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If Sway ran the Junos

By Nick Aveling

Between Anne Murray and the Barenaked Ladies, Bryan Adams and Simple Plan, the Junos have never squeezed in much attention to black music. At last year's ceremony, only 25 of 200 nominations — and a paltry total of six awards — went to black artists. Imagine our complete and utter lack of surprise, then, when this year's nominees were announced in early February and (cue the Celtic fiddles) black artists had only been nominated 22 times.

Fed up with waiting for pigs to fly, we got to thinking: what if the Junos weren't aimed at middle-aged Newfoundlanders and their teenie-bop kids? What if Sway were calling the shots? Ladies and gentleman, here are the nominees for Sway's 2007 Junos.

International Album of the Year

Traditionally a euphemism for "American Artist Who Outsold the Bejesus out of Anyone from Canada," the International Album of the Year award has, at least since hip-hop's mainstream explosion, actually highlighted black artists to a degree that most homegrown categories don't. But judging by last year's nominees — among them 50 Cent and the Black Eyed Peas — there is still progress left to be made. Here are Sway's truly global nominees for International Album of the Year.

Machel Montano (Trinidad) — Band Of D Year

Cham (Jamaica) — Ghetto Story

Kano (UK) — Home Sweet Home

Ornette Coleman (US) — Sound Grammar

Africando (Senegal/US) — Ketukuba

AND THE WINNER IS: It's almost too close to call, but Africando's Ketukuba — an irresistibly playful and sensuous Afro Salsa classic — sneaks past the finish line in first place.

Banger of the Year

The criteria for this category are simple: no back-of-the-throat Nickelback warbling, no rehased Bubl  crooning and, most importantly, no Canadian Idol winners. Canadian hip-hop might not be getting its due at home or abroad, but a quick listen to the following bangers would stop even the most stubborn of doubters from sipping that maple-flavoured Haterade.

k-os "Cat Diesel"

DL Incognito "Newera"

Rochester a.k.a. Juice "Young Love"

Red 1 "Dem No Worry Me"

Cadence Weapon "Sharks"

AND THE WINNER IS: While k-os' infectious "Sunday Morning" dominated the playlists of many an unsuspecting adult contemporary radio station this year, the vicious, unrelenting "Cat Diesel" remained slept on by almost everyone who hadn't bought the record. If we ran the Junos, that would stop right now.

Steelband of the Year

The steelpan was invented in Trinidad in the early 1940s. According to our calculations, the readers of this article will be long dead by the time it's recognized at the Junos. Until then, here are our nominees.

Jesse Ketchum Pan-Vibrations

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AND THE WINNER IS: We'll go with the Ontario Steelpan Association's 2006 Caribana Pan Alive winner, Pan Fantasy.

Most Slept on Vocalist of the Year

Need to deliver a batch of freshly baked scones across a dewy meadow? Sarah McLachlan's got you covered. Experiencing a sweeping moment of quiet reflection before doing battle with bloodthirsty orcs? Look no further than Loreena McKennitt. If you're not doing either of these things — and really, who has the time in this day and age? — Sway's got your back. Here are the nominees:

Denzal Sinclair

Nirvana Savoury

Kelly Lee Evans

Dione Taylor

Kaybe

AND THE WINNER IS: Sweetly melancholic and defiantly optimistic, jazz vocalist Dione Taylor's voice is like a perfect first date after months of singledom. We can't resist.

Special Toronto Mentions

Since CTV bought the rights to broadcast the Junos in 2002, the awards have not once been held in their hometown of Toronto. That's not cool. Here are Sway's compensatory Toronto awards.

Best Toronto-Centric Mix Tape Name:

S.A.R.S. 4 — Ear Born Virus

Best International Artist Who Wishes He Were From Toronto:

John Legend, for appearing in Toronto more often than the Leafs, Jays and Raptors combined.

Best International Artists Who Wish They'd Made It To Toronto:

Smif n' Wessun, Redman and Raekwon, who didn't make it across the border to perform at last December's disastrous Rock The Bells show.

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