BET Launches BET Studios

September 15, 2021

First-of-its-kind studio venture provides equity ownership to Black creators across premium TV & film content

Principal partners include Kenya Barris, Rashida Jones and Aaron Rahsaan Thomas

BET Taps Aisha Summers-Burke to Lead the New Venture as General Manager

NEW YORK--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Sep. 15, 2021-- BET, a unit of ViacomCBS (NASDAQ: VIAC; VIACA), today launched **BET Studios,** an unprecedented studio venture that offers equity ownership for Black content creators. Propelled by the infrastructure and financing of BET and ViacomCBS, BET Studios will create premium television series and films for an array of internal buyers, including Paramount+, SHOWTIME, CBS, Nickelodeon, BET+ and BET, in addition to select third-party platforms that seek best-in-class content from both leading and rising Black creatives. BET Studios will launch with principal partners **Kenya Barris**, **Rashida Jones** and **Aaron Rahsaan Thomas**.

"The demand for premium content from Black creators has accelerated dramatically as a result of both the rapidly changing media and social landscapes. BET, with our 40-year legacy of celebrating Black culture, and the full power of the ViacomCBS ecosystem—is uniquely positioned to service this demand," said BET President Scott Mills. "As a company with its origin in Black entrepreneurship, we are incredibly excited to create the first major studio to provide Black creators with ownership, creative freedom and the unparalleled partnership and support of BET. I am thrilled to have Aisha at the helm of this venture, and I look forward to our collaboration with our amazing creative partners in BET Studios."

"BET Studios is an exciting and novel extension of the storied BET brand, and we have a structure well-suited to our times to bring top talent into this production company with real ownership," said David Nevins, Chief Content Officer, Scripted Originals, Paramount+ & Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Showtime Networks Inc. "Scott Mills deserves tremendous credit for driving this innovative new business from idea to reality – and Kenya, Rashida and Aaron, could not be a more talented or in-demand group to lead this venture along with Aisha Summers."

"The investment being made by Scott, David Nevins, Bob Bakish and the ViacomCBS team into BET Studios is not only an investment in Black storytelling, it is also an investment in the culture," said **Barris**. "And while individual success is great, being able to amplify and champion underrepresented storytellers has been equally exciting and this venture allows that to continue to be a key focus in this next chapter of my career."

"There is such power in the creative talent that the principal partners bring to the table and BET Studios' unique ability to tell Black stories at scale," said **Jones**. "This joining of forces is super exciting for me in the multitude of ways that people of color see themselves represented on screen."

"As a new venture, BET Studios offers an opportunity to expand the brand's legacy of delivering Black stories," said **Thomas**. "This is a chance to bring nuanced, layered narratives to life, partnering with a forward-thinking team, interested in surprising and engaging the audience."

BET Studios will be headed by **Aisha Summers Burke**, who was recently appointed Executive Vice-President and General Manager of the new venture. In this role, Burke will be responsible for working collaboratively with the Studio's formidable creative partners and key internal constituencies. Along with overseeing the day-to-day creative affairs for the company, she will also be responsible for the BET Studios content slate and focusing on growing the Studio's production output across both internal and external platforms. Burke will report to **BET President Scott Mills.**

"BET has long been celebrated for excellence in producing quality programming that authentically depicts experiences lived within the Black community," said Summers Burke. "With the launch of BET Studios, we are excited to introduce a new model that opens the aperture to a broad array of platforms and supports the full range of content from Black creators. This entrepreneurial environment offers creatives the opportunity to produce diverse high-end content reflecting all aspects of entertainment."

Prior to joining BET, Burke spent thirteen years at Warner Bros. Television, most recently serving as Vice-President of scripted television for the cable and streaming division of Warner Horizon before it merged with Warner Bros. TV in 2020.

About BET Studios Principal Partners

BET Studios will operate with nimble teams of dedicated staff for Mr. Barris, Ms. Jones and Mr. Thomas. This group will utilize the BET and larger ViacomCBS infrastructure and shared services to support day-to-day tactics. BET Studios will be led by newly appointed General Manager, Aisha Summers-Burke, with Kenya Barris, Rashida Jones and Aaron Rahsaan Thomas serving as principals, and a broad array of creative talent that will partner with BET to launch the venture.

Kenya Barris is an award-winning writer, producer, and director. Barris created the Netflix original comedy #BlackAF and the multiseries "-ish" franchise, which includes ABC's Peabody Award-winning sitcom Black-ish and spin-off series Mixed-ish and Grown-ish, which airs on Freeform. Most recently, Barris co-wrote Coming 2 America, the highly anticipated sequel to John Landis' 1980s classic starring Eddie Murphy. In 2018, he was honored with the ACLU Bill of Rights Award, followed by being presented the 2019 Visionary Award from the Producers Guild of America and the Voice for Change Award from the Humanitas Prize.

Rashida Jones is an actress, director, writer, and filmmaker. As a filmmaker, Jones executive produced the Emmy nominated *Hot Girls Wanted* and the follow up Netflix series *Turned On*. In 2018, her documentary *Quincy*, about her father, Quincy Jones, debuted on Netflix and won the GRAMMY® Award for Best Music Film the next year. Alongside her partner Will McCormack, their company Le Train Train executive produced the hit dramedy series *CLAWS*, which premiered on TNT in 2017.

Aaron Rahsaan Thomas is an acclaimed television and film screenwriter and producer from Kansas City, Kansas. Most recently, Thomas was the co-creator and co-showrunner of the procedural series reboot of S.W.A.T., which airs on Friday nights on CBS and has worked on NBC's Friday Night Lights—for which he received a Peabody Award and two NAACP Image Award nominations—as well as CBS series, like Numb3rs and CSI: NY. He

has also served as a Co-Executive Producer on TNT's SouthLAnd, Fox's Sleepy Hollow, Netflix's The Get Down and directed an ESPN 30 for 30 documentary, Trojan War.

About BET

BET, a subsidiary of ViacomCBS Inc. (NASDAQ: VIACA, VIAC), is the nation's leading provider of quality entertainment, music, news, and public affairs television programming for the African-American audience. The primary BET channel is in 90 million households and can be seen in the United States, Canada, the Caribbean, the United Kingdom, sub-Saharan Africa, and France. BET is the dominant African-American consumer brand with a diverse group of business extensions including BET+, the preeminent streaming service for the Black audience; BET.com, a leading Internet destination for Black entertainment, music, culture, and news; BET HER, a 24-hour entertainment network targeting the African-American Woman; BET Music Networks - BET Jams, BET Soul and BET Gospel; BET Home Entertainment; BET Live, BET's growing festival business; BET Mobile, which provides ringtones, games and video content for wireless devices; and BET International, which operates BET around the globe.

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Source: VIACOMCBS INC.