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Write the songs and let the music play

Tom Gallagher | Jun. 19, 2009 NCR Today

Through unmerited good fortune, I sat at a front row table last evening (June 18th) at the 40th Annual Dinner and 2009 Induction and Awards Presentation of the Songwriters Hall of Fame [1] at the Times Square Marriott Marquis (New York City). It was an extraordinary evening.

Let me try to do justice to a recap of the evening:

At the pre-event, VIP Reception many of the inductees were photographed, including Berry Gordy, Richie Sambora and Jon Bon Jovi. American Idol was represented with Kara DioGuardi and rocker, Chris Daughtry. Then there was H-D-H: legenday MoTown songwriters, Brian Holand, Lamont Dozier, and Eddie Holland.

Perhaps a tip to Adam Lambert, but Ms. DioGuardi was wearing black finger nail polish.

When we took our dinner seats, James Taylor, his wife, Caroline, their son and his son's pretty, brunette girlfriend were sitting at the table next to mine. While things were getting settled, David Crosby and Graham Nash came over for a good chat with JT.

Clearly, we were in for a great evening.

Leading off the evening was legendary DJ Cousin Brucie. He laughed at the fact that he's so old he couldn't possibly read the TelePrompter midway back of the ballroom.

[In 1997 I was in the same room when my dear friend, Hub Schlafly, a University of Notre Dame grad, received an Emmy Award for inventing the TelepPrompter.]

By the way, this past week in 1956 John and Paul met at a church event and the world has never been the same.

The inductees were:

Jon Bon Jovi and Richie Sambora
Felix Cavaliere and Eddie Brigati
Roger Cook and Roger Greenaway
David Crosby, Stephen Stills and Graham Nash
Galt McDermot, James Rado and Gerome Ragni (posthumous)
Stephen Schwartz

The Special Awards winners:

Johnny Mercer Award
Holland, Lamont and Holland

Hal David Starlight Award
Jason Mraz

Howie Richmond Hitmaker Award
Sir Tom Jones

Abe Olman Publisher Award
Maxyne Lang

Towering Song
"Moon River"
Lyrics by Johnny Mercer, Music by Henry Mancini

Towering Performance
Andy Williams

Jason Mraz was beyond cool. During his "I'm Yours," he had the presence of a young Sinatra. He was very humble in accepting his award. He said songwriters attempt to "touch, move and inspire people." He certainly has.

Chris Daughtry performed the Bon Jovi-Sambora hit, "I'll be there for you." He then introduced the duo. Bon Jovi said that Daughtry performed the song better than he did. By the way, Daughtry's first album sold 4 million copies.

In their acceptance speeches, Sambora wore reading glasses (we're all getting older). Bon Jovi reflected on their early days in New Jersey just wanting to a rock star and realizing that everything came down to writing a compelling song, nothing else.

As they performed ..... Sambora began with a 2-neck giutar before switching out midway through the song.

Tall, lanky and lean, James Taylor came out and performed CSN songs"Love the one you're with" and "Teach your children."

Man, does JT make it look easy.

What was touching was watching his wife snap a cellphone picture of her husband on one of the two big screens bookending the stage. She is his biggest fan. JT got a standing ovation.

Stephen Stills thanked all the women who dumped him and a grade school English teacher.

Thank God CSN is going on tour again this year.

Cavaliere and Brigati performed "A Beautifu Morning" and got a standing ovation. Brigati got a round of applause for his comment at the end of his acceptance: "God bless everyone, excluding no one."

For the classic "Moon River," Paul Williams described Johnny Mercer as "too marvelous for words." The friendship between Mercer and Henry Mancini was so strong the Mercer referred to Mancini as "my Huckleberry friend."

Mancini's daughter, Monica, sang a warm, throaty Moon River and Andy Williams came onto the stage for his version of the iconic song. He brought the house down. His hair was thinner, white and he wore thick, black

rimmed glasses, but boy, did he deliver. Another standing ovation.

Cook and Greenaway sang "You've got your troubles," and the crowd sang along. It felt cathartic.

Paul Williams had a funny story about a time when he was a young songwriter staying up all night writing the next rock' roll anthem only to realize that he wrote "O Little Town of Bethlehem," and knew right away that "you don't mess with Bethlehem."

Now as president of ASCAP, which protects writers' rights to get paid for their work. He encouraged all to stop kids and others from illegal downloads, as most writers are not wealthy people.

Stephen Schwartz' accomplishments are too long to list. He is a phenom.

Sir Tom Jones was introduced by Kara DioGuardi. Turns out that Kara has collaborated with Sir Tom on a new album.

Sir Tom was his usual self. Gracious and capable. Believe it or not, he had a 26 year old grandson in attendance. He's been married for 52 years to Melinda.

He sang Green Green Grass of Home and It's Not Unusual, where he came in late on the song, asked the band's forgiveness and restarted the song. He laughed that he's been singing that song since 1964.

Another standing ovation.

An outstanding evening. A spirituallyl uplifting event. God, peace, joy, love and respect where invoked throughout the evening. Truly a catholic experience. A night to remember.

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