



Bad Hair Day Cited in Ventriloquist Case

By KARINA BROWN

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LOS ANGELES (CN) - Ventriloquist Jeff Dunham tried to snatch the rights to interviews and performances he gave to the makers of "I'm No Dummy," a documentary on the history of ventriloquism, the moviemakers say. They claim Dunham reneged on a deal after claiming that some of the film made him look "sick and unhealthy and with bad hair."

Montivagus Productions claims that when Dunham heard about its documentary, he said he would "love" to participate. Montivagus claims that Dunham offered to give it free interviews, footage of his performances and use of his image for ads, and signed an agreement guaranteeing it full ownership of the footage.

Montivagus filmed an interview and footage of Dunham performing in Cleveland and in Los Angeles in 2007. Dunham appears in about 15 minutes of "I'm No Dummy," according to the Superior Court complaint.

The plaintiffs say Dunham saw the documentary in 2008 and told the filmmakers they "did a superb job."

But by the time the movie was ready for release, Dunham asked Montivagus to film replacement footage of his performances, claiming the shots from Cleveland made him look "sick and unhealthy and with bad hair."

A month later, Dunham's lawyer told Montivagus that the movie may interfere with Dunham's agreements with Comedy Central, with which Dunham has made three one-hour specials, the complaint states.

Dunham's lawyer demanded full distribution rights for the documentary, claimed that the written agreement between Dunham and Montivagus was unenforceable and threatened to sue, according to the complaint.

Montivagus and Salient Media, its distributor, want a declaration affirming the enforceability of the contract and its right to distribute the documentary.

They are represented by Bryan Freedman with Freedman & Taitelman.