

MUSIC & MOVIES

RIDING HIGH, BEYONCE FAILS TO BREAK GRAMMY CURSE



File photo shows singer Beyoncé poses with her Grammy trophies in the press room during the 59th Annual Grammy music Awards on February 12, 2017, in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

Is Beyoncé too edgy for the music industry? Or do the Grammy Awards suffer from an underlying racial bias? The superstar's failure to win top prizes is vexing her many admirers among them the night's big winner Adele. Beyoncé had led the Grammy nominations with nine for "Lemonade," her most daring album to date, which she crafted as a celebration of the resilience of African American women. But Beyoncé, whose tour was one of the industry's most lucrative in 2016, took only two awards Sunday, again losing in the leading categories of Album and Record of the Year.

Adele, whose blockbuster album "25" stuck to her trusted style of wrenching ballads, for the second time swept three top Grammys and she earned praise from Beyoncé's fans for saying that "Lemonade" deserved to win. "My view is, kind of, what the fuck does she have to do to win Album of the Year?" Adele told reporters at the Los Angeles gala. The English singer said that her black friends found "Lemonade" to be "empowering" and hailed Beyoncé's creativity for intertwining the album with a film. "Obviously the visual is very new and the Grammys are very traditional, but I just thought that this year would be the year that they would kind of go with the tide," Adele said.

Adele's triumph comes a year after Kendrick Lamar's "To Pimp a Butterfly," hailed as a hip-hop landmark and whose song "Alright" became an anthem of the Black Lives Matter movement, also lost to a best-seller, Taylor Swift's "1989." Frank Ocean, the introspective hip-hop trailblazer whose

debut album was edged out by in 2013 by English folk revivalists Mumford & Sons, chose not to even submit his follow-up, "Blonde," for Grammy consideration. After Sunday's awards, Ocean wrote an open letter asking the Grammy organizers to discuss the "cultural bias and general nerve damage" caused by the show.

Ocean, who defiantly released "Blonde" independently, said he initially wanted to take part in the Grammys for the tribute to late pop icon Prince. "But then I figured my best tribute to that man's legacy would be to continue to be myself out here and to be successful," he wrote. "Winning a TV award doesn't christen me successful. It took me some time to learn that."

By and for black women

The Grammys—determined through voting by some 13,000 music professionals in the Recording Academy—have hardly ignored Beyoncé. With 22 career Grammys, she is among the most recognized artists in history. Stevie Wonder is tied for the record of winning Album of the Year three times but the top prize has been especially elusive for black women. Only three Natalie Cole, Lauryn Hill and Whitney Houston have won it. On "Lemonade," the film blurs present and past with flashbacks to slavery in the Deep South, where African American women are shown as proudly self-sufficient. "Lemonade" draws a link to 21st century America, taking on police brutality as well as marital infidelity as the music spans influences and culminates in hip-hop.

"Lemonade" is really about how black women are treated in society historically, and in the contemporary moment, and it's about loving ourselves through all of that," said LaKisha Simmons, an assistant professor of history and women's studies at the University of Michigan. "So in some ways, it's kind of fitting that she was left standing there," she said. "Beyoncé will be fine," she said. "But I think for the rest of us, it stings because of that—it's almost like, 'Get back in your place.'"

Challenging industry

The Grammys marked Beyoncé's first public appearance since she revealed she was pregnant with twins. Her performance returned to the theme of matriarchy as she donned a crown and her female troupe glided beneath her on a sea of flowers. Yet Beyoncé is hard to pigeon-hole as an experimental artist. When she last was passed over for Album of the Year in 2014, it went to alternative rock icon Beck who is far less commercial.

But one constant is Beyoncé's innovations on selling albums. Her self-titled 2013 album was also a surprise accompanied by videos. "She really challenges the people in the Recording Academy and the music industry," said Kevin Allred, who has lectured on Beyoncé at Rutgers University. Beyoncé is "breaking the rules and succeeding, and is also a very powerful black woman who has achieved a level of power that few do." — AFP



A tourist poses for a photo in front of a statue of composer Johann Strauss by sculptor Edmund Hellmer at the Stadtpark in Vienna.



A statue of composer Johann Strauss by sculptor Edmund Hellmer is pictured at the Stadtpark in Vienna. — AFP photos



Visitors look at scores of the Blue Danube waltz by Johann Strauss and other exhibits during the opening of the exhibition "Donau, so blau" at the Wienbibliothek im Rathaus in Vienna.



'The Blue Danube' keeps waltzing at 150

Born out of defeat, initially not that popular and dedicated to a river that's more greenish-grey, the beginnings of "The Blue Danube" 150 years ago this week were inauspicious. But Johann Strauss Junior's rousing waltz, first performed on February 15, 1867, is now one of the world's most famous and catchiest pieces of classical music. It features in movies galore and is being performed and danced to still. "An der schoenen blauen Donau," as it is known in the original German, began life as a choral work commissioned by the Vienna Men's Choral Society.

The main aim was to cheer people up after Austria had lost an important and bloody battle against Prussia, at Koniggratz, the previous summer. The title was said to have been inspired by a poem but the words were penned by the society's own lyricist, a policeman who humorously bemoaned the state of the defeated country. It was not an immediate runaway success, although an exhibition marking the anniversary at Vienna City Hall seeks to refute the belief that it was a total flop.

One glowing contemporary account even calls it a

"schlager" (German for "hit") -- supposedly the first recorded use of the term. But the piece only really took off once an orchestral version was performed in Paris later in 1867, to a rapturous reception, and soon afterwards in London. In a tour of the United States in 1872, Strauss conducted a performance by a 2,000-piece orchestra and a 20,000-strong choir to 100,000 people. "How am I supposed to conduct this mess?" the composer reputedly said.

The rest is history

Today "The Blue Danube" evokes like no other waltz the elegance of Vienna's 19th-century heyday—which lives on in the city's ball season, currently in full swing. It also takes pride of place in the Vienna New Year's Concert every January 1, and is Austria's unofficial national anthem. When Austria declared its independence from Nazi Germany in April 1945, it was "The Blue Danube" that was performed since at the time the country had no official national anthem of its own.

The national airline Austrian Airlines plays the

music to passengers before takeoff and after landing. A survey in 2016 of customers found 72 percent in favor of the practice continuing. It is also a perennial favorite on the silver screen, most famously in Stanley Kubrick's "2001: A Space Odyssey" but also in "Cool Runnings" and "Titanic", to name but a few. More irreverently, a sketch by British comedy troupe Monty Python showed members of an orchestra exploding one by one as they played the piece in a field.

It has also featured in madcap animated series "SpongeBob SquarePants" while in "The Simpsons", Homer, in homage to Kubrick, floats around a spaceship eating potato chips. But apart from it simply being a nice tune, how to explain the popularity, particularly considering that Strauss wrote almost 500 other waltzes? "There is no definitive answer," Thomas Aigner, curator at the City Hall exhibition, told AFP. "It's a patriotic song, but not too much. Everyone can project their own memory linked to the river, to a visit to Vienna." — AFP

Debbie Harry crowned Style Icon at Elle Style Awards

Debbie Harry, frontwoman of rock band Blondie, was crowned a fashion icon at London's Elle Style Awards, and she thanked her punk influences for defining her style. "Coming from the punk point of view, which was very deconstructionist, destructive, and disrespectful, you have to find something in yourself that makes you feel a lot of different ways," she told Reuters at the red carpet event late Monday. "So you have to feel beautiful, you have to feel comfortable. I have to feel sexy."

Harry, who attended the event with Blondie co-founder Chris Stein, playfully wore a crown designed by Vivienne Westwood, while posing for photographers. Harry also wore a Westwood red suit with a black-and-white shirt and shoes. Blondie, an American punk band famous for hits like "Heart of Glass" and "Call Me" in the late 1970s and early 1980s, is expected to release their 11th studio album, "Pollinator", in May.

"It's about the ongoing circle of culture and how we all feed off of each other and I think at this particular time...it's very important to remember that. That we're all so deeply connected," Harry said about the new album. British actress and United Nations Women Global Goodwill Ambassador Emma Watson was given the Woman of the Year award in recognition of her acting career and work for gender equality. Other winners included French singer-songwriter Christine and the Queens, who won Album of the Year, and Christopher Bailey took home British Brand of the Year for Burberry. Erdem Moralioglu won British Designer of the Year. — Reuters

Singer Debbie Harry poses for photographers upon arrival at the Elle Style Awards in London on Monday. — AP

Music Review

Ryan Adams delivers fresh songs and heartaches

From the days when he exploded out of North Carolina with the alt-country band Whiskey town to his steady growth into one of America's great songwriters, Ryan Adams has always floated just below superstar status. If it's possible to be underrated through years of sustained excellence, he has pulled it off. But the excellence continues on "Prisoner," a fine collection of fresh songs and new takes on heartache that demonstrates as much mastery as anything Adams has done. It matches surprising melodies with brilliant arrangements and affecting, urgent lyrics, reminding listeners that this is a craftsman who turns just about everything he touches into gold.

Adams' fans will recognize the vibe. There are the fingerpicked electric guitar trills set against a backdrop of jangly acoustic power-

chord strumming. There's the same harmonica he's been carrying around at least since "Cold Roses," now more than a decade old. His familiar blend of muscle and vulnerability sparkles on "Do You Still Love Me?" And when Adams, on "Shiver and Shake," sings, "I reach out for your hand but I know it isn't there," it feels like he's practically bleeding.

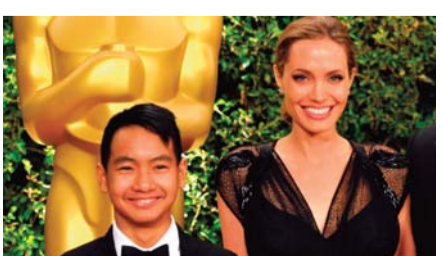
If there is a flaw here it lies in familiarity - Adams is hardly venturing beyond his comfort zone. But when you are this good that's not a significant problem. Better to sit back and appreciate a songwriter at the peak of his evocative power, with plenty to sing about and the command to bring it home with authority. — AP



Cambodian king to open Jolie's film on Khmer Rouge survivor

Cambodia's King Norodom Sihamoni will preside over the premiere Saturday of Angelina Jolie's film based on a memoir from a Khmer Rouge survivor. Queen Mother Norodom Monineath Sihanouk and senior government officials will also attend the showing of "First They Killed My Father" at the centuries-old Angkor Wat temple complex, a spokesman for the government agency that oversees the archaeological site said yesterday.

Jolie, who directed the Khmer-language film on location in 2015-16, is also scheduled to attend. Two free public screens are planned at



This file photo shows Maddox Jolie-Pitt, with Angelina Jolie on the red carpet at the 2013 Board of Governors of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' Governor Awards, in Los Angeles. — AP

the site near Siem Reap in northwestern Cambodia. The film is based on Loung Ung's account of her survival as a child under the 1975-79 communist Khmer Rouge regime, believed to be responsible for the deaths of 1.7 million Cambodians from starvation, disease and execution. Jolie has had an affinity for Cambodia since she began goodwill work for the U.N.'s refugee agency in 2001, and her eldest son, Maddox, was adopted from the country. She also has established a foundation to promote social development in rural Cambodia.

King Sihamoni's late father, Norodom Sihanouk, produced, wrote, directed and sometimes even acted in more than two dozen films made when he was in and out of power. Sihamoni has a deep interest in art and culture, focused on dance, both ballet and classical Cambodian dance. Long Kosal, the spokesman for Apsara Authority, the agency that oversees the temple complex, said he is pleased that the movie will have its premiere at Angkor Wat. "As a Khmer Rouge survivor, I am very proud that this movie is to be screened here, as the film will recall how the atrocities and harm caused to the Cambodian people under the Khmer Rouge regime," he said, explaining that it would be a good lesson to younger generations not to let such a brutal type of regime take power. — AP



British singer Tinie Tempah speaks on stage at the MTV headquarters, yesterday, following the announcement that the 2017 MTV European Music Awards are to be held in London. — AP

2017 MTV Europe Music Awards to be held in 'musical epicentre' London

The MTV Europe Music Awards will take place in London this year, more than 20 years since the ceremony was last held in the British capital, channel MTV said yesterday.

The awards show is hosted in a different European city each year. Last year's edition took place in Rotterdam.

"London is arguably the world's musical epicentre," David Lynn, chief executive of MTV's parent company Viacom International Media Networks, said in a statement. "The (awards ceremony) creates an incredible buzz wherever it lands it; that will be amplified tenfold in London." The awards show was last held in London in 1996. The 2017 edition will take place in November. — Reuters