

Elton John and Dylan Get Rock Prizes

By JOHN ROCKWELL

Elton John, Bob Dylan, Linda Ronstadt, Stevie Wonder and Joni Mitchell emerged as the top winners of the first Rock Music Awards, televised live Saturday night on the CBS network from the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium in California.

The 90-minute special was a venture of Don Kirshner, a veteran music-business figure and the producer of one of the longest-established late-night rock television shows, "Rock Concert." Mr. Kirshner hopes his Rock Music Awards will become an annual event.

Most award shows—the Oscars, the Emmys and the Grammys—grow out of an established entertainment association. Mr. Kirshner had to devise his own method for picking categories and nominees and then selecting the winners. His solution was to come up with the categories himself, then to pick a "blue-ribbon panel" of six rock critics and six progressive-rock disk jockeys to choose nominees, and finally to mail out ballots to 1,800 critics and disk jockeys, mostly the latter.

The results seemed reasonable enough, as long as one accepted a few of Mr. Kirshner's premises. The categories included two for best rhythm and blues single and album, for instance. Of course black music has had a decisive influence on rock. But then again, rhythm and blues is now honored by the Grammy Awards—whose neglect of rock supposedly inspired the current show in the first place. And if one is broadening the admittedly amorphous area of rock to include rhythm and blues, then why not have a country-rock category and a folk-rock category and on into the galaxy of proliferating sub-genres?

Progressive-Rock Slant

Similarly, as long as Mr. Kirshner chose to slant things in the nominations and especially the balloting by relying on progressive-rock disk jockeys, then why no categories for the sort of overtly progressive rock that is increasingly popular on such stations?

And the awards might better not climax with the outstanding rock personality of the year, which seems needlessly vague. Album sales are crucial, and the top award should be for best album.

Still, given allowances for differing tastes, the winners betrayed a greater awareness of what rock music is about than is evident in the often absurd nominees and winners in the Grammy rock categories.

It might seem odd that



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Stevie Wonder

Best male vocalist



Camera Press

Joni Mitchell

Best female vocalist

Mr. John was considered the year's "outstanding personality" when he wasn't the best male vocalist or the producer of the best single or album. For this observer, Mr. Dylan, with his revitalized concert and recording career, seemed a better choice. But Mr. John is the most consistent, popular performer of present-day rock, so the award is hardly a scandal.

Questions of category arise in both the best male and best female vocalist awards. Mr. Wonder is unquestionably a giant of rhythm and blues and of pop in general. But surely all the other nominees — Mr. Dylan, Mr. John, Mick Jagger and Paul McCartney — are more certifiably rock 'n' rollers.

The Basic Problem

By the same token, Miss Mitchell is another wonderful artist, but her latest work has been in a folk-jazz idiom of her own invention. The other nominees here, however, include three black women — Aretha Franklin, Gloria Gaynor and Gladys Knight—who are once again

A List of the Winners Of Rock Music Prizes

Here is a list of winners of the 1975 Rock Music Awards:

Outstanding rock personality of the year: Elton John
 Best album: "Blood on the Tracks," Bob Dylan
 Best single record: "You're No Good," Linda Ronstadt
 Best male vocalist: Stevie Wonder
 Best female vocalist: Joni Mitchell
 Best group: Eagles
 Best new male vocalist: Dan Fogelberg
 Best new female vocalist: Phoebe Snow
 Best new group: Bad Company
 Best rhythm and blues single: "Lady Marmalade," Labelle
 Best rhythm and blues album: "That's the Way of the World," Earth, Wind and Fire
 Rock Music Hall of Fame: Chuck Berry
 Best rock movie or theatrical presentation: "Tommy"
 Best song composer: D. Henley, G. Frey, J. D. Souther, for "Best of Love," the Eagles
 Best producer: George Martin
 Public service award: Joan Baez



Associated Press

Elton John

Outstanding rock personality of the year

not really rockers, plus Miss Ronstadt and Carly Simon, who are a little more so. The basic problem is maybe that rock is largely a white male music, and people don't want to admit that.

For best group, it seemed peculiar to include Mr. John's band among the nominees, since he is such a strong solo artist and has disbanded his old group. And it seems to reflect the critics' and disk-jockey bias of the voting that Led Zeppelin, an enormous favorite among teen-agers, wasn't honored anywhere. But the Eagles were at least a reasonable choice, even if this observer might have preferred Steely Dan or, above all, the Rolling Stones.

Of the other top awards, the fields for both best single and best album contained a host of worthy nominees; the winners seemed justified, but

other records by the Rolling Stones, Labelle, Mr. John, Mr. Wonder, Bad Company, Mr. Dylan and Steely Dan might all have won without occasioning protest.

The show itself was cast in the mold of other awards shows, and as such had enough television sleaziness to raise the hackles of most self-respecting rockers. The opening—with glittering Las Vegas dancers cranking through typically tired jazz-dance routines to the slick stylings of a TV-studio orchestra doing a medley of rock hits — was enough to daunt the most intrepid.

Improvement Later

But later on things improved a bit, even with a clutch of presenters only vaguely associated with rock (Manhattan Transfer, Olivia Newton-John, Mike Douglas, Ella Fitzgerald, Brenda Vaccaro, Valerie Perrine, Raquel Welch) and with a supposed computer that coughed up the winners' names with all the dignity of a daytime game show.

The most redemptive moments, the moments that came closest to the spirit of rock, came with some of the performances and with the presumably ad libbed asides from some of the presenters. Live or on videotape, Kiki Dee, Labelle, the Rolling Stones and Chuck Berry provided statements that were honestly and honorably rock 'n' roll.

Equally refreshing were the asides of Mr. John and Diana Ross, who made generally pleasing impressions as the hosts, and of Keith Moon, who kept cropping up in various roles. Mr. John popped up after a performance segment with "back to the land of vulgarity." It was refreshing.

Better yet was Mr. Moon, the Who's madcap drummer, who presented awards with Miss Newton-John. He made undisguisedly lascivious remarks to his uneasy partner and otherwise vindicated the whole notion of live TV.

The unregenerate rockers left among us will probably have trouble accepting the whole notion of such an awards show. Rock was born of a rebellion, after all—in large part precisely against the tacky vulgarity that television epitomizes.

Yet Mr. Kirshner is surely correct when he argues that rock dominates the music business today and is by far the most influential and beloved kind of music that Americans listen to. But one can argue with his notion that rock is blending into the American mainstream (true, but where and how much?), and that this means he must subvert its essence in his awards show with television production values.