

## U.S. album sales down 7 percent

LOS ANGELES (AP) - U.S. album sales were down about 7 percent as 2005 drew to a close, but the budding market for music downloads, which more than doubled over last year, helped narrow the revenue gap, according to figures recently released.

Album sales from January through the week ending Dec. 25 stood at 602.2 million, compared with 650.8 million for the same period last year, according to Nielsen SoundScan.

Combined, album and singles sales fell about 8 percent over the same time last year. More than 95 percent of music is sold in CD format.

Downloaded tracks from online retailers soared to 332.7 million this year, compared with 134.2 million in 2004, an increase of 148 percent.

While good news for recording companies looking to expand download sales, it doesn't bode well for music retailers relying on customers to buy music CDs rather than digital downloads to turn a profit amid declining sales.

"More and more we're seeing customers switch to downloads or burning CDs from their friends," said Jesse Klempner, owner of Aron's Records in Hollywood. "The last couple of years we've been hanging on by our teeth."

The top three best-selling albums of 2005 through Dec. 21 were rapper 50 Cent's "The Massacre," which had sold 4.8 million copies, followed by Mariah Carey's "The Emancipation of Mimi" with 4.6 million sold, and Kelly Clarkson's "Breakaway," which sold 3.3 million units, Nielsen SoundScan said.

Full-album downloads are counted under album sales along with other formats. Most digital downloads reflect single-track purchases. Sales of music-related videos, another key revenue source for brick-and-mortar retailers, plunged 23 percent over the same time last year, Nielsen SoundScan said.

Holiday shoppers helped pump up music download sales figures with some last-minute shopping, buying 9.6 million downloads — the biggest sales week ever for digital downloads, according to the company.

Music lovers bought 5 million tracks during the same week last year.

Final 2005 figures will be released this week. The last week of the year typically sees a boost in music sales as gift certificates or other promotions given out for the holidays are spent. Those additional sales could help narrow the sales gap further.

## N.C.'s poorest children struggle

By Herbert L. White  
Special to Sentinel-Voice  
CHARLOTTE, N.C. (NNPA) - It's tough to be a low-income child in North Carolina.

A study released by the Raleigh-based North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute shows that middle- and upper-income children fare better on a series of indicators of well-being.

Kids who live in families earning more than 200 percent of the federal poverty line — roughly \$19,000 — are more likely to have better health and academic achievement than their low-income peers. They are also more

likely to participate in after-school activities.

"Money might not buy love, but it buys quality childcare, gas to participate in extracurricular activities or go to the library, and other essentials of family life," said Barbara Bradley, executive director of the institute.

"These data show that low-income families face more barriers in their day-to-day lives than moderate or higher income families, even as they have fewer financial resources to deal with those challenges."

Childcare is an especially difficult hurdle for low-income families, the study

found.

One in six poor families has had to quit, refuse or change a job because of child-care issues in the past year. More than 30,000 N.C. children can't get subsidies their parents need to afford childcare while they work.

The gap in health care between poor and upper-income children is closing, however. Higher-income families are three times more likely to have private health insurance, but access to publicly-financed programs like Medicaid and Health Choice has trimmed the gap to 12 percent of North Carolinians who have any type of insur-

ance. Still, 1 in 5 low-income kids went without health insurance at some point the year before the survey.

"We know that working hard is not enough for half a million families with children in North Carolina to afford the daily basics of life," said Sorien Schmidt, legislative director of the N.C. Justice Center and a member of the institute's board of directors.

The survey is based on a 2003 survey of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of 1,800 N.C. parents.

Herbert L. White writes for The Charlotte Post.

## Fitness

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jobs and, therefore, got enough exercise during the day.

"Most jobs we've got are [physical jobs] like janitors," one said "...We're going to work ourselves to the bone."

Surprisingly, that belief held true even among desk workers, Kumanyika said.

"People might think of themselves as hardworking people to come home and rest," she said. "In fact, their jobs may be sedentary."

But for many Black Americans, failure to exercise comes down to priorities and exposure, said John Grant, executive director of the 100 Black Men of Atlanta. The group's yearlong health challenge promotes

exercise among Black men by providing pedometers and encouraging fitness goals.

Grant argued that exercise hasn't historically been emphasized in Black homes, and that exposure to things like pricey gyms often is limited. Many Blacks, he said, are focused on economic survival, making regular exercise "not one of those things that are high on our priority list."

He's among those who believe incorporating Black exercise instructors and some soul music could change things.

"If you can see a reflection of yourself as part of that, one becomes more inspired," said Grant, who watches Richardson Joyner's

show. "They may be exercising to music I like or that is more culturally attuned."

Back at First Baptist, Tuesday night gospel aerobics class resembles a cozy family reunion.

The 15 or so women warm up to hip-hop before shifting into a gospel-driven version of "The Electric Slide." Moments later, they break into groups and take turns at exercise devices set

up around the room. In the center, one group of women hoots "Go Lula, go Lula," as another furiously whips a hula hoop around her sturdy waist.

All are Black women. All are at risk for obesity. And all are trying to buck the trend with a little bit of soul.

"It's a cultural thing, a gospel thing," explained 70-year-old Rebecca Brown. "I just can't stop coming."

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