

Oscar night special for Black actors

Special to Sentinel-Voice

It was a memorable but not completely triumphant Oscar night for Black actors as Forest Whitaker and Jennifer Hudson won trophies, but Eddie Murphy lost in an upset.

As expected, Whitaker won best actor Sunday for his frightful yet charismatic performance as Ugandan dictator Idi Amin. Jennifer Hudson, a former "American Idol" contestant, scored the best supporting actress award for her debut performance in the musical "Dreamgirls."

"Receiving this honor tonight tells me that it's possible. It is possible for a kid from East Texas, raised in South Central L.A. and Carson, who believes in his dreams, commits himself to them with his heart, to touch them and to have them hap-

pen," Whitaker said as he accepted his award.

Murphy, also, was favored to win, but experienced a surprising loss early in the evening to Alan Arkin ("Little Miss Sunshine").

"I was definitely shocked. It makes you a little bit nervous," Hudson said backstage. "You can never be too sure. He did an unbelievable job."

Leading up to the Oscars, some speculated that the recent release of Murphy's lowbrow, cross-dressing comedy "Norbit" would injure his Oscar prospects. The "Norbit" producers hesitated over releasing it in the middle of Murphy's Oscar campaign, but director Brian Robbins said it was Murphy who insisted on releasing it on schedule.

Some also thought



Forest Whitaker, left, who won the Oscar trophy for best actor and acting newcomer Jennifer Hudson, who won the Oscar trophy for best supporting actress, pose backstage during the 79th Academy Awards on Sunday in Los Angeles.

Murphy showed a slightly cavalier attitude about acting honors when he accepted a Screen Actors Guild award and lightly mocked earlier, earnest speeches.

"No, I'm sorry," the 45-year-old comedian said after a moment, cracking up with laughter. "It's just when the British people come and get the awards, it's so smooth with their stuff. And I feel goofy up here, 'cause I don't be winning stuff."

Still, Black actors took two of the four main acting awards, and other nominees included Will Smith and Djimon Hounsou.

"It's a wonderful year to be an African-American actor," Beyonce Knowles (who co-starred with Murphy and Hudson in "Dreamgirls") said on the red carpet before the ceremony.

Although Jesse Jackson noted that the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences includes only 110 African-Americans out of 5,830 members, such years have been increasingly frequent.

After a long history of the Academy Awards being a largely all-White affair

(Chris Rock once called the Oscars a "Million White Man March"), this was the third year where multiple Black actors won Oscars.

Denzel Washington ("Training Day") and Halle Berry ("Monster's Ball") memorably shattered the Oscars' racial ceiling in 2002, the first time Blacks won both lead-acting prizes. In 2005, Jamie Foxx ("Ray") and Morgan Freeman ("Million Dollar Baby") won Academy Awards, prompting Freeman to say: "It means that Hollywood is continuing to make history. We're evolving with the rest of the world."

The "rest of the world" was also notably present at this year's Academy Awards — with nominees from Mexico, Japan, Africa, Germany and elsewhere.

"Such diversity in the room in a year where there's been so many negative things said about people's race, religion and sexual orientation," said host Ellen DeGeneres. "And I want to put this out there: If there weren't Blacks, Jews or gays, there would be no Oscars."

Ludacris mourns dad's death

ATLANTA (AP) - Ludacris has thanked his fans for their support and asked for privacy to grieve following the death of his ailing father. Wayne Brian Bridges, 52, died Sunday in an Atlanta hospital after a long illness, said Barry Florence, a publicist for the rapper.

At the Grammys earlier this month, Ludacris, 29, dedicated his award for best rap album for "Release

Therapy" to his father, saying his dad was in critical condition and fighting for his life.

"Mr. Wayne Bridges, I love you to death," he said at the televised Los Angeles ceremony. Ludacris, whose real name is Chris Bridges, also won a Grammy at this year's awards for best rap song for "Money Maker."

"We are overwhelmed by the generous outpouring of

love, condolences and support from family members, friends, fans and the many well-wishers," said a statement released Monday by Ludacris' family. "We thank you for your prayers and hope you will understand our need for privacy during this sorrowful time."

The statement said Wayne Bridges was "a great influence on his son" and had exposed him to music as a

young child.

Florence said the family had chosen not to publicly announce the cause of death and was planning a private funeral in Atlanta.

Beanie Sigel back in court

PHILADELPHIA (AP) - A judge extended Beanie Sigel's supervised release after the rapper was questioned in federal court about a positive drug test and association with convicted felons.

Sigel was sentenced in October 2004 to 12 months and a day, plus two years of supervised release, on gun and drug charges.

The U.S. Probation Office asked for a hearing Wednesday to change his supervised release status, saying he failed to notify his probation officer that he had been stopped and questioned by police on Aug. 20. He was with several people, at least one of them a convicted felon, at the time, police said.

Sigel also tested positive for codeine and morphine in a drug test in December.

The 32-year-old rapper, whose real name is Dwight Grant, told U.S. District Court Judge R. Barclay Surrick that he had been

given a prescription by his doctor three days before a scheduled drug test.

Sigel's attorney, Fortunato Perri Jr., provided Surrick and Assistant U.S. Attorney Curtis Douglas with a copy of a prescription and a letter signed by a doctor.

Surrick sentenced Sigel to an additional six months of

supervised release. He told Sigel he would have to get the situation "under control or otherwise I'm going to have to take action you're not going to appreciate."

Sigel's albums include "The Truth," "The Reason" and "The B. Coming." He starred in the 2002 film "State Property" and its 2005 sequel, "State Property 2."

Latifah

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Shankman promising me — because there was no script initially when I agreed to do the movie — that they would really, really do a great job with it and that I would have a really important part in the movie and I would get to wear a blonde wig."

Underneath it all — her career, not the hair — is her music, and she's now in the studio recording a new album.

The multi-hyphenate (who shares executive producer credits with several others on "Life Support" including Jamie Foxx) is set to executive produce "Wifey," a hip-hop drama for BET and VH1, and she is in talks to star opposite Katie Holmes in the indie heist film, "Mad Money."

"I never want to put myself in a box — I like to be challenged in different ways," she said.

"I've got a short attention span, so if I can't do different things then I get bored after a while."

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