

Bits 'n' Pieces

TAYLOR MEDIA SERVICES

Oprah sits atop highest earning African-American list; rapper 50 Cent is second

Forbes magazine has released its annual "Top Earning African-American Celebrities" list. And as would be expected, television talk-show queen Oprah Winfrey sits atop the list with 2008 income totaling approximately \$275 million. Gangsta rapper 50 Cent places second with an estimated income of \$151 million from his records, G-Unit clothing line and other ventures. Third place went to actor/producer Tyler Perry who recently opened a major television and film studio in the Atlanta area. Perry's income was placed at \$125 million. Golfer Tiger Woods was fourth at \$100 million. Rap mogul Jay-Z placed fifth with \$83 million. The remaining people in the top ten were Jay-Z's wife Beyonce Knowles, actor Will Smith, current basketball stars Kobe Bryant and Shaquille O'Neal and former basketball great Michael Jordan. The *Forbes* list covered income earned during the June 2007 to the June 2008 period.



Oprah Winfrey

Etta James says harsh criticism of Beyonce, President Obama was a joke



Etta James

Soul music legend Etta James last week attempted to back away from some harsh criticisms she hurled recently at singing sensation Beyonce Knowles and President Barack Obama. Initially, James seemed highly upset with Beyonce for singing James' 1961 signature hit "At Last" to Obama during an inauguration ball. Among other things, James told an audience at Seattle's Paramount Theater that Obama "ain't my president" and called him the guy with "the big ears." She then tore into Beyonce saying she was "going to get her ass whipped" for singing "At Last" to Obama. However, after the controversy was widely publicized, James now says she was just joking. She told one California newspaper, "I'm a comedian besides a singer. I wasn't doing it to be hateful."

Vivica Fox denies connection to Psychic Friends Network

Actress Vivica Fox has denied any connection to the somewhat controversial Psychic Friends Network. She says a new infomercial video being shown on the Internet which appears to show her promoting the network was being used without her permission. A Fox spokesperson told AOL Black Voices that the Psychic Friends Network "is using her unauthorized likeness, footage, voice and photographs as an endorsement of their services." They demanded the network "cease and desist" its actions. During the early 1990s, using singer Dionne Warwick as a spokesperson, the Psychic Friends Network made over \$100 million in profit in just a few years. But by the late 1990s, profits fell drastically and parent company Inphomation was forced to file bankruptcy. The association and fall also helped to undermine Dionne Warwick's career.

LL Cool J reportedly in talks to join the CBS "NCIS" series spin-off

Well-built rapper-turned-actor LL Cool J was reportedly in talks with CBS Television last week to become part of a spin-off of the crime series "NCIS." Cool J will be part of a team of special agents which conducts criminal investigations involving the Navy and Marine Corps. The spin-off is expected to take place sometime this spring. Cool J will play a tough former Navy seal Sam Hannah.

Wayne wins, but not top award

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Lil Wayne left the Grammys loaded down with four golden trophies, but it wasn't a great shock to anyone that his haul didn't include the night's top award, which went to Robert Plant and Alison Krauss for "Raising Sand."

The rapper led the Grammy field with eight nominations, and Tha Carter III was the year's best-selling album. He did win best rap album, rap solo for "A Milli," rap song for "Lollipop" and rap by duo or group for "Swagga Like Us" with Jay-Z, T.I. and Kanye West. Still, the voters continued to show reluctance to give the big prize to grittier hip-hop acts.

A rap album has been nominated in the category every year but two since 1997, but only Lauryn Hill's R&B-flavored hit "The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill" (in 1999) and Outkast's "Hey Ya"-fueled "Speakerboxxx/The Love Below" (2004) have won. Kanye West and Eminem have lost three times and two times respectively.

"I don't think it issues much of a statement," says Tracey Ford, editor of AOL Music's hip-hop site, TheBoombox.com. "It just means the Grammys went the way we thought they



Lil Wayne, pictured with family and friends, took home four Grammy Awards on Sunday.

would. It really doesn't say anything about Lil Wayne's success, because in the end, it was one of the biggest albums in 2008. You can't take that back."

Tha Carter III sold 2.9 million copies, topping 1 million in its debut week in June, the first album to accomplish that feat since 50 Cent's "The Massacre" in 2005.

"Lil Wayne was against some stiff competition that fit more easily into the Grammy mold," says Entertainment Weekly music critic Leah Greenblatt. "The Grammys' desire to be cool is not quite matched by the Grammys' traditional voting tenden-

cies."

But losing out on album of the year isn't likely to hurt the rapper, who was already a big winner before any trophies were passed out.

"When you have Lil Wayne sitting in front of [CBS Evening News anchor] Katie Couric on Grammy specials, that's already saying something," Ford says. "It helps push him into the music elite. Lil Wayne has been out there for a while, and though hip-hop fans already respect him, this brings him to a new audience."

Lil Wayne seemed grateful for the awards he did win. He bounded to the stage to

get the rap album trophy right after performing his Katrina-inspired "Tie My Hands" with Robin Thicke and fellow New Orleans native Allen Toussaint.

He seems set to take advantage of the broad exposure and an expanded fan base with his next project.

Rebirth, a rock album, out April 7. Lil Wayne will sing and play guitar on the album.

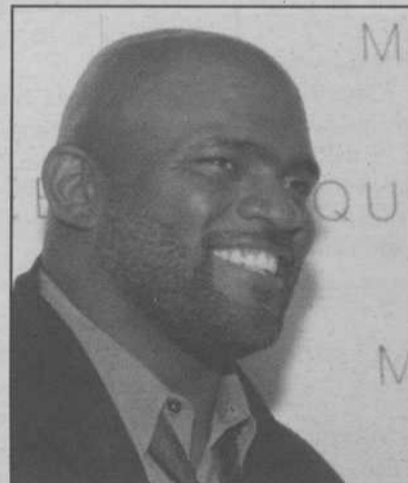
"I don't think people will look at whatever he does next as a joke," Ford says. "It's a smart move on his part to show that hip-hop guys can also rock out." Lil Wayne won four Grammys Sunday night but missed the biggest award of the evening.

Lil' Kim on 'Dancing with the Stars'

Special to Sentinel-Voice

LOS ANGELES - Grammy-award winning rapper Lil' Kim, Olympic gymnast Shawn Johnson and former New York Giants linebacker Lawrence Taylor will hit the floor for "Dancing With the Stars" when the show returns for an 8th season in March, ABC said on Monday.

They will be joined by real-life couples, rodeo athlete Ty Murray and his singer wife Jewel, and country star



Lawrence Taylor

Chuck Wicks and his girlfriend, two-time "Dancing With the Stars" champion Julianne Hough.

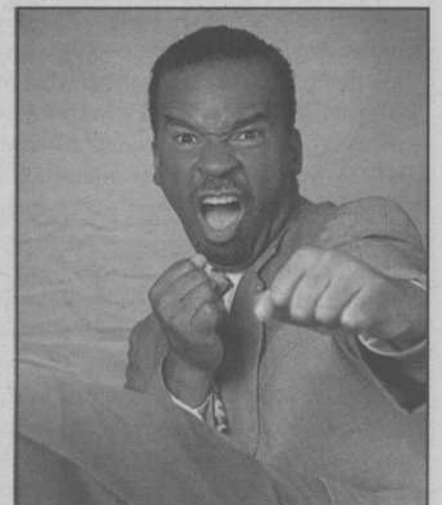
Former Apple executive Steve Wozniak, actress Denise Richards, 1980s pop singer Belinda Carlisle, "Sex and the City" actor Gilles Marini, celebrity reporter Nancy O'Dell, movie and TV prankster Steve-O and actor David Alan Grier round out the 13 stars showing off their fancy footwork.

Johnson, 17, who won an Olympic gold medal at the Beijing games in 2008, is the youngest ever competitor on the hit show which returns with a two-hour season premiere on March 9.

Singer and actress Lil' Kim, 33, spent a year in prison in 2005 after being found guilty of perjury and conspiracy for lying about the involvement of her friends in a 2001 shooting in New York.

Taylor, who led the New York Giants to two Super Bowl titles, has also written two books and appeared in several movies.

"Dancing With the Stars" has proved a ratings smash for ABC. Its last season, which ended in September 2008, drew about 19 million viewers per episode.



David Alan Grier



Lil' Kim