## 'Family Guy' Creator MacFarlane To **Guest Host As 'SNL' Starts Season**

38th Season Begins This Saturday

BY FRAZIER MOORE

AP Television Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — You might think Seth MacFarlane has a show-biz bucket list.

By now, he's checked off ventures like his animated TV shows (led by "Family Guy"), his recording of show tunes, live performances at Carnegie Hall and this summer's film comedy, "Ted," which he directed, wrote and provided the title character's voice for.

Now MacFarlane will serve as guest host this week for the season premiere of NBC's "Saturday Night Live.'

Was this just the next gig on his to-do list?

"Not exactly," MacFarlane said Tuesday. "When things come up, I tackle them if they sound fun. That's how I decide what to do and what not to do. It's what sounds like it's going to be a good time."

But there's another reason he was reporting to Studio 8H.

"They asked me," he explained. "It's the kind of thing you don't say 'no' to if you're in

For a multimedia comedy impresario, MacFarlane might not seem ideally suited to "SNL," where he is being treated warmly, but not in his customary role as the boss.

"It's always a nice break to NOT be the guy in charge," he insisted. And with his edition of "SNL" being polished off in just a week, the routine should prove a refreshing change, too. "It's the complete antithesis of the nine months it takes us to do one episode of an animated series."

While MacFarlane arrived Monday with a few sketch ideas, "this is a large writing staff that's well equipped to do what they do," he pointed out. "I sat in on a pitch where writers threw out a bunch of one-line sketch ideas, and there were a lot of hilarious ones. There's no shortage of fresh stuff.'

But along with comedy, will the silver-throated MacFarlane sing a song on the show?

'Possibly," he said. "But it's too soon to tell."

As the series begins its 38th season (Saturday at 11:30 p.m. EDT), MacFarlane will be sharing the bill with musical guest Frank Ocean. Meanwhile, Aidy Bryant, Tim Robinson and Cecily Strong will be joining the troupe as featured players.

But absent from the scene will be veteran cast members Kristen Wiig and Andy Samberg, as well as Abby Elliott.

Not a problem, said MacFarlane from his insider's perspec-

"The coming and going of cast members is something the show has rolled with for decades," he noted, "so I think they're pretty well disposed to deal with that. They seem pretty excited to get started with a new group.

Looking beyond Saturday, MacFarlane said future projects he'd like to do include another film and even maybe an on-camera acting role.

"We'll see if this weekend is a disaster or not," he hedged. "But I do like trying things I haven't tried before. It kind of gets the blood going."

But what about the threat of a butterflies attack when airtime gets here on Saturday?

MacFarlane laughed, then cracked, "Aren't there drugs that can get rid of the butterflies these days?



L.A. Reid, from left, Demi Lovato, Britney Spears and Simon Cowell on the set of "The X Factor" which airs on

## **Judges**

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"On the Floor" — a mammoth dance-club hit and her first Top 10 single in nearly a decade. The song was released just a few weeks after her debut as an

'Idol" judge. With singers making much less than they used to from record sales, the pressure to do

TV becomes even more intense. Getting beamed onto people's flat screens twice a week makes it much easier to sell concert tickets — an increasingly important source of income for performers these days.

"You've got to put butts in the seats at events," said Scott Sternberg, a veteran reality producer who's helped supervise shows for Abdul, Paula Zahn and others. "It's all about branding."

The real question is whether stacking the judges' tables with

platinum sellers will do anything to budge ratings. Many analysts see a glut of singing shows, and say that trend — combined with the advancing age of "Idol" — signal the beginning of the end for a genre that has dominated TV for about a decade.

"Idol" "is going to be entering its 12th season," Hughes said. 'There's a limit to what you can do now to stem its decline. When a show is this age, it's hard to reverse that, regardless of the judges.

## Ho Ho Ho: Lady **A Offers Fans Christmas Gift**

BY CHRIS TALBOTT AP Music Writer

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) -When the members of Lady Antebellum sat down to plan out their new Christmas album they faced a choice: Toss it off or take it seriously.

In the end, the platinum-selling trio of Hillary Scott, Dave Haywood and Charles Kelley put in as much or more work than they had on any of their three previous studio albums. For a simple rea-

"These things live out long past some of your other records because every season it comes back," Kelley said.

"It could potentially outlive us, literally," Scott said. "You think about Bing Crosby and some of those classic versions of Christmas songs, and it's like we could be that. Which is crazy and heavy in a way.

"On This Winter's Night" will be released Oct. 22. It's notably different from previous Lady A work, filled with lush orchestral moments, string sections and more iuii-dand arrangements than they've previously attempted. The title song, co-produced with Paul Worley, is an original, written by the group with Grammy-winning songwriter Tom Douglas.

'All those big arrangements, we wanted to make sure they were right," Haywood said. "And these songs that people have done almost perfectly, like these Bing Crosby songs and Brenda Lee songs that are just so well done, we wanted to make sure we didn't just go in there and say, 'Oh, this will be fine.' So we spent tons and tons of time just making sure that our version would be something that would hopefully be around for a while."

In a way, the Christmas album — conducted in two sessions over the summer during breaks from their tour — was a warm-up for work on their next studio album. The group recently started putting down tracks with Worley in Nashville for their follow-up to the platinum-selling "We Own the Night." Kelley said it's the first album they've recorded that doesn't have a deadline looming.

They'll head to Australia to finish off the "We Own the Night" world tour and they'll do some promotional work for the Christmas album. But for the most part, they'll be focused on the new

record for as long as they want. "I think that's the biggest freedom for us," Kelley said. "I think we'd be lying if we said we didn't feel pressure with the last record coming off "Need You Now," so I think we're far enough away from that, and coming off a successful tour, for us, for me, was the most rewarding and comforting thing. We're like, 'Oooh, we're good.' We can go in here and make a creative record without so much pressure. So we're going to go in here I think and take some chances and actually get back to the basics a little more with this record.'

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