

STREAMING REVOLUTION REACHES GRAMMYS

Streaming has rapidly transformed the music industry and if there is to be a single moment to confirm the format's arrival, it may be the Grammy Awards. The music industry's most prestigious awards, which take place Sunday in a star-studded gala in Los Angeles, this year for the first time considered releases that were only streamed online. The biggest beneficiary has been Chance the Rapper, whose "Coloring Book" came out in May only by streaming-first through Apple Music and then on other services including the most popular one, Spotify.

The 23-year-old, known for incorporating gospel elements into hip-hop, is in the running for seven Grammys including Best New Artist. The Chicago artist insists he doesn't plan ever to sell his songs. His music giveaways have become part of a social media strategy, with touring his primary source of revenue. "There's so many ways that music moves around now. I feel like trying to fit it into a for-sale album is kind of obsolete now," he told television host Jimmy Fallon on 'The Tonight Show.' "It gives me more space to create and put out stuff," he said.

Variety of strategies

Streaming has brought new optimism to executives of the music industry, which has witnessed its first healthy growth figures since the start of the internet era. In the United States, the world's biggest music market, subscriptions to music streaming services more than doubled in 2016 alone, according to analytical firm BuzzAngle Music. Larry Miller, director of the music business program at New York University's Steinhardt School, said the change by the Recording Academy, the tradition-bound institution that administers the Grammys, would likely lead to more streaming exclusives in the future.

"It's certainly not the first and probably not the last but it is perhaps one of the most important validating statements about the emergence, and maybe domination, of streaming as the way that many, if not most, people are finding and listening to music," he said. The three top-selling albums last year in the United States, which are all up for the prestigious Album of the Year Grammy, show the diversity of strategies on streaming. Beyonce, who leads the Grammys with

nine nominations, sprung her previously unannounced album "Lemonade" onto Tidal, the upstart streaming service led by her husband Jay Z.

Beyonce started selling "Lemonade" on iTunes a day later and within two weeks put it out on CD-but has not streamed it on Tidal's rivals. Toronto rapper Drake released "Views" through Apple for a two-week exclusive period-a triumph for the tech giant as it promotes its young streaming service-before sharing it with other platforms. However, English balladeer Adele released "25"-the top-selling album in recent years-only through CDs, vinyl and digital downloads. It started streaming seven months later. Miller said Adele's move made commercial sense for a singer of her broad popularity. "But that is not a release strategy that can be undertaken by more than a couple of artists who have enormous global, older and moneyed fan bases," he said.

Pitfalls of streaming

Pop superstar Taylor Swift, whose "1989" is the reigning Album of the Year, also resisted streaming initially and waged a campaign against Spotify. She is not alone in her criticism. While the number of artists to boycott streaming has dwindled, many complain that the payback is paltry except for mega-stars. Some artists have seen streaming's possibilities and experienced its pitfalls. Acclaimed hip-hop artist Frank Ocean fulfilled a label contract when he streamed a loosely defined visual work on Apple Music-and a day later, independently, released his long-awaited second studio album, "Blonde."

The audacious move reportedly outraged Lucian Grainge, the head of largest music label group Universal, who was said to ban future exclusives. Kanye West, who is up for eight Grammys, declared "The Life of Pablo" to be a new type of release-a "living album," which he fine-tuned even after its release on Tidal. But Tidal did not report its data, meaning "The Life of Pablo" only entered the charts once the celebrity rapper released it more widely. One major streaming critic-late pop icon Prince, whose music only appears on Tidal-looks to be headed to other services. Spotify has been running teasing Grammy advertisements in Prince's signature color purple.—AFP



This image released by Warner Bros. Pictures shows Batman, voiced by Will Arnett, in a scene from 'The LEGO Batman Movie'. — AP

Irreverence, affection click nicely in 'Lego Batman'

Turns out, Batman can take a joke. Hundreds, actually. It's not the simplest thing to take a character as embedded in our culture as Batman and make wickedly irreverent fun of him while simultaneously paying tribute to his storied past and keeping him likable for the next round. If a kids movie can do all that AND get in a perfectly placed clip from "Jerry Maguire" - and you know which one we're talking about - well, then, you had us at hello, "Lego Batman Movie."

The laughs at the Dark Knight's expense start early in director Chris McKay's manic romp of a movie - in the first seconds, actually, with a very husky Christian Bale-like voice opining on the importance of starting a superhero movie with a black screen. That gruff voice again belongs to Will Arnett, expanding on a supporting role in the popular 2014 "Lego Movie" (clearly this self-important superhero was not pleased with a mere supporting role). Arnett's Batman is not a happy guy, weighted down as he is by a limitless sense of self-grandeur. Since nobody can do what he does, he has to do everything alone.

And one, as the soundtrack tells us, is the loneliest number. Sure, the bat cave is amazing - but what's a superhero to do after a long day saving Gotham? He comes home to a few trivial pieces of mail - one of them a coupon for Bed, Bath and Beyond. His only companion is his computer voice (voiced by Siri, of course!) His loyal butler, Alfred (a silken-toned Ralph Fiennes) has left some Lobster Thermidor to heat up in the microwave. Alone in his cavernous abode, he munches on his crustaceans, plays a little solo guitar, and watches one of his favorite chick flicks, er, movies - yup, "Jerry Maguire."

Destructive Mischief

We all know that Jerry ends up with a family at the end, but will Batman ever have a family to, um, complete him? A photo of young Bruce Wayne and his ill-fated parents is a sad reminder of his childhood. Batman is being challenged on several fronts. First, old nemesis Joker (Zach Galifianakis, delightful), is up to his usual destructive mischief. But there's something else Joker craves, even more than flattening Gotham: recognition. He wants to be Batman's ONLY bad guy. Thing is, Batman's just not that into him. "I don't do 'ships" - meaning relationships - he says. "I like to fight around." Even worse: "Batman and Joker are not a thing." Joker is devastated. Then there's Barbara Gordon (Rosario Dawson), Gotham's new police commissioner. She's highly qualified - heck, she graduated from "Harvard for Police" - and has sensible ideas about fighting crime. After all, she points out, Gotham is still crime-ridden. Maybe relying on a masked vigilante savior isn't the best strategy; it's gotta be a team effort. Batman does NOT like this idea.

Meanwhile, two key people are trying to soften Batman up, in a personal sense. One is Alfred, attempting to bring out the emotions he knows

are there somewhere.

(A highlight for us old folks is when Alfred reviews the many iterations of Batman over the years, including a precious black-and-white clip of Adam West in the '60s.) And young orphan Dick Grayson (the future Robin, voiced by Michael Cera) manages to get Batman to adopt him - inadvertently. Gradually, our superhero warms to the idea of being a dad. To a point, anyway.

The essential struggle of the movie (besides the constant battling of returning criminals - too many to mention - and defusing of apocalypse-threatening bombs, of course) is Batman's struggle with his own loneliness, and his thorny path toward accepting the help - and companionship, and maybe even love - of others. Will he get there? Perhaps that's obvious. But the fun comes in seeing how it all clicks together. "The Lego Batman Movie," a Warner Bros release, is rated PG by the Motion Picture Association of America "for rude humor and some action." Running time: 104 minutes. Three stars out of four. — AP

Michael Jackson's mom bullied and afraid of nephew

Katherine Jackson, the 86-year-old mother of late pop star Michael Jackson, has won an order against a nephew she accuses of bullying her, getting information on her bank accounts and other emotional abuse. Trent Lamar Jackson, a 52-year-old nephew on husband Joe Jackson's side of the family, worked as a driver for the 86-year-old Jackson family matriarch. A lawyer for Katherine Jackson said in court documents filed in Los Angeles Superior Court this week that she was afraid of her nephew and fears he will use credit cards and other financial information about her for his personal gains.

"Mrs Jackson has to hide in her closet to speak to her kids so she can speak freely," the court papers said. "Trent bullies Mrs. Jackson into submission." "She has had enough, her health is fragile and she is tired of being frightened," the documents said.

Los Angeles Superior Court judge on Wednesday issued a temporary restraining order against Lamar Jackson and ordered him to move out of the guest house at Katherine Jackson's home in Calabasas, near Los Angeles, and stay at least 100 yards (meters) away from her. — Reuters



Singer Beyonce Knowles attends the Tidal X: 1015 benefit concert in New York. — AP photos



File photo shows Adele onstage at the Brit Awards 2016 at the O2 Arena in London.