

Legal Briefs

Composer **Alan Menken** filed a breach of contract suit against **Concorde-New Horizons** over the musical rights to "**Little Shop of Horrors**," from which an animated production was created using the music he wrote with lyricist Howard Ashman under the banner of Shoptalk Ltd.

The suit, filed in U.S. District Court in Los Angeles on Wednesday, claims that Menken and Ashman entered a dramatization rights agreement in 1983 that wasn't honored when Concorde granted Saban International an option for an animated TV series containing their music.

A former **Daily Variety** employee has sued the trade paper and its publisher, **Michael Silverman**, claiming Silverman harassed and fired him for speaking out against gay and lesbian discrimination in the Boy Scouts and the entertainment industry.

Gay rights activist **Rob Roberts**, a former assistant production manager, filed suit in Los Angeles Superior Court on April 30. He claims the paper retaliated for his refusal to support a Permanent Charities Committee fund-raiser because some of the money would go to the Boy Scouts, which does not allow gays.

Entertainer **Smokey Robinson** was sued by his neighbors over a fallen tree and an alleged "spite fence" the suit claims was erected to annoy the couple.

Michael and **Barrie Grobstein's** Los Angeles Superior Court suit, filed Monday, seeks \$750,000, plus punitive damages, due to "humiliation, mental anguish and emotional and physical distress."

On March 19, 1991, a tree on Robinson's suburban Encino property toppled into their yard, causing \$250,000 damage to their patio, pool and landscaping, the suit said.

Singer **Wilson Pickett** plead-

ed innocent Tuesday in Englewood, N.J., to charges of drunken driving and striking an elderly pedestrian. A prosecutor said Pickett "is like a loaded gun."

Pickett was charged in an April 24 accident in which authorities said he injured an 86-year-old man while allegedly driving under the influence.

The operators of four stores pleaded innocent Tuesday in Omaha, Neb., to charges of selling obscene music recordings to minors sent by a city councilman to buy the records in an unofficial sting operation.

The stores pleaded innocent to charges they sold the sexually explicit **2 Live Crew** album "Sports Weekend" to four teens sent by Councilman Steve Exon and an anti-pornography group called Omaha for Decency.

A London censorship watchdog organization has blasted a court ruling that allows the government to employ an anti-terrorism law to force journalists to reveal their sources.

Britain's director of public prosecutions, Barbara Mills, received High Court permission April 29 to bring contempt proceedings against **Channel 4 TV** for failing to disclose documents revealing its informants' identities. The material was for a report on alleged collusion between British police and Protestant death squads in Northern Ireland.

"**Old Joe**" **Camel** can continue to puff away on T-shirts, caps and other promotional products distributed by cigarette-maker **R.J. Reynolds** in California, a state judge has ruled.

San Francisco Superior Court Judge Lucy Kelly McCabe on Wednesday rejected an attempt to ban use of the slick cartoon character, siding with Reynolds' that the suit is pre-empted by federal laws.

U.S. Surgeon General Antonia

Novello and the American Medical Assn. have said the character encourages children to smoke.

The private advocacy group **Public Citizen** has sued the **National Archives** for the release of more than 250 autopsy photos and X-rays of assassinated President John F. Kennedy.

"The photographs and X-rays are government records," said Public Citizen attorney Theresa Amato. Neither the government nor the Kennedy family, she said, can "deny the public the right to see them under the Freedom of Information Act."

In the suit filed April 29, Public Citizen charged the government with wrongfully withholding public documents by claiming they are the private property of the Kennedy family.

Largo Entertainment has filed a breach of contract suit against screenwriter **Tim Metcalfe**.

According to the suit, filed in Los Angeles Superior Court on Wednesday, Largo and Metcalfe entered into an agreement Oct. 15 in which Metcalfe would be paid two installments of \$50,000; one upon commencement and one upon completion and delivery of a script.

Largo claims Metcalfe received his first payment in November but hasn't written the screenplay and refuses to repay the \$50,000.

Compiled by Gary Akers

USTA files to deny Cox telco access

By Paula Parisi

DALLAS — In an early salvo against cable invasion of telco turf, the United States Telephone Assn. filed a petition with the FCC to prevent cable giant Cox Enterprises from gaining a controlling share in the Teleport telephone firm.

USTA is objecting on the grounds that Cox Enterprises should not be able to control both a cable television provider and a traditional phone service in the same area. Federal laws prevent telephone companies from doing the same.

Characterizing the move as "unusual," USTA president John Sodalowski said, "There is widespread sentiment that the underlying statute limits technology deployment and is anticompetitive."

"It must be changed," Sodalowski said.

"Telephone companies must be allowed to compete."

"These equity issues cannot be ignored and must be brought to the attention of those who make and apply communications policy," Sodalowski continued.

Cox, which had a minority 12% stake in Teleport, announced recently that it would up its option to purchase enough outstanding shares to bring its total holdings to 50.1%.

Another cabler, Tele-Communications Inc., purchased a 49.9% stake in Teleport earlier this year. Merrill Lynch was the previous owner.

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