to others trying to infringe on its turf.

TV One, a partnership between the popular Radio One network and the Comcast cable company, is planning to launch next year with a focus on blacks aged 25 to 54 who feel disenfranchised by BET's emphasis on youth.

Rodgers, TV One's president and the former head of Discovery, is trying to sell the service now to cable and satellite operators.

While BET is heavy on hip-hop, TV One will start with rerun comedies and dramas. TV One will also be heavy with the type

of nonfiction programming the Discovery networks have made popular, stories about dating, decorating, weddings and births, focusing on black participants.

"It's not us or BET," Rodgers said. "The African-American marketplace has been so underserved. Why should we have only one channel? And if there are two channels, that they have to be competitors?"

According to a recent study by the ad-buying firm Magna Global, the median age of the BET viewer during daytime is 21. In prime-time, it's just under 27 years old. That's significantly younger than just a year ago, when BET's prime-time median age was nearly 32.

In the youth-centric television business, those are demographics to die for. Some of the few cable networks that skew younger, MTV and Nickelodeon, have been, like BET, hugely profitable.

Yet with BET the only major network with "black" in its name, the focus on youth with a heavy dose of hip-hop music has long been the source of grumbling in the black community.

It's as if white Americans had only one choice of networks, and it was MTV, Rodgers said.

"Anybody who is trying to compete with them, if they went a little bit older, they would have

a much better chance," said Steve Sternberg of Magna Global. "They certainly can't get much younger."

Many who have watched BET founder Robert Johnson amass his fortune over the years admire his business decisions. Since he has never truly been pressed by a major competitor, he hasn't spent much money on programming; there are few things cheaper than filling hours with music videos.

"If you look at what advertisers want, in most instances, they want younger," said Debra Lee, BET's president. "So that's why the bulk of our programming is younger."

But Lee disputes the view that youth is everything BET is after. As the broadcast day goes on, the programming, including gospel shows and some news, skews older, she said.

BET's decision to add syndicated programs like "Soul Food," "The Parkers" and "Girlfriends" this fall has been widely seen as an effort to bring up the median age and head TV One off at the pass.

"One of the things I see wrong about TV One is that it strikes me that they're trying to define who we are instead of trying to define who they are," Lee said. "We are the No. 1 network among black households. We reach all ages."

Rodgers, an industry veteran, steers clear of badmouthing Johnson and said black viewers who clamor for more aren't necessarily mad at BET.

"It serves an important purpose and it's just a great business," he said. "People respect that and respect Bob. What they don't like is that they don't have any choices."

In addition to their startup programming slate, TV One is also working with New Millennium Studios, the company created by former "WKRP in Cincinnati" actor Tim Reid, to develop movies and series.

The new network will steer clear of news and sports, ceding that territory to the Atlanta-based Major Broadcasting Corp., which in February announced plans for a spinoff 24-hour news network for blacks.

If any of Johnson's business decisions that can be questioned, it's that he didn't invest over the years in a series of BET-affiliated networks that would cover a broader spectrum of interests, like Discovery Communications did with its 14 networks.

BET has created separate networks devoted to jazz, hip-hop and gospel music and helped launch, with Starz, a service of black-oriented movies.

"I don't think we've had any missed opportunities," Lee said. "We just have gone into markets that we thought would work."

TV One and Major Broadcasting are betting that BET was wrong.

They have a tough task. The industry is littered with failed networks; one BET competitor, New Urban Entertainment Television, gave up last year. TV One hasn't announced any commitments by cable or satellite operators to carry its signal yet, although Comcast, which has more than 20 million subscribers nationally, would seem to give it a head start.

Major Broadcasting is barely in a quarter of the nation's 107 million TV homes, not necessarily a strong base for a spinoff all-news network. The company is vague about a startup date, saying only it hopes to begin next year.

BET casts a long shadow, even if its relative paucity of news gave rise to the plans for Major's all-news cable network, said Greg Morrison, Major's news director.

"They have the advertisers, they have the households, they have the name recognition, they have 20-something years in the game," he said. But, he added, "we truly believe there is a market out there that we can serve."



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**Gregory Hines, Actor And Dancer, Dies Of Cancer At 57**

By TIM MOLLOY  
Associated Press Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) - Tony Award winner Gregory Hines, the tap-dancing actor who started on Broadway and in movies including "White Nights" and "The Cotton Club," has died, his publicist said. He was 57.

Hines died Saturday in Los Angeles of cancer, publicist Allen Eichorn said.

The dancer, among the best in his generation, won a 1993 Tony for the musical "Jelly's Last Jam."

ballerina Jeanmaire.

"I don't remember not dancing," Hines said in a 2001 interview with The Associated Press. "When I realized I was alive and these were my parents, and I

"I was going through a lot of changes," Hines told the Washington Post in 1981. "Marriage. We'd just had a child. Divorce. I was finding myself." He returned to New York in 1978, partly to be near his daughter, Daria, who was living with Hines' first wife, dance therapist Patricia Panella. His brother, with whom he had reconciled, told him about an audition for the Broadway-bound "The Last Minstrel Show." He got the part, but the show opened and closed in Philadelphia.

The brothers reunited onstage for "Eubie!" an homage to composer Eubie Blake choreographed by LeTang. Gregory Hines was lauded for his singing of "Low Down Blues," and his rat-tat-tat tapping during "Hot Feet." He won several awards, and was nominated for a Tony.

Although his appearance in "The Cotton Club" opened the door to more movie roles, producer Robert Evans told Hines that Richard Pryor his first choice for the part. Hines told The Associated Press in 1985 that Evans told him, "I can raise \$4 million with Pryor's name. With you, I can raise \$1,500."

He starred in 1985 in "White Nights," a Cold War dance film that paired him with Mikhail Baryshnikov. In his next film, "Running Scared," in 1986, he returned to comedy in a cop buddy movie with Billy Crystal.

Hines landed his first film role in the 1981 Mel Brooks comedy "History of the World Part I," in which he played a Roman slave as a last-minute replacement for Pryor.

Hines' has been nominated for a number of Emmy Awards, most recently in 2001 for his lead role in the mini-series "Bojangles." His PBS special "Gregory Hines: Tap Dance in America" was nominated in 1989, and in 1982 he was nominated for his performance in "I Love Liberty," a variety special saluting America. He was nominated in 1985 for a performance on "Motown Returns to the Apollo."

He also won a Daytime Emmy Award in 1999 for his work as the voice of "Big Bill" in the Bill Cosby animated TV series "Little Bill" and NAACP Image Awards for "Bojangles" and "Running Scared."

Heinz was engaged to Negrita Jayde, and the two described each other as soulmates. He is also survived by his daughter Daria, and his two children with his second wife, Pamela Koslow. They are his son Zach, and step-daughter Jessica.



Gregory Hines is shown in a scene from Columbia Pictures "White Nights" in this 1985 handout photo. Hines, a Tony Award winning, tap-dancing actor who started on Broadway and in movies including "White Nights" and "Running Scared," has died, his publicist says. He was 57. Hines died Saturday in Los Angeles of cancer, publicist Allen Eichorn said. AP Photo/Columbia Pictures, HO

Hines also starred with Mikhail Baryshnikov in 1985's "White Nights" and with Billy Crystal in 1986's "Running Scared," and he appeared with Whitney Houston and Angela Bassett in 1995's "Waiting to Exhale," among other movies.

On television, he had his own sitcom in 1997, the critically praised "The Gregory Hines Show," as well as a recurring role on "Will and Grace." This past March, he appeared in the spring television series "Lost at Home."

Hines became internationally known as part of a jazz tap duo with his brother, Maurice, and the two danced together in the musical revue "Eubie!" in 1978. The brothers later performed together in Broadway's "Sophisticated Ladies" and on film in 1984's "The Cotton Club."

Gregory Oliver Hines was born on February 14, 1946, in New York City. He has said his mother urged him and his older brother toward tap dancing because she wanted them to have a way out of the ghetto.

When he was a toddler, he said, his brother was already taking tap lessons and would come home and teach him steps. They began performing together when Gregory Hines was five, and they performed at the Apollo for two weeks when he was six. In 1974 they were cast in the Broadway musical "The Girl in Pink Tights," starring French

could walk and talk, I could dance." Paired with his brother Maurice, he was a child star. In his teens, joined by their father, Maurice Sr., on drums, they were known as Hines, Hines and Dad. Later he earned Tony nominations on Broadway in "Eubie," "Comin' Uptown" and "Sophisticated Ladies." His Tony was for best actor in a musical playing jazz legend "Jelly Roll" Morton in "Jelly's Last Jam."

There was a time, he said, when he didn't want to dance. He was in his mid-20s, "a hippie" in a brief moment of rebellion, he said in 2001.

"I felt that I didn't want to be in show business anymore. I felt that I wanted to be a farmer," he said with a laugh. Invited to work on a farm in upstate New York, he quickly learned a lesson. Beginning before dawn, "I was milking cows and shoveling terrible stuff and working all day. By the end of the day all I wanted was my tap shoes - I thought, 'What am I doing? I better get back where I belong on the stage where we work at night and can sleep later!'"

Hines had a falling out with his older brother in the late 1960s because the younger was becoming influenced by counter-culture and wanted to perform to rock music and write his songs. In 1973, the family act disbanded and Hines moved to Venice Beach.

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