

Oscarcast Review: Chris Rock scores big as host

NEW YORK (AP) — In the lingo of the moment, Chris Rock scored big on Sunday's Oscarcast with his charm of-fensive.

Rock did nothing to rile the FCC, as some had feared or hoped. Nor, as some had feared or hoped, did he relegate the Oscars themselves to supporting-player status. What he did do was give "The 77th Annual Academy Awards" a needed pick-me-up, presiding over the broadcast with saucy finesse.

In its never-ending quest to shake off its accumulated cobwebs, the Oscarcast had taken an unusually bold step in hiring him. It seemed to acknowledge that, for many viewers, there was more suspense in seeing what the irrepressible comedian might say or do than in finding out who would claim this year's crop of trophies.

Maybe so. But the ABC show proved a satisfying balance of personality and ceremony. Thank goodness. This was a night appallingly devoid of juicy flare-ups, screwups, breakdowns or bombshells (unless you count poor Martin Scorsese missing out, yet again, as best



Actors Jamie Foxx (L) and Morgan Freeman shake hands after the 77th annual Academy Awards in Hollywood, Feb. 27. Foxx won the Academy Award for best actor for his role in 'Ray' and Freeman won the Academy Award for best supporting actor for his role in 'Million Dollar Baby.'

director).

Rock's opening monologue wasn't a home run, but he warmed up quickly.

He needled nearly every actor within earshot by observing, "There's only four real stars, and the rest are just popular people. Clint Eastwood is a star. Tobey Maguire's just a boy in tights."

He vowed not to slam the president, then marveled at

George Bush's re-election despite certain missteps: "When Bush got into office there was a surplus of money. Now there's, like, a \$70 trillion deficit. Just imagine if YOU worked at the Gap, and you're closing out your register, and YOU'RE \$70 trillion short!"

Later, a pre-taped remote found Rock visiting the nearby Magic Johnson movie house to talk to "ordinary

people," and he had fun with the fact that many of these Black cineastes had not seen, nor even heard of, the Oscar-nominated films.

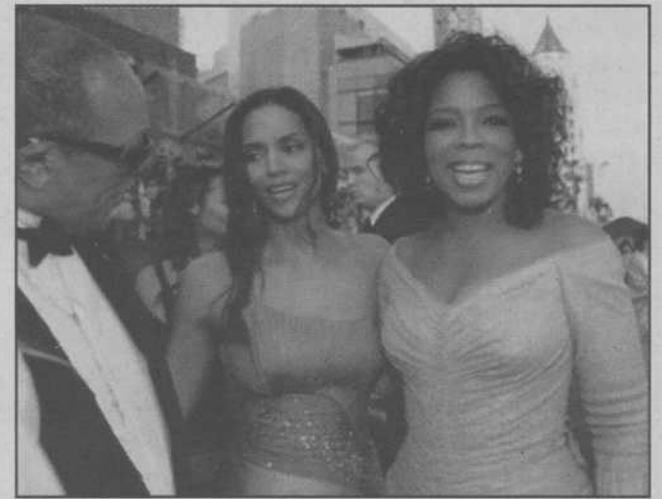
It was classic Rock: He glibed his interview subjects for being out of touch, while glibing the Oscars for being, well, a little highfalutin.

Originating as usual from Hollywood's Kodak Theatre, the show made maximum use of its venue, with the occasional award presented from out in the audience.

"Next year, they're gonna give the Oscars in the parking lot," quipped Rock, who also took to voicing puckish introductions for some of the presenters. "Comedy superstar Jeremy Irons"? And what about dishy Penelope Cruz and Salma Hayek, brought on by Rock with the crack, "You won't be able to take your eyes off these next four presenters."

The handsome stage set, designed in circular swirls, had a novel feature: Video images were projected across the floor or, mirror-like, from an array of ceiling panels.

As promised, all nominees for certain categories were convened onstage as the win-



Academy Awards presenter Halle Berry, center, greets legendary music producer Quincy Jones along with TV mogul Oprah Winfrey as they arrive on the red carpet for the 77th Academy Awards Sunday, Feb. 27, in Los Angeles.

ner was named. Not a bad idea. It saved precious moments and broke the numbing cycle of bringing winners up from their seats.

In sum, the broadcast felt brisk, though not rushed. It felt modern and refreshingly free of chronic self-importance. (Could that really be?)

It was a night when Prince was a presenter and the cellist Yo-Yo Ma performed.

A warm tribute to the late Johnny Carson treated viewers to clips from his many years in a role much of the audience had forgotten he

once had: hosting the Oscars. Accepting his lifetime achievement award, director Sidney Lumet offered one of the most all-inclusive (and gracious) thank-you's in Oscar history: "I guess I'd like to thank the movies."

And after a breezy 3 hours and 15 minutes, Rock was saying good night.

But what took so long for the producers to figure out this winning formula? Short of Michael Moore and Mel Gibson duking it out, this year's Oscarcast could hardly have been better.

Rapper C-Murder records music video behind bars

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — A rapper who is in jail awaiting a murder trial has angered the sheriff by recording parts of his forthcoming music video behind bars.

The rapper C-Murder, whose real name is Corey Miller, has been jailed for more than three years, facing a second-degree murder charge in the killing of a 16-year-old inside a nightclub. He was found guilty in 2003, but his conviction was thrown out last April.

While awaiting his second trial, Miller has created a 17-song album called "The Truest S— I Ever Said," set to be released on March 22. An early version of a music video of the album's single "Y'all Heard of Me" shows Miller in jail, in an orange prison outfit, complaining that he and other poor Blacks must endure racial profiling.

The release of the video and CD angered Jefferson Parish Sheriff Harry Lee, who says he learned of the video Wednesday after The Associated Press asked to interview Miller in the jail.

Lee said he had been unaware that the rapper had made music and video recordings from behind bars. Lee said he was tricked and the filming was done without his permission.

"Suffice it to say, I'm not pleased," Lee said. "The only thing I'll say is, he will not make another video while he's in my jail."

The rapper's lawyer, Ron Rakosky, said the footage in the video was recorded by two film crews: one for "Court TV", the other with a local cable-access show. Rakosky said both film crews received permission from the sheriff's office to interview Miller inside the jail.

"The bottom line is, we didn't do anything wrong," Rakosky said.

The early version of Miller's video shows another rapper, B.G., performing amid large crowds in and around New Orleans housing projects, where Miller grew up with his brothers Percy, the rapper Master P, and Vyshonne, whose stage name is Silkk the Shocker.

The record is Miller's first since 2002. His career peaked in the 1990s, when he had a hit "I'm Bout It, Bout It," in a trio called TRU with his brothers, then the solo record "Life Or Death," in 1998, which sold nearly 1 million copies.

A victims' advocate said she was upset to hear that Miller would be making money on record sales while in jail.

"He is a suspect in a murder case. I don't think he should be allowed these privileges, especially earning money, until his name is totally cleared," said Beverly Siemssen, president of New Orleans-based Victims and Citizens Against Crime.

Rakosky said he has encouraged Miller to continue working while in jail.

"Here's a guy in jail, making constructive use of his time instead of withering away," he said. "He's lost more than three years of his life, locked up for a crime he did not commit. At least he's not just sitting there, wasting away."

Students of the Month

Natasha Sanders and Tebecca Smith were selected by their peers and instructors because of the exceptional work they perform on clients and the outstanding grades they have earned on class exams. "Other schools clientele is limited, here; we service a diverse group of clients with all types of hair which is a better reflection of the general population" Sanders said. Both share a love for styling hair and had the same dream of becoming



Natasha Sanders (left) and Tebecca Smith (right) cosmetologists. "There is more too styling hair than hair... learning practical theory and understanding all hair types is a must if success is truly your goal," said Sanders. Both will complete their training this month. Sanders will work in a local salon. Smith plans to open her own salon in Summerlin this year, and then join her sister (who is a member of the singing group Lade) on tour in London, England as the group's hair stylist.

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