

'Vibe' and 'Keenen' go head to head where Arsenio Hall has gone before

By Frazier Moore
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — A new battlefront for the late-night wars? Or just more talk?

It's hard to say right now, but this much is sure: "The Keenen Ivory Wayans Show" premiered Monday. "Vibe," with host Chris Spencer, also premiered Monday.

Talk about talk-show synchronism!

Each syndicated hour (check local listings for times and stations) features a young black host who presides over celebrity interviews, comedy and live music from the hottest bands.

Each program tapes just hours before airtime, at Hollywood studios virtually within shouting distance of each other.

Each pledges to be different from Leno's and Letterman's late-night institutions — and from the other, even while echoing each other's spiel (attitude, style, energy!).

In short, each wants to land the audience that's been adrift these past three years, ever since "The Arsenio Hall Show" barked its last. For it was the pioneering Arsenio who identified the niche of the urban young adult in late night, seized it, and then, when he quit, left behind a tantalizing vacuum.

So say hello to "Vibe" and "Keenen." Each dearly hopes to follow in Arsenio's woof-steps.

"If you look at the landscape of television, there's a void," Wayans noted in a phone interview Wednesday, "so we couldn't help saying, 'H m m m, let's take a shot.' That's why other people had the same idea at the same time."



Spencer

It's the only time Wayans brought up "Vibe."

Likewise, in a separate interview, Chris Spencer attempted to keep up the appearance that he's just tending his own garden, with no thought of the one about to bloom across the way.

"Keenen Williams?" Playfully garbling Wayans' name, Spencer feigned surprise over his fellow newcomer. "I hadn't heard!"

Of course, there are a few differences between "Keenen" and "Vibe."

Initially "Vibe" will be available to 97 percent of the U.S. audience, while "Keenen" will be seen in 90 percent of the nation.

At the outset, Wayans, 39, is better-known than his "Vibe" counterpart. The driving force behind the Fox sketch-comedy series "In Living Color," he also wrote, directed and starred in the film "I'm Gonna

Git You Sucka." He is executive producer as well as host of the show that bears his name.

A decade younger than Wayans, Spencer was a rising comic who had been a guest on both "Arsenio" and "In Living Color," as well as a star of a shortlived Fox sitcom, when "Vibe's" producers chose him for the show that bears not his name but instead that of the popular young-adult magazine. Think of the TV venture as a sort of brand extension.

But an even bigger brand name belongs to "Vibe" executive producer Quincy Jones, a godfather in the entertainment world. His star value is such that he poses beside Spencer in some of "Vibe's" publicity shots.

Not surprisingly, "Vibe" talks big, promising splashy production values, inventive staging, even satellite remotes from glamorous events like premieres and "mega-parties."

"I wish them luck," Wayans said with a laugh.

"We all have to work within the confines of the talk-show genre," he argued, with the deciding factor in each show's success not technical pizzazz, but "the host and that host's sensibility. Dave has a different sensibility from Jay. And I'll have a different sensibility from them."

As well as that new guy? "And from Chris," Wayans said.

Only time will tell if, even in markets where the two new

shows don't compete head-to-head, they will be forced to divvy up a finite group of viewers Arsenio once had all to himself.

Or if, instead, "Vibe" and "Keenen" can start with that audience, then build on it by attracting the broader demographics both hosts say they welcome.

or rent movies or commit crimes. I'm gonna bring the crime rate down with my show!"

Meanwhile, each host makes nice with the other, preaching peaceful coexistence as they set out on paths that, at the start, at least, are parallel.

Wayans: "I think there's enough viewers for everyone." Spencer: "I think we can both work out."

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Winans offers good new CD

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Daniel Winans is the sometimes forgotten member of the Winans clan. He's done several albums, one of which Brotherly Love, won a Grammy. He's back with a new CD, On The Inside. It's a dandy.

Like his brothers and sisters, Daniel is comfortable in either the gospel, contemporary Christian or even hip-hop arenas. This CD leans more toward

the latter, but gospel fans should be very happy with this CD.

Daniel is in fine voice. He's not a powerful vocalist, nor does he do vocal gymnastics. He's sincere and shows it.

The whole family (except BeBe) was involved in this work. CeCe does a haunting duet called "Without Love." It's a heart-tugging song of praise. The Winans add background vocals on "True To You," a bubbling, joyous num-

ber which asks for help with vices. And Debbie's duet called "My Satisfaction" owes as much to hip-hop as it does gospel.

Well done, Daniel. Well done, indeed.

- ☆☆☆☆ Classic;
- ☆☆☆☆ Excellent;
- ☆☆☆ Good;
- ☆☆ Fair;
- ☆ Why?;

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