



Jay-Z, with daughter Blue Ivy Carter, accepts the Dr. Dre Global Impact Award at the Grammys in Los Angeles on Feb. 4.
ROBERT HANASHIRO/USA TODAY

Exclusion of Black artists is Grammys' oldest tradition



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I've tuned into the Grammy Awards every year for as long as I can remember. As a fan of music and popular culture, I loved seeing all my favorite artists in one place. But as I became more cognizant of the politics behind these awards, I became increasingly disillusioned by them.

What happened last Sunday night is a pattern the Grammys continuously uphold. Artists of color are notoriously shut out of the top categories: album of the year, song of the year and record of the year.

Taylor Swift took home album of the year for her 10th studio album, "Midnights." She was nominated alongside SZA's "SOS," Lana Del Rey's "Did You Know That There's A Tunnel Under Ocean Blvd," Olivia Rodrigo's "GUTS" and more.

It's argued that Swift's record was one of the weakest in the category and one of the weaker albums in her own category (it's me, I'm the one arguing).

Nevertheless, Swift's win makes sense for the types of artists and music canon awarded in these main categories. A Black woman has not won album of the year since Lauryn Hill's "The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill" in 1999.

If they refuse to break barriers and award excellence in the mainstream, what hope does that give to the rest of the industry, the smaller artists who are often the true innovators? The ones who do win seem antithetical to what the Recording Academy postures itself to be.



Beyoncé accepts the award for best dance/electronic music album for "Renaissance" at the 2023 Grammys.
CHRIS PIZZELLO/INVISION/AP

From Beyoncé to Aretha Franklin, Black icons are sidelined

At last year's Grammy Awards show, Beyoncé's groundbreaking album "Renaissance," a love letter to Black, queer culture, lost album of the year to "Harry's House" by Harry Styles, an inoffensive, corporate pop album.

In fact, despite being the most-awarded artist in Grammy history, Beyoncé has never won album of the year. This reality is a common one for many Black artists who are pigeonholed to genre-specific categories and left out the main categories their white peers so freely exist in.

Aretha Franklin, who has 18 Grammys, was never even nominated in any main categories.

Jay-Z shed light on this issue, specifically in regards to his wife, Beyoncé, in his acceptance speech for the Dr. Dre Global Impact Award. "She has more Grammys than anyone and never won album of the year, so even by your own metrics that doesn't work," he said.

So why do we still care?

Every year we seem stuck in this fruitless tango. Nominations come out, there are some snubs but most take it for what it is and make wide-eyed predictions about who will win (mainly whom they want to win), the ceremony commences and it's long and boring and full of upsets and head-scratching wins.

The Recording Academy does what it always does, the think pieces roll out and then we profess the Grammys' irrelevance just to rinse and repeat the following year.

If we know the Grammys have a history of fraudulence, why do we still engage every year? It's not like the ceremony is particularly enjoyable. Most of the interesting awards and many of the historically Black genre awards are given out during the pre-show.

I think Jay-Z summed it up quite well: "We love y'all. We want y'all to get it right. At least get it close to right."

We love the idea of the Grammys. Music is such a permeating force in our culture. It finds its way into the crevices of our being, creating memories and eliciting emotions otherwise unearthed.

It's completely reasonable that we'd love to see those responsible awarded for their creative prowess. It's a shame the entity tasked with doing so swears allegiance to conformity and refuses to honor those most deserving.

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