

Grammys track evolution of musical culture

Awards keep up with times (almost)

By Dan Rice

Goldberg acting as host.

In a culture that seems to be award-happy, the ever-growing variety of statuettes, plaques, trophies and obelisks almost cheapen the tribute, to everyone but the honoree, of course. Fortunately, there are awards recognized by everyone as the pinnacle of accolades: Pulitzers for journalism; Oscars for motion picture achievements. For the music industry, nothing beats a Grammy. "The 34th Annual Grammy Awards" will be presented on CBS Tuesday, Feb. 25, live from Radio City Music Hall, with Whoopi

Besides bestowing acclaim upon artists, composers and engineers, the Grammy awards serve as a mirror for popular musical culture. Looking back at the awards' history of categorization, one can determine the relative importance and acceptance of disparate genres, as well as the musical climate of the time. While we may wax nostalgic to recall that the Best New Artist of 1964 was the Beatles, it is hard to believe that 1962's Best Rock 'n' Roll Recording was "Alley Cat" by Bent Fabric.

The evolution of Grammys categorization since those first ceremonies for the year 1958 has largely been the distillation of catch-all divisions into its specifics. With the exceptions of the years 1961 to 1964, Rock 'n' Roll was lumped into the Contemporary/Pop divisions until 1979, when it was granted four categories of its own. (Hard Rock/Metal was defined in 1988.) Folk yielded Polka in 1985 and Bluegrass in 1989. Other divisions, such as Rhythm & Blues in 1968, were expanded along with their audiences.

Some categories have been created to embrace new or newly popular genres (Jazz Fusion, 1970; Reggae, 1984; Now Age, 1986; Rap, 1988), but only one flash-in-the-pan category was ever deleted because the musical form lost its relevance: 1979's Best Disco Recording. (Its ironic title was "I Will Survive" by Gloria Gaynor.)

Michael Greene, president and CEO of the National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences, explains that category revisions are done by committee vote.

A prime example of change is in one of this year's new categories.

"World Music was a problem in the terms that those artists were being thrown into either Latin or Pop, and they really didn't have any chance of competing in those areas because they just weren't appropriate," Greene said. "As the record companies got more involved in World Music internationally, then it was the appropriate time to add the category."

Coming full circle, the once omnibus division of Pop will reach maturity this year with the addition of the Traditional Pop category, which will accommodate the likes of Harry Connick Jr. And the Grammys still are playing catch-up; consider the long-overdue Lifetime Achievement awards granted this year to the late guitar virtuoso Jimi Hendrix and bluesmaster Muddy Waters, and the belated entrance to the Hall of Fame of Patsy Cline's "Crazy" (1961) and Ravel's "Bolero" (1937). In an industry in which the product is timeless, sometimes recognition comes a little late.

BITS AND PIECES

Parting long, sweet sorrow for late-night TV king

It'll be a month of Tuesdays before we see this much of Johnny Carson again. During his last four weeks as host of *The Tonight Show*, Carson will be working behind the desk a nostalgic four nights a week in an effort to squeeze in all those last-time-with-Johnny guest appearances before he signs off for the last time on May 22.

There may not be a chicken in every pot in these recessionary times, but there's a VCR in 73.3 percent of all U.S. households, according to Nielsen Media Research, and that's a rise of three percentage points in just 14 months. On a city-by-city basis, Anchorage and Fairbanks, Alaska, lead the nation in VCR ownership, with percentages in the mid-80s. Wonder why?

Leapers' hearts will skip a beat to know that reruns of their favorite dramatic series, *Quantum Leap*, will join cable's USA network beginning this fall. (They're probably still rejoicing over star Scott Bakula's recent win in the Best Actor/Drama category at the Golden Globes.) Provided the NBC series, which ranks about midway on the Nielsen roster, is picked up for another season, that'll make two out-of-body experiences a week.



Johnny Carson

David Lynch and Mark Frost are back to the drawing board with their third network series, *On the Air*. Masterminds of the fascinatingly perverse *Twin Peaks* and *American Chronicles* in 1990 and '91, the team apparently intends to do for situation comedy what it has done for drama and documentary. Set in 1957 amid the mayhem of a live weekly TV variety show, *On the Air* will star Miguel Ferrer and David Lander and is expected to debut on ABC in the fall. Could be a little like watching Richard Benjamin's *My Favorite Year* in a funhouse.