

# Grammy Awards hit a sour note

review by Greg Smith  
contributing writer

Technical difficulties. Lack of plan or "rehearsed" feeling. Bad jokes. Mediocre performances.

Am I talking about an episode of the Late Late Show with Craig Kilborn? No, not exactly. That was my quick summary of the 46th Annual Grammy Awards, which aired this past Sunday night on CBS.

Every year the Grammys honor some of the best (and some of the worst, depending on whose side you're on) that the music business has to offer. The Grammys normally are not the most exciting of the flux of early-year award shows, but this year they were even worse than usual.

CBS was already intensely cautious about the show because of certain exposed body parts of certain Super Bowl performers from the previous Sunday. Because of Justin and Janet's "wardrobe malfunction" at halftime of the big game, CBS aired the Grammys on a 5-minute tape delay to guard against any new creative ideas by performers. Sure, the delay nixed any nudity plans, but it couldn't help the lack of talent and ideas that the telecast presented.

Where to start, where to start? How about the beginning. To open the show, Beyonce Knowles teamed up with Prince for an interesting medley of songs. While the performance somehow seemed to work for me, it was a forerunner to the oddball

combinations that were used throughout the night, crossing that fine line between strangely intriguing and just strange. Either way, Beyonce looked great in her pink dress and popped back on stage after the performance to claim her first of five Grammys of the night.

Beyonce wasn't the only star with a high pitched voice who was wearing pink at the awards. But enough about Justin Timberlake! Seriously, Timberlake won for Best Male Pop Vocal Performance, a category which also saw the likes of the late George Harrison and Warren Zevon as nominees. These are moments when you realize the Grammys are a business-driven, popularity contest instead of a judgment of music. While Timberlake apologized for the Super Bowl fiasco in his acceptance, he should've been apologizing for his utter lack of talent and given thanks to be nominated with two great musicians like Zevon and Harrison. Moving on, the pain continues as I quickly realize that there's no host for the evening, just different performers and celebs sent onstage to read horribly scripted jokes from the teleprompter. As I noted before, the combinations of award presenters were just plain weird. The list started with Steven Tyler, Joe Perry and B.B. King (handing out a rap award, no less) included Tony Bennett and Missy Elliot, and ended with my absolute personal favorite, Snoop Dogg and Jason Alexander. Alexander looked physically scared. Oh yes, folks, it doesn't get much better than that.

I think this is a great point to talk about some of the performances that went on during the telecast. Were they all bad? No, actually, I was pleasantly surprised by a number of the songs. But it's unquestionably more fun to point out the horrible moments! Christina Aguilera's awful performance solidifies her "fastest fall from pop diva to tramp" status.

Timberlake's performance was quite brutal, however. I used to complain about his lack of integrity because he never played instruments. After hearing the painful chords bark out of his keyboard, I'll rescind my prior argument and hope he never plays an instrument again. And finally, this just in: Jack White can't sing. The guy lays down some cool riffs on the guitar, but whatever record exec thought, "Hey, this kid's got a great voice," ought to be locked away somewhere.

As for the good numbers, Prince and Beyonce were cool, and OutKast was Outstanding on two occasions (once with Earth, Wind, and Fire and once performing "Heya"). Two tributes in the show were the two high points, one featuring Sting. Dave Matthews, Vince Gill and Pharrell Williams playing the Beatles hit "I Saw Her Standing There." The second was an all-star tribute to funk, which came closer than anything else to blowing the roof off of the place.

With intros given by the unassailably cool Samuel L. Jackson and featuring the likes of Earth, Wind, and Fire, Robert Randolph and the Family Band and George

Clinton's Parliament Funkadelic, the funk tribute rocked the show and made up for the majority of lackluster performances. The energy that the funk-masters brought to the table was unparalleled, especially the intensity displayed by up-and-coming pedal steel player Robert Randolph.

The positive pretty much ends there as I must talk about some technical glitches that occurred throughout the evening. Some poor mic work left Sting sounding like he was singing in a cave during his number with Sean Paul (another brilliant combination).

After a couple of odd occasions where CBS technicians' voices could be heard on the telecast, the night was going very poorly, technically speaking. But the low point of the poor audio work was when Celine Dion's mic wouldn't work at all. When a technician brought her a new one, she let us all know that her earpiece monitor didn't work while looking extremely pissed off. Then she put on a fake smile and went to town. It was unintentional comedy at its finest.

If you were reading this article looking for some actual information, here it is, in the form of a recap of awards received. Beyonce led the way with five Grammys out of her six nominations. Luther Vandross garnered four awards, followed by unique rappers OutKast and great country artist Alison Kraus with three. Some notables winning two Grammys

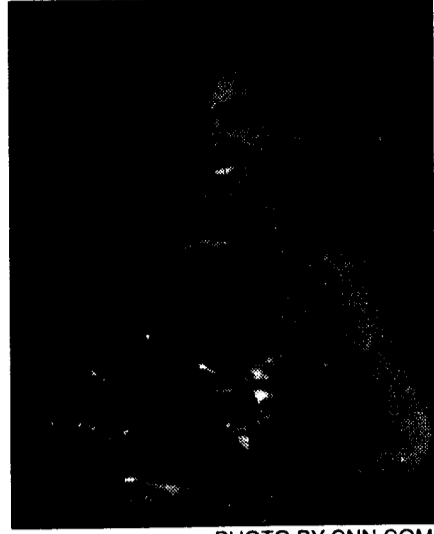


PHOTO BY CNN.COM

Beyonce holds her winnings as she brings light to the Grammys this past Sunday.

were Eminem, Jay-Z and the late June Carter Cash and Warren Zevon. OutKast's "Speakerboxxx/The Love Below" took home Album of the Year honors and in a complete shocker, Coldplay won Record of the Year for "Clocks" (I thought for sure that Timberlake or Beyonce would win). Evanescence won for Best New Artist.

So the Grammys have come and gone once again, filled with lackluster performances and oddcouple galore. I wouldn't blame you if you didn't even realize the award show took place. The show provided me with some laughs (unintentional, mind you) and one or two nice musical moments, but thank God I don't have to witness it again until next year.

# Internet film 'Fight Circle' fails to impress

review by Daniel J. Stasiewski  
managing editor

Watching "Fight Circle," a feature length, medieval martial arts film distributed solely on the Internet, I had this odd sensation that I was watching something familiar. Not story-wise, rather, the film has a production value, low-budget, but admirably high quality, that mimicked something I'd encounter before, but rarely in the cinema. When I sat down in front of my television and flipped on a late night episode of the syndicated sci-fi show "Stargate: SG-1," I realized why "Fight Circle" was so easily consumable.

The film, with mysticism established in repetitive imagery and an emphasis on the action over story, feels like a syndicated action series in the vein of "Hercules: The Legendary Journeys." And it deserves all the accolades that a great

syndie series should get. Regrettably, the action film would work better as a series than as a feature, making the story more exhausting than it should be.

After the ancient fight circle is taken over by thugs and murderers, a jaded master fighter, Undan (Runyun Woods), abandons combat and travels the country using his skills to protect and defend the innocent and abused. In travel, Undan and his loyal page Mullag (Thomas Shanks) save two cousins from the filth that would take advantage of those unable to put up a defense. The female cousin, Paky (Anna Henke), is impressed by Undan's show of force and follows the master and his page, urging them to train her to do battle in the fight circle.

But Undan has long rejected the idea of training for the circle. The stubborn girl, who must fight for the cause that took her father, doesn't want to go

through the rigorous metal training and instead leaves Undan to train with Trebor (Sam Hargrave), a young fighter seeking to bring the fight circle back to its glory. Eventually, Paky's training with both Trebor and Undan sets her up to fight, but she still must face those who don't want a woman in the male-dominated fighting tradition.

There is also a dark warrior in "Fight Circle" named Kas, who serves as the example of what is wrong with the circle. Unfortunately, his slow characterization doesn't make him feel like the villain he should be. Like Kas, Undan's intellectual warrior builds slowly and Paky doesn't seem to have much of an arc until the final moments of the film. All the characters are built well enough to make me care about them in the future, but the film ends leaving any view feeling merely teased.

"Fight Circle" is treated more as a

character-building story than an action film, but the action is what dominates. Like "Star Wars," this film creates characters that are interesting, but without an exploding Death Star, "Fight Circle" doesn't have a climax that is worth sitting through an hour and a half of tedious characterization.

I did enjoy the story, but I just don't feel fulfilled. "Fight Circle" would be a great pilot episode for a long-running series (which I do hope writer/director Donald Whittier does decide to create), but the amazingly advanced fight choreography is the only part of this film that is self-sustaining. The "Fight Circle" Web site would have you believe Paky's Ann Coulter feminism is the heart of the story, but the spontaneous combat scenes always overshadow Paky's story.

The film's big accomplishment is still its method of distribution. Though the individually downloadable chapters do

feel make the film feel like it should have commercial breaks, the clarity of the picture, both visually and aurally, is spectacular. I don't know how much it cost to make and distribute "Fight Circle," but I hope its budget is low enough to allow for a sequel. This is a film that deserves a fan following, one that will know the ins and outs of the mystical fight circle and care about where the characters are headed. If I had such a promise going into the film, I would have probably treated it less harshly. Unfortunately, "Fight Circle" is sold as a feature, and sweet tasting crumbs are still crumbs. Right now, I want the whole cake.

"Fight Circle," directed by Donald Whittier and starring Runyun Woods and Anna Henke is currently available for download at [www.FightCircle.com](http://www.FightCircle.com). The cost is \$7 for a 25-ticket pass.

## Arts & Entertainment Highlights

### Top 40 Singles

1. "Hey Ya!" Outkast
2. "The Way You Move" Outkast featuring Sleepy Brown
3. "Someday" Nickelback
4. "It's My Life" No Doubt
5. "Yeah!" Usher featuring Lil Jon & Ludacris
6. "Here Without You" 3 Doors Down
7. "With You" Jessica Simpson
8. "Toxic" Britney Spears
9. "Slow Jamz" Twista featuring Keyne West and Jamie Foxx
10. "My Immortal" Evanescence

\*\*According to Billboard.com\*\*

### Album Releases on Feb. 17

- The Hives- "Veni, Vidi, Vicious"
- Willie Nelson- "Singin' With Willie"
- Wyclef Jean- "Masquerade"

### New Movie Releases

- "50 First Dates"-Adam Sandler, Drew Barrymore

### DVD Releases on Feb. 13

- "Runaway Jury"
- "Roswell: First Season"
- "Blowup"
- "Death in Venice"
- "The Damned"

## The Jarvis File

### 14 minutes down, 1 to go:

If you couldn't get enough of the rich, ditzy duo, Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie, no worries. They're back! The two girls are taking their popular reality show "The Simple Life" on the road for their second season.

Taping hasn't begun yet because the two girls are looking for another family home to invade. If you think you're up for the challenge, applications are still being accepted.

After all, who wouldn't want to spend 30-odd days with these two?

### Late night with MTV:

MTV has done it again. They've decided that a few of their videos are a little too racy and edgy for daytime viewers. The top guys at the music channel have decided to move such videos as, "Toxic" by Britney Spears and "Megalomaniac" by Incubus. MTV has moved the videos to a later time slot (10p.m. to 6a.m.) since the kiddies are in bed at 10 and can't witness the scandalous videos. Not sure what the problem is since MTV doesn't seem to air music videos anyhow during the day.

### And it has begun:

The American Idol judges have scoured the country and have found their star singers. Tuesday night, Americans had their first chance of many to dial in and vote for their favorite singer. Wednesday night, the horrific 30-minute show filled with 29 minutes of commercials aired. Announced was the first two to make it to the top 12. Welcome America, Fantasia Barrino and Diana DeGarmo. Simon Cowell actually likes these two!



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