

# Usher, West dominate the Billboard Awards

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Usher may not want to ring in the new year. This one's been too good to him. The R&B impresario dominated the 2004 Billboard Music Awards on Wednesday night, picking up 11 awards in the latest string of accolades he has earned this year.

His awards included artist of the year, R&B/hip-hop album of the year for "Confessions" and Hot 100 single of the year for "Yeah!" featuring Lil Jon and Ludacris.

The 26-year-old singer opened the show with a blast, dropping from the ceiling on a cord and performing "Bad Girl" while a bevy of beautiful women clad in white parkas and snow boots gyrated around him.

Usher, whose album sold more than 1 million copies in its debut week, also had a big night at last month's American Music Awards and is nominated for eight Grammys.

R&B crooner Alicia Keys picked up seven awards during Wednesday's show, which was held at the MGM Grand hotel-casino. Keys took home wins for female



R&B Artist Usher poses with just a few of his eleven awards during The 2004 Billboard Music Awards Wednesday, at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas.

artist of the year, R&B/hip-hop single of the year for "If I Ain't Got You" and Hot 100 songwriter of the year.

Kanye West, who has a leading 10 Grammy nomina-

tions, picked up four Billboard awards, including rap artist of the year. 50 Cent won a new award, ringtone of the year, for "In Da Club." Stevie Wonder, who pre-

sented Sting with the Century Award last year, was himself the recipient. Destiny's Child received the artist achievement award.

The Billboard Awards honor the year's chart-topping artists. Winners are determined by the magazine's year-end chart listings, which are based on record sales and airplay.

The 2004 Billboard Music Awards winners, announced in Las Vegas on Wednesday:

Artist of the Year: Usher  
Female Artist of the Year: Alicia Keys

Duo/Group Artist of the Year: OutKast

Male New Artist of the Year: Kanye West

Billboard 200 Album of the Year: Usher, "Confessions"

Billboard 200 Artist of the Year: Usher

Billboard 200 Duo/Group Artist of the Year: OutKast

Hot 100 Artist of the Year: Usher

Hot 100 Songwriter of the Year: Alicia Keys

Hot 100 Duo/Group of the Year: OutKast

Hot 100 Single of the

Year: Usher featuring Lil Jon & Ludacris, "Yeah!"

Hot 100 Airplay Single of the Year: Usher featuring Lil Jon & Ludacris, "Yeah!"

Hot 100 Producer of the Year: Lil Jon

Female Hot 100 Artist of the Year: Alicia Keys

Top-Selling Single of the Year: Fantasia, "I Believe"

Top-Selling R&B/Hip-Hop Single of the Year: Fantasia, "I Believe"

R&B/Hip-Hop Artist of the Year: Usher

R&B/Hip-Hop Duo/Group of the Year: OutKast

R&B/Hip-Hop Album of the Year: Usher, "Confessions"

R&B/Hip-Hop Single of the Year: Alicia Keys, "If I Ain't Got You"

R&B/Hip-Hop Producer of the Year: Kanye West

R&B/Hip-Hop Albums Artist of the Year: Usher

R&B/Hip-Hop Airplay Single of the Year: Alicia Keys, "If I Ain't Got You"

Female R&B/Hip-Hop Artist of the Year: Alicia Keys

New R&B/Hip-Hop Artist of the Year: Kanye West

R&B/Hip-Hop Singles Artist of the Year: Alicia Keys

Rap Artist of the Year: Kanye West

Mainstream Top 40 Artist of the Year: Usher

Mainstream Top 40 Single of the Year: Usher featuring Lil Jon & Ludacris, "Yeah!"

Digital Track of the Year: OutKast, "Hey Ya!"

Ringtone of the Year: 50 Cent, "In Da Club"

Independent Album Artist of the Year: Lil Jon & the East Side Boyz

Independent Album of the Year: Lil Jon & the East Side Boyz, "Kings of Crunk"

Artist Achievement Award: Destiny's Child

Century Award for Creative Achievement: Stevie Wonder

Artist Achievement Award: Destiny's Child

Century Award for Creative Achievement: Stevie Wonder



Alicia Keys won 7 awards.

## Danny's dozen does it again

By Kam Williams  
Sentinel-Voice

Frank Sinatra and the rest of the Rat Pack never took themselves all that seriously when they made the original "Ocean's 11" back in 1960. And it showed. But nobody complained because it was enough of a thrill that so many A-list actors had been assembled for that star-studded endeavor.

Director Steven Soderbergh took the same approach several years ago in mounting his similarly unsatisfying remake, cavalierly crafting a slapdash romp which was only a hit because of a big-name cast comprised of the likes of George Clooney, Brad Pitt, Julia Roberts, Bernie Mac, Matt Damon, Elliot Gould, Don Cheadle and Carl Reiner. So, the question for this highly-anticipated sequel was whether Soderbergh would stick to that tried-and-true formula and simply serve-up another uneven, celebrity-driven farce, or if he would bother to make a movie memorable for more than its collection of famous faces.

The good news is that "Ocean's Twelve" is more satisfying than "Eleven" in terms of plotline and dialogue, and it even adds a few additional matinee idols in Bruce Willis, Catherine Zeta-Jones and Peter Fonda. Plus, this peripatetic adventure offers international flavor via generous helpings of breathtaking cinematography shot across exotic European locations in Monte Carlo, Rome, Paris, Amsterdam and Sicily.

"Ocean's Twelve" is a convoluted, cat-and-mouse crime caper which picks up three years after the gang had the nerve to pilfer \$160 million from Las Vegas kingpin Terry Benedict's (Andy Garcia) previously impenetrable casino vault. Since divvying-up their ill-gotten gains, we see that Danny Ocean (Clooney) has reconciled with and re-married his ex-wife, Tess (Roberts), and retired

to suburban Connecticut to live out his days quietly. The rest of his crew have been indulging their individual fantasies, too. For instance, con man Rusty (Pitt) has bought himself a trendy hotel in Hollywood and safecracker Frank (Mac) has been having his sensitive fingernails manicured in upscale salons. Meanwhile British explosives expert Basher (Cheadle) is attempting to break into the music business and pickpocket Linus (Damon) has been dreaming about coming out of retirement as the brains behind his own operation.

This time, the fun starts when a stool pigeon rats them all out to Benedict, and the ruthless mobster wants his money back immediately, or else. With half of the booty blown, Danny and company must reconvene and hatch a plot for an even bigger payday. After some needlessly confusing shenanigans, they ultimately settle on stealing a priceless Fabergé Egg. By involving a reluctant Tess in the scheme, they thereby turn the team into the requisite dozen.

But between them and the Fabergé stands Europol Agent Isabel Lahiri (Zeta-Jones), an expert at cracking such sophisticated cases, and Francois Toulour (Victor Cassel), a foxy, French master thief who is competing for the same prize. Peppered with plenty of humorous asides throughout, the production is frequently funny, if not always exactly plausible.

There's also a very clever twist towards the end involving the then expecting Roberts, a spoiler which only a meanie would consider divulging. See it all resolved with a perfect flourish which makes "Ocean's Twelve" one of those rare sequels which actually improves on the original.

Very Good (3 stars). Rated PG-13 for profanity.

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