

MTV Awards Show Rocks

by J.D. Considine
The Baltimore Sun

Most acts on TV live in mortal fear of being "too hip for the room," that is, working off cultural references most squares wouldn't get.

That's not an issue on MTV. Never mind that much of what gets air-time on MTV sails right over the heads of average Americans (especially if they happen to be over the age of 25); within its own rarefied frame of reference, it's almost impossible to be too hip for MTV.

But Lord knows, the Video Music Awards broadcast Thursday night tried.

With comedian Chris Rock as host and featuring performances by Nine Inch Nails, Lauryn Hill, the Backstreet Boys and Kid Rock, the 1999 MTV Video Music Awards was everything that award shows usually aren't - entertaining, unpredictable, provocative and frequently unquotable in a family newspaper.

What other show would refer to Latin pop idol Ricky Martin as "the Puerto Rican Al B. Sure?" Where else would you hear the Artist Formerly Known As Prince introduced with the phrase, "He's got more records than the census bureau?"



Rapper Dr. Dre performed with Eminem and special guest Snoop Doggy Dogg. CPE PHOTO

Would any other emcee even dream of referring to "N Sync as "The Spice Boys?"

Of course not. But that's because other award shows have normal hosts, while the VMAs had Chris Rock. Totally unflappable and completely irreverent, Rock rocked the Video Music Awards, upstaging many of the musical acts and

most of the winners. OK, so many of his jokes were too racy to be repeated here. So what? It's not like many of the winners had anything quotable to say. Ricky Martin, who won for Best Dance Video and Best Pop Video, dutifully thanked all the people who helped him up the ladder to fame.

Madonna, who won for Best Video from a Film, thanked all the people who helped her up the ladder to that particular hit. Will Smith, who won for Best Male Video, thanked his wife, Jada Pinkett. (Yawn!)

Fortunately, the MTV VMAs were less about "Who won?" than "Who did what onstage?" And the onstage doings were plenty wacky. For example, there was Norman "Fatboy Slim" Cook, who turned "Praise You" into a glitteringly amateurish send-up of MTV production numbers. Between Cook's deadpan fakery at the piano and his dancers' Solid Gold (or should we say Solid Brass?) choreography, the number proved a welcome relief from the typical professionally polished mindlessness.

Of course, it helped that the Fatboy followed TLC, whose obviously lip-synced version of "No Scrubs" tried to substitute choreographed ambition for genuine inspiration. Theirs was the kind of performance that almost invited parody.

Fortunately, most of the music offered by the VMAs was all-the-way-live. Lauryn Hill and her crack backing band did a medley of "Lost Ones" and "Everything Is Everything" that did much to explain why



WWF wrestler Stone Cold Steve Austin takes a break from the ring for the MTV Video Music Awards. CPE PHOTO

she won for both Best Female Video and Best R&B Video. The Backstreet Boys merged "I Want It That Way" and "Larger Than Life" into a performance so tough that, afterward, Chris Rock joked, "They're going to change their name to 'CWA' - Crackers With Attitude." But it was Kid Rock (no relation to the host) who most memorably rocked the joint. Not only did he bring out veteran rappers Run-DM.C. to join his band, Twisted Brown Trucker, in a medley of

"King of Rock" and "Rock Box," but he topped off a supercharged version of his own "Bawittaba" with an all-star run through "Walk This Way," featuring Aerosmith's Steven Tyler and Joe Perry. It was like a five-minute history of everything that has made MTV matter to millions of kids, and a five-minute lesson in how live music can be made vital on TV. Here's hoping the rest of the industry was taking notes.

'Practice,' 'McBeal' take top Emmy Honors

by Brian Lowry
Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES - The love affair between the television industry and David E. Kelley swelled to historic proportions Sunday, as two legal programs created by the producer, "The Practice" and "Ally McBeal," were recognized as best dramatic and comedy series, respectively, at the 51st annual Nighttime Emmy Awards.

It's a feat unmatched by any television producer, all the more remarkable considering that Kelley wrote nearly every episode of both programs, which is virtually unheard of in the television business.

In addition to being the first one-hour program to successfully vie in the comedy series balloting, "Ally McBeal" ends "Frasier's" unprecedented five-year streak as best comedy - a total unequalled by any series, comedy or drama. Starring Calista Flockhart as a daffy lawyer, the show also becomes the first Fox series to win in either of those prestigious categories.

Kelley, who was also honored with best-drama Emmys while producing "L.A. Law," and in 1993 and 1994 for his moderately rated drama

"Picket Fences," also left the Shrine Auditorium with a second consecutive Emmy for his drama about Boston defense attorneys, "The Practice." That rubbed out any chance of the year's most nominated program, Home Box Office's mob drama "The Sopranos," becoming the first cable series to be named best comedy or drama.

"This is a bit of a shock," Kelley said in accepting for "The Practice," looking more dazed moments later when he returned on behalf of "Ally McBeal."

In terms of actors, an array of past winners paraded to the stage. Helen Hunt closed out her run on NBC's "Mad About You" with her fourth straight Emmy as star of that show, an unprecedented feat for any actress in a comedy. "NYPD Blue's" Dennis Franz was also honored with his fourth Emmy in six years as Detective Andy Sipowicz, while John Lithgow went home with his third trophy for the NBC sitcom "3rd Rock From the Sun."

Only two performers, Candice Bergen and Don Knotts, in "Murphy Brown" and "The Andy Griffith Show," have won more awards than Franz and Hunt for playing the same

character in the same series, each receiving five for their respective shows.

Presenting an award together earlier in the evening, co-star Paul Reiser joked with Hunt about her previous Emmys. Reiser went home empty-handed again, never winning despite numerous nominations.

"The Sopranos" settled for a lead actress Emmy for first-time nominee Edie Falco and, having garnered four of the five drama writing nominations, not surprisingly took that award as well.

Though "Sopranos" generated an enormous amount of critical praise, few programs in recent years have received the Emmy in their first season. Fellow nominees "ER," "The Practice" and "NYPD Blue" all were chosen as best drama in their second seasons, while this year's final nominee, "Law & Order," waited until its sixth year.

Winners are chosen by peer group members from the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences, the organization that presents the Emmys.

"The Sopranos" won four awards in all, including Emmys casting and editing presented during an event two weeks ago, primarily recognizing

Emmy winners in technical areas. Including results from that ceremony, HBO amassed 23 awards, more than any other network. The pay channel has led in total wins once before, in 1993. Cable programs didn't become eligible for Emmy consideration until 1987.

NBC, the most honored network the past four years, compiled 17 awards for second place, followed by ABC, with 13, and 11 for CBS.

Fox, which televised this year's Emmy ceremony, won seven awards in all but only avoided being shut out in the 27 categories handed out Sunday when "Ally McBeal" pulled off its night-capping coup.

In addition, "The Practice's" best drama prize two of its supporting players, Holland Taylor and Michael Badalucco, were both winners in their first nomination. Taylor looked genuinely stunned, thanking Kelley for creating a female character "who puts a flag on the moon for women over 40." Actresses have long complained about a dearth of roles for more mature performers.

As with the leading comedy roles, supporting awards went to familiar faces. Emmy co-host David Hyde

Pierce won his third Emmy for "Frasier," while Kristen Johnston walked away with her second in the last three years as one of the zany aliens on "3rd Rock From the Sun."

"Frasier" also snagged the comedy writing Emmy, while the critically acclaimed first-year ABC series "Sports Night" nabbed directing honors.

HBO continued its domination of the made-for-TV movie voting thanks to "A Lesson Before Dying." The pay service has now won an astounding seven straight Emmys in that field, adding to its tally with a best actor award going to Stanley Tucci for his portrayal of columnist Walter Winchell in "Winchell."

Still, HBO faces stiffer competition in the arena of prestige movies from other cable networks, underscored by A&E sailing away with best miniseries for its new version of "Horatio Hornblower" and Helen Mirren earning the second Emmy of her career for the Showtime movie "The Passion of Ayn Rand."

Despite lagging behind "The Tonight Show With Jay Leno" in the ratings, CBS' "Late Show With David Letterman" emerged as outstanding

variety, music or comedy series for the second year in a row. HBO's "The Chris Rock Show" took the prize for best writing in that category.

In a year where the major networks have found themselves under siege for a shortage of minorities in new programs, there were a few references to that issue during the telecast. Paris Barclay, a black who claimed his second Emmy in a row for directing "NYPD Blue," lauded series co-creator Steven Bochco by saying, "His commitment to diversity means 'Get the best people, (and) look a little harder.'"

John Leguizamo, who received an Emmy for his HBO special "Freak," also pointed out in his acceptance speech that the Latino voice is under-represented in the media.

Anne Bancroft was also chosen as best supporting actress in a movie for CBS' "Deep in My Heart," meaning both she and her husband, Mel Brooks, received Emmys this year - Brooks' honor coming two weeks ago for his guest role on "Mad About You." Another veteran actor, Peter O'Toole, was recognized with a first Emmy for his supporting part in CBS' miniseries "Joan of Arc."

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