

Sweet sixty

As the 60th edition of the GRAMMYS returns to New York and Madison Square Garden, *Upward Curve* delves into the magic of the most prestigious date in the music industry

Where there is a nine-inch gold-plated Gramophone, there is a story. A story of how a prodigious talent first broke into a notoriously tough industry, and then how that artist delivered music worthy of an award.

Then there is another story all together; of what they wore on the night, who they kissed (and didn't kiss), what they said and what they sang. The truth is, the GRAMMYS and the Emmys do not hold the prestige of the Oscars, but they do provide a wonderfully rich history – and an opportunity to celebrate artistic brilliance.

It all began in 1959 after the Hollywood Walk of Fame project had highlighted the need for more

musicians to be recognised. Frank Sinatra failed to win a General Award (Album of the Year, Record of the Year, Song of the Year, Best New Artist) that night, but took home the first of his 11 awards when *Only the Lonely* landed Best Recording Package.

For the first three years, the awards were simultaneously hosted in New York City and Beverly Hills, until Chicago hosted a third leg in 1962 and Nashville hosted a fourth in 1965 – unified in the Hollywood Palladium in 1971.

An erratic relationship with popular culture followed, as the Recording Academy's voting system evolved and the list of categories underwent a facelift.

There were 84 awards in 2017 (down from 109 in 2011), exactly three times as many as at the inaugural ceremony.

The 2018 edition is returning to Madison Square Garden and New York, where it all began (in the Park Sheraton Hotel) 60 years ago, after the Staples Centre in Los Angeles provided a home for 15 years.

"Playing host to the music industry's marquee awards show is a unique creative, artistic and economic boon to the rich cultural fabric of our city," said Mayor of New York, Bill de Blasio.

Pictured: Maren Morris accepts the award for Best Country Solo Performance in 2017

"We welcome the GRAMMY Awards back to New York City with open arms and we look forward to continuing to partner with a music industry that supports access and empowerment in the arts."

It is the third time in history the show will broadcast live from the famous Madison Square Garden arena (11th time in New York City), following the 1997 and 2003 editions. The latter will be remembered for Coldplay's visceral rendition of *Politik* with the New York City Philharmonic Orchestra, just 18 months after 9/11.

Current affairs will forever be intertwined with the GRAMMYS; 2018 six-time nominee Kendrick Lamar marched on stage in chains in reference to Trayvon Martin's death in 2012. Michael Portnoy ripped off his shirt to reveal the words 'Soy Bomb' during Bob Dylan's 1998 performance of *Love Sick* in an act of protest-art and Eminem answered critics of his homophobic lyrics when he appeared alongside Elton John in 2001.

The GRAMMY stage has also been used to pay tribute to the death of relatives or famous artist; Lady Gaga's technologically intense homage to David Bowie, Christina Aguilera's rendition of James Brown's *It's a Man's World*, a bluesy farewell to B.B. King and Dave Grohl, Tony Kanal, Pete Thomas and Bruce Springsteen belting out *London Calling* in honour of the late Joe Strummer. The 2012 GRAMMYS took place just a day after the announcement of Whitney Houston's death and Jennifer Hudson's poignant rendition of *I Will Always Love You* drew almost 40 million viewers to long-term broadcaster CBS.

After ten years of telecasting, the largest GRAMMYS television audience to date tuned in for the 1984 awards when 51.67m people watched Michael Jackson win a record-breaking eight awards.

The late Jackson, whose outstanding 1988 performance of *Solitary Man*, won 13 in total, ➤



as well as the GRAMMY Legend Award and the GRAMMY Lifetime Achievement Award.

Carlos Santana equalled MJ's record of eight awards in one night in 2000, when he also scooped three awards at the inaugural Latin GRAMMY Awards.

While the GRAMMYS only recognise English-language music, this new iteration celebrated songs written in Spanish and Portuguese – the 2017 ceremony marked its tenth anniversary at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas.

The greats and the cultural influencers – The Beatles, Elvis, Simon & Garfunkel, Adele, Stevie Wonder, U2, Aretha Franklin, Pink, Prince Kanye West and Jay-Z to name a few – have all left an indelible mark on the awards; while unthinkable mashups, jaw-dropping duets and, of course, red-carpet head-turners have their place in history.

British rapper M.I.A. performed on the day she was due to give birth, with appropriately-placed polka dot fabric showing off

Right: The famous Jennifer Lopez Versace silk-chiffon dress in 2000 Bottom: Taylor Swift won four GRAMMYS at the 52nd annual awards in 2010

her baby bump, while Beyoncé performed five months into pregnancy with twins – albeit with quieter-than-usual choreography.

Lady Gaga arrived at the 2011 awards in an egg – before performing *Born This Way* – but arguably the most memorable red carpet moment goes to Jennifer Lopez who stunned the world with a revealing green Versace silk-chiffon dress in 2000.

The history of the awards is preserved in the GRAMMY Museum on LA's Olympic Boulevard (grammymuseum.org).

Cee Lo Green shocked fans last year when he arrived in head-to-toe metallic gold, and British comedian James Corden tried to ridicule recent high-profile blunders, but only managed to set the scene for more indiscretions.



Corden, who replaced long-time host LL Cool J at the 2017 GRAMMYS, will host again in Madison Square Garden for the 60th edition.

“While we’re best known for Music’s Biggest Night, we serve the music community year-round, and a large part of that community is alive and thriving in New York City and on the East Coast,” said Neil Portnow, who has stood as Recording Academy President/CEO since 2002.

“As a native New Yorker and lifelong supporter of the city’s vibrant arts scene, I couldn’t be more excited to return in 2018 and celebrate 60 years of honoring the best of the best in recorded sound in the world-class venue that is Madison Square Garden.”

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