MUSIC

SINEAD O'CONNOR, BURNING SPEAR JAM IN NY

Fifth-annual Jammys features diverse beats and pairings

By **ROBIN A. ROTHMAN**
APRIL 27, 2005

The fifth-annual Jammy Awards show, held Tuesday night at New York City's Madison Square Garden, opened with new blues and ended with old reggae. In between, the five-hour event held true to its exploratory spirit, covering bluegrass, classic rock, neo-folk, alt-country, avant garde, and trance fusion — with no single band representing any single genre.

The most surprising appearance of the night was by presenter Jeff Dowd, best known to the pop culture masses as the dude behind "The Dude" in Coen Brothers' 1998 movie *The Big Lebowski*. (Yes, he's a real guy!) But the music most certainly took center stage.

The evening began at 8 p.m. sharp with blues-rock powerhouse North Mississippi Allstars, who were soon joined by gospel goddess Mavis Staples and blues legend Buddy Guy.

The collaboration set up the Lifetime Achievement Award, which was presented to Guy by the evening's host Phil Lesh, bassist for the Dead. "Rock and Jazz have a common ancestor. It's called the blues," Lesh said, calling Guy "the master" and emphasizing his inevitable influence on all the musicians who would soon take the stage.

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Guy accepted the honor with gregarious grace on behalf of himself and those he "learned every damn thing from," T-Bone Walker, Jimmy Reed, Muddy Waters and others. He then went on to demonstrate what his lifetime has truly achieved, forming a temporary quartet with Lesh, singing/songwriting guitarist John Mayer and Roots drummer ?uestlove on standards like "(I'm Your) Hoochie Coochie Man" and "Stormy Monday."

Afterward, another kind of classic took the stage next: Huey Lewis. Grounded by Umphrey's McGee, the next big stars in the jamband scene, the Eighties pop star ripped through a fun-loving "Heart and Soul," proving himself to be more than a nostalgic punch line. The point was driven home when Staples and the recently unretired Sinead O'Connor joined in on a sing-along rendition of the Band's "The Weight."

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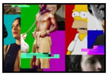

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The outfit pulled the song off perfectly, which is more than can be said for one-man band Keller Williams' stage time with quirky songstress Nellie McKay, whose attempt at Bob Dylan's "Rainy Day Women #12 and 35" didn't quite pan out. A marathon medley by Williams and ?uestlove, on the other hand, was on fire — from Stevie Wonder's "Superstition," the O'Jay's "For the Love of Money" (better known these days as the theme to *The Apprentice*), Led Zeppelin's "Whole Lotta Love" (or, as William's sang it, "Whole Lotta ?uestlove") and finally a full-fledged funk version of Cameo's "Word Up!"

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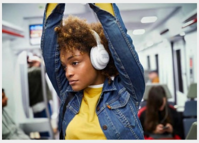

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Ryan Adams then took the stage and welcomed Phil Lesh to join his band. While the collaboration was far from the most elaborate the audience would witness, it was absolutely the most effective. After all, this was without question a Grateful Dead crowd. So singing "a song we didn't write," the Dead's epic jam "Wharf Rat," was a winning choice for Adams, who sang and played guitar up front with Lesh blending into the background perfectly.

Other performances included equally simple combinations: Yonder Mountain String Band with Bruce Hornsby and the Disco Biscuits with Travis Tritt. Complex concoctions found bassist Mike Gordon of Phish, drummer Joe Russo and keyboardist Marco Benevento (known as "the Duo") with oddball Primus bass man Les Claypool on stand-up electric and Gabby La La on sitar. Jazz-fusion trio Medeski Martin and Wood, Burning Spear, Sinead O'Connor and the horn section of Afrobeat band Antibalas took the vibe to pure reggae, and way late into the night. And though host Phil Lesh had long left the building by the end, all who remained — Claypool, ?uestlove, North Mississippi Allstars members and more — turned the reggae party into an instrumental jam of Jimi Hendrix's "Crosstown Traffic" to close the show.

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And throughout all that madness, several J-shaped Jammy awards in several jam-friendly categories managed to make their way to the winners, as voted on by *Relix* and Jambands.com readers. Phish, who disbanded last year after twenty-two years together, were two-time winners. Accepting for Tour of the Year Gordon quipped, “This award goes to prove my theory that we probably had a few more decades in us.”

The 2005 Jammys winers:

Tour of the Year: Phish
Live Album of the Year: Keller Williams, *Stage*
Studio Album of the Year: Gov’t Mule, *Deja Voodoo*
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Archival Live Album of the Year: Jerry Garcia Band, *After Midnight: Kean College 2/28/80*
Song of the Year: Umphrey’s McGee, “In the Kitchen”
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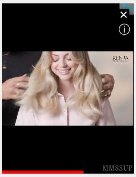

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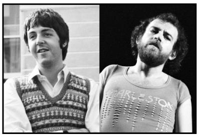

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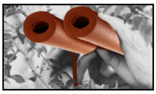

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