

1D ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Music sales rally contin-

By David Germain
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES — Online music file-sharing and other forms of piracy haven't gone away, but a gradual turnaround in U.S. music sales that began in the fall has picked up in the first quarter of this year, resulting in the industry's best domestic sales in years.

Overall U.S. music sales — CDs, legal downloads, DVDs, etc. — were up in the first three months of the year by 9.1 percent over the same period in 2003, according to Nielsen SoundScan.

Album sales were up 9.2 percent. Sales of CDs, which represent 96 percent of album sales, rose 10.6 percent. For the first time since 2000, two recording artists — Norah Jones and Usher — managed to sell more than 1 million copies of their albums in a single week this year.

"We've had a big run so far," said Geoff Mayfield, director of charts and senior analyst for Billboard Magazine. "Because we've had three years of erosion, at least for the first eight months of the year, it will be relatively easy for the industry to post increases."

The sales data are a bolt of encouragement to the industry, which was hit by a three-year sales slump it blames largely on file-sharing. The downturn prompted a wave of restructuring by record companies and thousands of layoffs.

Cary Sherman, president of the Recording Industry Association of America, called the first-quarter figures "good news," but cautioned that the results were measured against a dismal period.

"The numbers of 2003 were down about 10 percent to 12 percent from the year before," Sherman said. "If we didn't have that kind of increase it would be really terrible."

U.S. album sales declined annually in the three years following 2000, the biggest year since Nielsen SoundScan began tracking U.S. music sales.

In 2001, sales were down 3 percent. The next year, sales dropped 11 percent. Last year, until September, sales were down 8.5 percent, but the pickup in sales at the end of the year narrowed the total decline for 2003 to less than 4 percent.

"This is an industry that is very much, very, very cautious, because until this trend continues for a much longer period, they're not going to take anything for granted," Sherman said.

The burgeoning online music market accounted for the sale of more than 25 million tracks between January and March, eclipsing the 19.2 million tracks purchased in the last six months of 2003, according to Nielsen SoundScan.

Stores also saw gains. Chain stores' music sales were up 7 percent, while independent music retailers saw a 3 percent increase. Discount chains such as Wal-Mart, Target and Kmart posted a 13 percent jump in sales compared to the same period last year, according to Nielsen SoundScan.

"There were a couple of major releases that certainly pushed this quarter," said Jesse Klempner, owner of

See U.S. MUSIC/3D

Touching the essence of soul



With self-titled CD due in June, Jesse Powell hopes to continue recent success

Soul singer Jesse Powell brings mellow soul to a Hip-Hop dominated market.

By Cheris F. Hodges
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In an industry driven by tight rhymes over hip-hop beats, R&B singer Jesse Powell stands out as an artist not willing to load his album with guest appearances from rap's brightest stars.

But he might on the remix.

Powell's goal is simply to make good soul music. With his new album set to hit stores in early June, Powell is giving his fans a heads-up on what's been going on since he last dominated the airwaves with smooth R&B.

Powell, a native of Gary, Ind., now living in Los Angeles, is widely known for his hit single "You," which was the wedding anthem of 1999.

"That's one of the songs that I have to do at every show," he said. "If not, I think my life might be in danger."

Over the last three years, Powell hasn't produced any new music, despite touring steadily for the last two years. Powell is back with a new CD titled "Jesse" on a new label - Liquid8 Records/D3 Entertainment - his three previous albums, "Jesse Powell," "Bout it" and "JP" were released on Silas/MCA records. However, Powell needed a new home after the death of Louil Silas, head of Silas Records. This, he said, delayed his new music slightly. "Jesse" is scheduled for release on June 1. Powell is already working on his follow up so that fans won't have to wait again.

Powell said his life has moved on since his last album, he and his girlfriend were nearly married, but the postponed the wedding and he

spent time in the studio creating new music and singing on his sisters' Trina and Tamera new project. ("Unlike them," he joked, "I made time to be on their record"). Finally, Powell said, he decided that it was time for him to "get back into the game."

On "Jesse," Powell has a few more up-tempo songs and he covers two of his favorite songs, El DeBarge's "I Like It" and Michael Jackson's "I Can't Help It."

"I love those songs," he said. "I love music and I don't just like listening to new songs or songs that I've written."

Powell also loves black women and that's why he wrote "Ebony," a sensitive ode to the sisters.

"I listen to a lot of letters that I get and sisters are waiting for a good song they could be proud of," he said.

Another thing that would be good for sisters is a tour. Powell said he'd love to. "I think it's time for a strong R&B male tour," he said.

Powell said he would want tour with other R&B heartthrobs like Usher, Joe and Avant.

Even though the industry measures artists' success by the number units they sell and where their album lands on the charts, Powell said those things don't matter much to him.

"When I get in the studio, I'm not thinking about chart position," he said. "That gets in the way of productivity."

As Powell prepares to do more promotional touring, he says he's not sure if he will be coming to Charlotte, but he plans to in the future.

"I love Charlotte," he said.

'Brothers' recall a different fight

By Patrick Burris
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Films like "Glory," the 54th Regiment of Massachusetts' story, depict black soldiers and segregation.

Others subsequently experienced it as well, including the 761st Tank Battalion, a World War II unit thought incapable of operating tanks

under fire. Their

courage, bravery, and skills helped America win World War II.

"Brothers In Arms," written by Kareem Abdul Jabbar, is a must read chronicling the lives of black soldiers discriminated against solely because of race. The story of three men - Leonard Smith, Abdul-Jabbar's mentor and family friend, Preston McNeil, and William McBurney - is riveting and realistic. Abdul Jabbar said in a phone conversation he felt the story needed to be told since blacks traditionally are "written out" of military narratives. For example, HBO's recent "Band of Brothers," the story of the 969th Artillery Battalion, who fought the Battle of Bastogne, featured no blacks. Leonard Smith's story compelled Abdul-Jabbar to review the 761st's archives. It is a brilliant and moving narrative engaging the reader in battle with imagery depicting bombings and buildings replaced by bomb craters. It tells the horrors of war, its cold, its depravity, insufficient food and clothing, in addition to its inhumanity battling Europe's cold in tanks providing little shelter. Nevertheless, it best succeeds illustrating racism's dehumanizing effects. The 761st's courage, skill, and sacrifices secured Gen. George S Patton's victory and Hitler's demise. Half of the Third Army dies at the Battle of the Bulge, necessitating the 761st's entry into the war. Here, we see blacks and whites integrated, despite prior exclusion and harassment. White superiors noticed tactical brilliance fully engaging them in battle. Here, whites abandon, if only temporarily, their prejudice and hate, while wrestling with a real problem, Nazi forces. Described in a series of flashbacks, the 761st are no longer America's forgotten World War II heroes, for military archives contained documentation producing this book honoring other regiments and troops performing maintenance, ambulance, and engineering duties.

What drives "Brothers In Arms" is its non-abrasive treatment of racism instead focusing on how blacks transcended it and persevered. History is liberating.

18-year-old riding high off success of hit song 'Topsy'

By Nekesa Mumbi-Moody
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — At age 18, J-Kwon is hardly old enough to be drinking or going to clubs — and that's what his huge debut hit, "Topsy," is all about.

But to hear the St. Louis-born rapper tell it, he's lived a life that would be too gritty for some adults to handle.

Put out on the streets by his mother when he was 13 because he wanted to rhyme instead of go to school, he spent some time homeless, living on the streets and selling drugs while trying to pursue his dream of being a famous rapper.

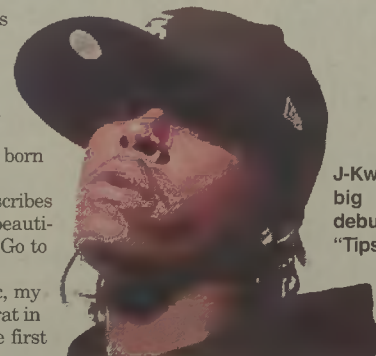
"I would sleep in the White Castle (restaurant) if I had to," J-Kwon told The Associated Press in an interview. "Same shoes, same pants for a month, but you know it's going to get better later."

Things certainly have gotten better — his debut album, "Hood Hop," debuted on this week's Billboard album charts at No. 7, with more than 125,000 copies sold. In addition, his infectious party song "Topsy" has reached No. 2 on the charts and still has steam.

"I think I'm pretty blessed," says J-Kwon, born Jerrell Jones.

It wasn't always that way. Though he describes his relationship with his mother now as "beautiful," a few years ago she gave him a choice: Go to school or leave home.

He chose to leave. "I was focused on music, my group, and crack," he says. "You could put a rat in a maze, and he might not go through it the first



J-Kwon hit it big with his debut single "Topsy."

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