

After less than a day, jury acquits R. Kelly of all counts

CHICAGO — R. Kelly was acquitted of all charges on Friday after less than a day of deliberations in his child pornography trial, ending a six-year ordeal for the R&B superstar.

Kelly dabbed his face with a handkerchief and hugged each of his four attorneys after the verdict — not guilty on all 14 counts — was read. The Grammy award-winning singer had faced 15 years in prison if convicted.

Minutes later, surrounded by bodyguards, he left the courthouse

without comment. Dozens of fans screamed and cheered as he climbed into a waiting SUV.

Prosecutors had argued that a video tape mailed to the Chicago Sun-Times in 2002 showed Kelly engaged in graphic sex acts with a girl as young as 13 at the time. Both Kelly, 41, and the now 23-year-old alleged victim had denied they were the ones on the tape. Neither testified during the trial.

The prosecution's star witness was a woman who said she engaged in three-way sex with Kelly and the

alleged victim. Defence lawyers argued the man on the tape didn't have a large mole on his back; Kelly has such a mole.

The trial centred on whether Kelly was the man who appears on a sexually graphic, 27-minute videotape at the heart of the case, and whether a female who also appears on it was underage.

Over seven days presenting their case, prosecutors called 22 witnesses, including several childhood friends of the alleged victim, and four of her

relatives who identified her as the female on the video.

In just two days, Kelly's lawyers called 12 witnesses. They included three relatives of the alleged victim who testified they did not recognize her as the female on the tape.

Kelly won a Grammy in 1997 for "I Believe I Can Fly," and is known for such raunchy hits as "Bump N' Grind," "Ignition," and for "Trapped in the Closet," a multi-part saga about the sexual secrets of an ever-expanding cast of characters.

Of the 12 jurors, nine were men and three were women; eight were white and four were black.

Despite his legal troubles, Kelly — who rose from poverty on Chicago's South Side to become a star singer, songwriter and producer — still retains a huge following, and his popularity has arguably grown in recent years.

The singer has released more than half a dozen albums, most of them selling more than a million copies. » The Associated Press

In Brief

COMPANY SETTLES IN NIGHTCLUB FIRE

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — A company that made insulation used in a Rhode Island nightclub that burned down five years ago, has agreed to pay US\$25 million to survivors of the fire and relatives of the 100 people killed.

The settlement with Elmwood Park, N.J.-based Sealed Air Corp., was disclosed in court papers.

It's the latest settlement stemming from the February of 2003 fire at The Station nightclub in West Warwick.

The fire began when pyrotechnics for the band Great White ignited flammable soundproofing foam on the club's walls.

So far, more than \$147 million has been offered to survivors and victims' relatives.

Victims' lawyers say Sealed Air made foam used as soundproofing that was installed in the club in 1996.

They say the foam burned too easily and produced toxic gas.

WITHERSPOON'S DIVORCE FINAL

LOS ANGELES — Reese Witherspoon has sealed another deal: her divorce from fellow actor Ryan Phillippe.

Documents filed on Thursday in Los Angeles show the pair have resolved the remaining issues of their split.

Exact details weren't filed, though the pair had indicated they wanted joint custody of their children, ages eight and four.

They opted for an uncontested divorce, which kept many of its particulars private.

Witherspoon cited "irreconcilable differences" when she filed for divorce in November of 2006 after seven years of marriage.

The "Legally Blonde" actress won the best-actress Academy Award in 2006 for her portrayal of June Carter Cash in "Walk the Line."

BRITAIN HONOURS DRABBLE, WINTOUR

LONDON — Vogue editor Anna Wintour and author Margaret Drabble were accorded some of the highest honours in the Queen's Birthday List made public today.

Drabble was made a dame, the equivalent of a knight.

Wintour, editor-in-chief of the U.S. edition of Vogue, was made an officer of the Order of the British Empire, or OBE. A London native, she is among the most influential figures in fashion.

"I am totally thrilled at this recognition, particularly since it coincides with my 20th anniversary as editor of American Vogue," Wintour said on Friday.

Richard Rogers, the architect of Heathrow Airport's Terminal 5, was made a companion of honour, an award limited to 65 living people, including theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking, former prime minister John Major and dramatist Harold Pinter.

In descending order, the main honours are knighthoods, commander of the Order of the British Empire, OBE and member of the Order of the British Empire.

» Wire Services



Singer-songwriter Sheena Grobb has received plenty of industry accolades in her young career. She performs tomorrow evening in the Lorne Watson Recital Hall. (Submitted)

Young musician brings sweet melodies to the Wheat City

BY JOANNE F. VILLENEUVE

Dulcet tones and sweet melodies underline Sheena Grobb's passion and talent.

Of late, the young musician from the Treherne area has been making her mark on the Manitoba music landscape and tomorrow evening, she brings her original material to Brandon.

"I'm excited to come back to Brandon. It was the big city for me when I was little. That's where we always went when we needed a bit of a treat or a little vacation. It's a very near and dear community to my heart," said Grobb, who has always been interested in music.

Her initial training, which began at the age of two, was classical in nature, with lessons in piano, violin and voice with her music teacher mother.

She picked up the guitar in her teens and began seriously thinking about music as a career during her university studies.

Her first foray as an aspiring professional musician was in the recording of an EP in 2006.

"At the same time, I was also trying to finish my schooling and was uncertain as where I was meant to go," she said, adding that it was last May, after she graduated with a education degree in high school chemistry, that she decided to pursue music and performed as much as she

could. "I got the response from the universe that I needed because I was nominated for a Western Canadian Music Award (for outstanding pop recording) in October, and shortly after, I was nominated for vocalist of the year at the Los Angeles Music Awards. It was phenomenal to be considered."

In November, she travelled to New York and took part in the Williamsburg songwriting competition, making it to the semi-finals.

These industry nods have given her the encouragement to continue, and she has now completed a full-length recording of new material.

"When I begin with songwriting, I definitely need to find a quiet, isolated space — that can be an emotional space — a place where I'm able to connect with my emotional/spiritual realm and tapping into the things that are happening in my life," said the singer/songwriter.

"Each song starts with a theme or a feeling or an occurrence and I go from there." Interestingly, two years ago, Grobb was chosen to represent Winnipeg, where she now lives, in a model search for Bootlegger.

Had she won the grand prize of \$10,000, she would have

donated it to the Canadian Cancer Society, in her grandmother's memory.

"It really would have been wonderful to do that. I had my heart set on donating it to breast cancer (research)," she said, adding that modelling was a completely different aspect of being in the public eye.

"The experience of getting flown out to Vancouver and meeting so many like-minded individuals was really nice."

Veteran folk performer, Craig Cardiff is accompanying Grobb on her summer tour and will play some of his own music during the evening.

This concert will take place at 7:30 p.m. tomorrow in the Lorne Watson Recital Hall at the Brandon University School of Music.

Tickets are available at Ted Good Music as well as the Surridge's Music Centre, and will be available at the door.

Grobb and Cardiff will also play at The Beach Pavilion in Minnedosa at 7:30 p.m. on Monday, and at The Beach Club in Wasagaming, at 8 p.m., on Tuesday.

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NBC news host was known for his pointed questions

BY DAVID ESPO

WASHINGTON — Tim Russert, who pointedly but politely questioned hundreds of the powerful and influential as moderator of NBC's "Meet the Press," died of a heart attack on Friday while at work in Washington.

The network's Washington bureau chief was 58.

In addition to his weekly program, Russert appeared on the network's other news shows, was moderator for numerous political debates and wrote two bestselling books.

President George W. Bush, informed of Russert's death while at dinner in Paris, swiftly issued a statement of condolence that praised the NBC newsman as "an institution in both news and politics for more than two decades."

"Tim was a tough and hardworking newsman. He was always well-informed and thorough in his interviews. And he was as gregarious off the set as he was prepared on it."

NBC interrupted its regular programming with news of Russert's death, and in the ensuing moments, familiar faces such as Tom Brokaw, Andrea Mitchell and Brian Williams took turns mourning his loss.

Williams called him "aggressively unfancy." "Our hearts are broken," said Mitchell, who appeared emotional at times as she recalled her longtime colleague.

Russert, of Buffalo, N.Y., took the helm of the Sunday news show in December of 1991 and turned it into the country's most widely watched program of its type. His signature trait there was an unrelenting style of questioning that made some politicians reluctant to appear, yet confident that they could claim extra credibility if they survived his grilling intact.



In this January file photo provided by NBC, Tim Russert moderates the Republican Presidential Candidates Debate from Florida Atlantic University. Russert, 58, died of a heart attack while at work at the NBC Washington bureau on Friday. (The Associated Press)

He was also a senior vice-president at NBC, and this year, Time Magazine named him one of the 100 most influential people in the world.

Russert had Buffalo's blue-collar roots, a Jesuit education, a law degree and a Democratic pedigree that came from his turn as an aide to the late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York.

One of his books, "Big Russ and Me," was about his relationship with his father.

Praise flowed quickly from those who knew Russert across the television interview room.

The network said on its website that Russert had been recording voiceovers for Sunday's program when he was stricken.

He was married to Maureen Orth, a writer for Vanity Fair magazine. The couple had one son, Luke.

» The Associated Press

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Sat/Sun Mats 1:05, 3:05 Nightly 7:05, 9:05
INDIANA JONES PASSES VOID PG13
Sat/Sun Mats 12:50, 3:25 Nightly 6:50, 9:25
IRON MAN PASSES VOID PG
Sat/Sun Mats 12:45, 3:15 Nightly 6:45, 9:15
SEX & THE CITY: THE MOVIE 18A
Sat/Sun Mats 12:40, 3:30 Nightly 6:40, 9:30
KUNG FU PANDA G
Sat/Sun Mats 1:10, 3:10 Nightly 7:10, 9:10
YOU DON'T MESS WITH THE ZOHAN 14A
Sat/Sun Mats 1:00, 3:20 Nightly 7:00, 9:20
THE INCREDIBLE HULK PG PASSES VOID
Sat/Sun Mats 12:55, 3:25 Nightly 6:55, 9:25
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