

Universal Music Sues Over VH1 DJ Competition Series

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The third season of 'Masters of the Mix' allegedly used lots of unlicensed music



David Brendan Hall

Universal Music describes a new lawsuit over VH1's *Masters of the Mix* as a "cut-and-dry copyright infringement case," but modest trappings aside, there's a few reasons to pay attention to this one.

The complaint was filed in California on Friday against Je T'Aime Media Group, the show's producer. Interestingly, VH1 and its corporate parent Viacom are not named as defendants.

Although live DJ music has somewhat been overlooked on the copyright front for many years, the lawsuit takes issue with a reality television program where disk jockeys compete for \$250,000 in prize

money and the title of vodka company Smirnoff's official DJ for a year.

Universal Music says the producer of *Masters of the Mix* properly licensed sound recordings and musical compositions for the first two seasons of the show, but failed to do so for the third season. That season, which aired in 2013, is said to have used at least 93 of Universal's compositions including songs from **Daft Punk, Kanye West and The Roots** and 115 of its sound recordings including works by **Black Eyed Peas, Gwen Stefani and Nirvana**.

"Plaintiffs' copyrighted works are fundamental to the production and success of the Show," says the complaint.

Besides seeking up to \$150,000 for each copyright infringed, Universal is making common law misappropriation and conversion claims over pre-1972 recordings by artists such as **James Brown, Marvin Gaye and The Temptations**.

In the past year, the record industry **has gone after Sirius XM and Pandora** over pre-1972 music, and one of the responses has been that rights-holders have long given television broadcasters (as well as other music users) a pass on royalty collection on the older music. No longer, it seems. Until the issue is settled, pre-1972 music is a legally hot one, as the latest lawsuit evidences.

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