

No sophomore jinx for Atlanta's Ciara

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Ciara may have evolved, but fans still can't get enough of her goodies.

Two years ago, the Austin-born R&B songbird broke big with her Hot 100 chart-topper "Goodies." Now, powered by her new single, "Promise," the Grammy-winner has bagged her first number one album, outselling the likes of Gwen Stefani and Eminem along the way.

Ciara's "The Evolution" sold north of 338,000 copies for the week ended Sunday, according to Nielsen SoundScan. Her debut album "Goodies," which also spawned the Top 5 hits "1, 2 Step" and "Oh" along with the title cut, topped out at number three.

"My second record is called The Evolution because I feel like I'm graduating to a whole new level creatively

and musically," Ciara (pronounced "Sierra") said in a statement. "I cowrote every song and coproduced many of the tracks on this record, so it really reflects where I am as an artist."

Her Darwinistic feat is even more impressive considering the competition.

"Eminem Presents: The Re-Up" moved 309,000 copies to open at number two. The new disc features Em as both rapper and producer on an album meant to promote new Shady Records artists (specifically Stat Quo, Ca\$his and Bobby Creekwater). The disc also features new Em and 50 Cent collaborations, including "Jimmy Crack Corn" and "The Re-Up," and both rap superstars join Ca\$his and Lloyd Banks on the lead single, "You Don't Know."

Em's supposed swan-song disc, "Curtain Call," is still on the charts at 172 after



Atlanta song-and-dance star Ciara is basking in her success.

53 weeks. Next up, the unretired rapper will release a new D12 album dedicated to slain member Proof and a new studio album in '07, as reported by singer Akon after collaborating with Em on "Smack That."

Meanwhile, Stefani's "The Sweet Escape" sold a

sturdy 243,000 copies to finish third for the week. Her previous solo album, 2004's "Love. Angel. Music. Baby." maxed out at number five despite being certified triple platinum. Stefani's only number one album came while fronting No Doubt, whose "Tragic Kingdom" hit

the top spot 11-plus years ago.

Surprisingly, after landing the third-biggest bow of the year, Jay-Z's "Kingdom Come" fell from the Top 10 in its third week, dropping to 15. Elsewhere, the "Dreamgirls" soundtrack opened at 20 on 92,000 copies. The soundtrack features tracks from the film's cast, including Beyonce, Jamie Foxx, "American Idol's" Jen-

nifer Hudson and Eddie Murphy.

The soundtrack deserved a higher ranking, since the collector's edition was tallied separately, opening at 132 with 14,000 in sales.

Combined sales would put the disc at 15 with nearly 107,000 total copies sold. Expect the sales to be goosed once the film is theatrically released on Christmas Day.

Simmons raises money for Africa

NEW YORK (AP) - Hip-hop and fashion mogul Russell Simmons said Tuesday he's selling bling to help raise money for the development and empowerment of Africans.

The 49-year-old entrepreneur announced his "Green Initiative" jewelry, which is manufactured and designed by Simmons Jewelry Co. Twenty-five percent of proceeds from sales will go toward the Diamond Empowerment Fund, which will support institutions, like schools and colleges, in South Africa and Botswana and help boost economic development.

Simmons' recent visit to South Africa and Botswana to tour diamond mines and factories coincides with efforts by human rights groups to raise awareness about so-called conflict diamonds, which have fueled and funded wars in Africa. Fighting forces sell the gems to raise funds for weapons. Millions have been killed in Angola, Sierra Leone, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Simmons Jewelry Co. President Scott Rauch said the company's diamonds are conflict-free.

"Our purpose was to see how we could have an affect on the diamond industry," he told a packed news conference Tuesday.

"Africans need this industry," Simmons said, touting the economic benefits to the region, like the funding of many HIV/AIDS clinics.

Hollywood has also taken up the issue with "Blood Diamond," a new film starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Jennifer Connelly. It shows how conflict diamonds financed civil war in Sierra Leone in the 1990s. The film will be released nationwide on Friday.

Some officials say loopholes remain in the Kimberly Process Certification Scheme, which is the diamond industry's response to growing world concern about blood diamonds. It was established in 2002 and aims to stem the flow of conflict diamonds by forcing participants to certify the origins of the diamonds being traded.

Blige snags eight Grammy nods

LOS ANGELES (AP) - Veteran R&B diva Mary J. Blige was the breakout leader Thursday with eight nominations as the 49th annual Grammy Awards were announced recently at the Music Box at Fonda Theater in Hollywood.

The Red Hot Chili Peppers were also multiple nominees, garnering six.

Other multiple nominees were the Dixie Chicks, British newcomer James Blunt,

John Mayer, Prince, and the Black Eyed Peas' will.i.am.

Blige's multi-platinum album "The Breakthrough" was nominated for R&B album of the year, and the hit "Be Without You" earned song of the year and record of the year nods.

Blige helped announce the nominees, along with Justin Timberlake, who also collected multiple nominations.

When Timberlake brought sexy back to music,

Grammy love came with it. The 25-year-old singer's second solo CD, "FutureSex/LoveSounds," nabbed nominations for pop vocal album of the year and album of the year.

The Dixie Chicks survived the controversy that followed member singer Natalie Maines' criticism of President Bush in 2003, crowning their comeback year with a number of nominations, including album of

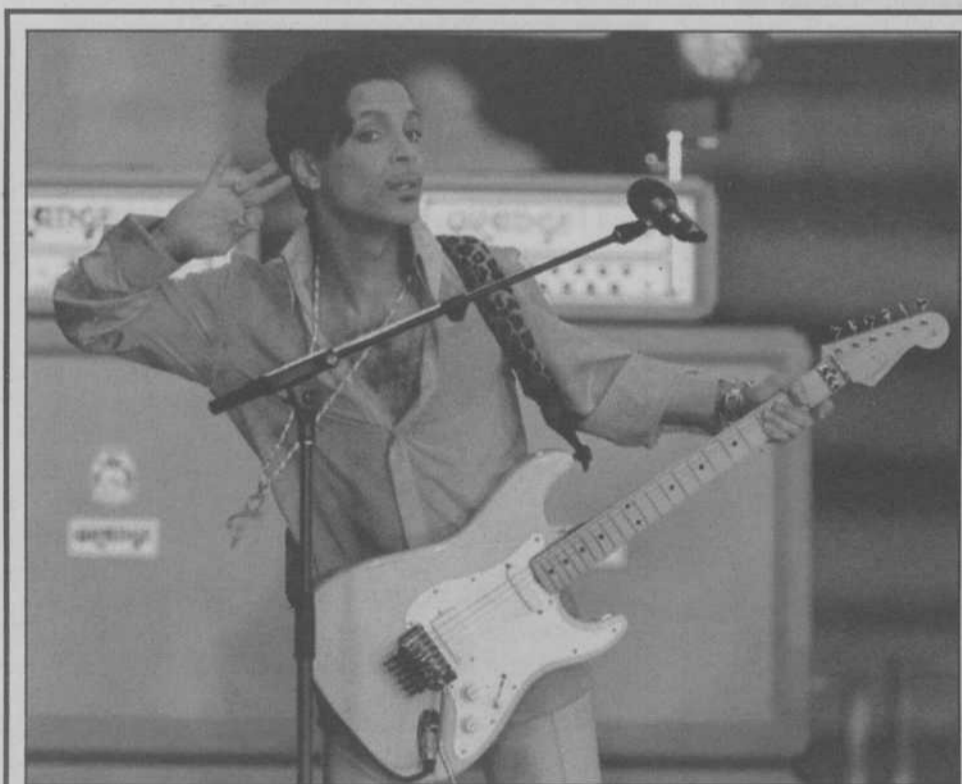
the year for "Taking the Long Way" and record of the year for the single "Not Ready to Make Nice."

The nominees for record of the year are "Be Without You" by Mary J. Blige, "You're Beautiful" by James Blunt, "Not Ready to Make Nice" by the Dixie Chicks, "Crazy" by Gnarls Barkley and "Put Your Records On" by Corinne Bailey Rae.

Christina Aguilera grabbed two nominations, for best pop female vocal and best pop vocal album for "Ain't No Other Man."

Blige was also nominated for best R&B album, along with Jamie Foxx, India.Arie, Prince and Lionel Richie.

The 49th Grammy Awards program is scheduled to air live on CBS from the Staples Center on Feb. 11.



Princely Performance at the King of Events

Prince, a musical icon and Rock and Roll Hall of Fame member, will headline the Super Bowl halftime show. The Purple One, winner of six Grammy Awards and nominated for five this year, will play at the half of the Miami event on Feb. 4. The Super Bowl, which will be televised by CBS, is television's highest-rated show. An estimated 141 million people watched last year's game between Pittsburgh and Seattle.



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