

The 66th annual Grammy Awards: Notable protests against Israeli-US genocide in an ocean of self-satisfaction

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The 66th annual Grammy Awards, held at the Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles Sunday night, were largely a spectacle of self-congratulation and jockeying for position among various performers, “artists” and celebrities seeking to put their particular brand name on display. Fortunately, some different and healthier tendencies also made themselves felt at the ceremony.

The event took place under conditions of global crisis unprecedented in many decades. The Netanyahu regime, in alliance with the Biden administration and other Western governments, is carrying out genocide in the Middle East, while the US military continues to expand its murderous activities around the globe. The American ruling elite is doing everything in its power to provoke a conflict with Iran, on top of its proxy war with Russia and its continued determination to confront China.

Closer to home, a presidential election campaign has begun unlike any since the period of the US Civil War, with fascist Republican candidate Donald Trump preparing to go head-to-head with Democrat “Genocide Joe” Biden, the current White House occupant. The two are among the most hated presidential candidates in American history.

To her everlasting credit, Scottish singer-songwriter Annie Lennox (formerly of the Eurythmics) punctuated a captivating “In Memoriam” performance of the late singer Sinéad O’Connor’s ballad “Nothing Compares to You” with a call for an end to the US-backed Israeli genocide of Gaza. “Artists for ceasefire! Peace in the world!” she declared, with raised fist, as her performance ended. The gesture marked the first open protest by an artist at an awards show against one of the most horrific crimes of the 21st century.

Other artists made less visible protests. Indie rock group boygenius, winner of the award for Best Rock Album, wore “Artists Call for Ceasefire Now” pins to the event. Bassist Esperanza Spalding wore a keffiyeh to the event, a symbol of solidarity with the Palestinian cause.

These are relatively modest actions, but they come in the face of a venomous campaign in the entertainment industry against opposition to the Israeli genocide, aimed at stamping out resistance to the Netanyahu-Biden mass murder. A number of artists have taken initial steps. Now the protests must become larger and bolder.

Unfortunately, many other Grammy attendees and performers said nothing when given the chance, despite having also signed the “Artists4Ceasefire” petition. The danger of sparks of genuine protest were no doubt enough to alarm music business and government officials. Notably, President Joe Biden issued a statement from the White House the day of the Grammys confirming he would not attend.

Aside from the protests, a miasma of self-congratulation and jockeying for industry clout and celebrity was virtually all that could be seen.

Writing about the 2023 Grammy Awards, the WSWS referred to the self-promoting and constant references to one’s racial or gender identity as justification for winning an award as “a thinly disguised form of upper-middle class tribal warfare.”

The Recording Academy, perhaps concerned about the degree of shallowness on display, made gestures to include a “diversity” of contenders throughout the evening.

According to the *New York Times*, “Women dominate

the major Grammy nominations so thoroughly this year that in the ceremony's three most prestigious categories—album, record and song of the year—the winners are, mathematically, almost certain to be female.”

This, the *Times* explains, is good “optics” for the Grammys. “Not so long ago, women were far less visible on the show, which became a major talking point for critics of the Recording Academy, the organization behind the Grammys.” This is a reference to the reactionary #MeToo witch-hunt, which the *Times* among others helped to promote and which has by now had a major impact on the nomination process.

The celebration of banality reached its crescendo as familiar pop stars won each of the awards in the three most prestigious categories.

Among these, billionaire recording celebrity Taylor Swift won Album of the Year for *Midnights*, a forgettable and hyper-produced pop album. It was her 14th Grammy and fourth win of the coveted Album of the Year. Swift's fame appears more driven by itself and an accompanying relentless media campaign than by any particular musical contribution. She surpassed notable artists such as Stevie Wonder (three-time winner) and Frank Sinatra (also three).

The more talented Billie Eilish won Song of the Year for “What Was I Made For?” The song was her contribution to the *Barbie* movie soundtrack, a film which the WSWS described as a “shallow, moralizing feminist fable.” Eilish's smoky vocal presence and powerful piano backing cannot make up for the song's ridiculous theme. Following this, Miley Cyrus's vapid *Flowers* won Record of the Year.

Elsewhere, the “thinly disguised tribal warfare” and sanctimonious self-pity broke out in the open, as another entertainment billionaire, Shawn “Jay-Z” Carter (net worth: \$2.5 billion) admonished the Recording Academy to “get it right” in his acceptance speech for never having awarded his wife, entertainer-celebrity Beyoncé Knowles-Carter, the coveted Album of the Year award. Beyoncé (\$800 million) has received 32 Grammys, the most by any recording artist.

Media commentaries were quick to seize on this to continue grinding away at their racist fixations. This and the arrest of rapper Killer Mike for minor battery outside the venue (after winning a triplet of awards for his album *Michael*) was seized on by the *Times*'s Jon

Caramanica (“The Grammys Aim for a Big Tent, but Not Everyone Feels at Home”) to tell everyone “some of the white artists who won big on Sunday ... seemed implausibly comfortable,” while black artists did not.

While the immense levels of social inequality as well as the relentless warmongering of the political establishment continue to intensify, the building opposition of the population is making itself felt among the more socially aware layers. Undoubtedly, there will be far more substantial expressions of opposition to come, including among the artists.



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