

And The Award Goes To....

By Jeff O'Kelley

Music

I don't usually make a habit of watching music award shows. For the most part, they're heavily influenced by the big record labels and tend to become a three hour commercial for the most popular "artist's du jour". When I have accidentally tuned into one of these self-serving spectacles, I am always amazed at how much time they devote to mindless banter and silly skits, and how little music is actually presented. If you'll notice, these shows seem to mirror the format of the vast majority of FM stations on the air today. For my time, I'd rather pop in a live Police DVD, or a great CD and hear some real music.

But, from time to time, I do find myself drawn into one of these shows by the lineup or their promises of great music. After all, I am just enough of an optimist to believe that I might actually see something entertaining. This just happened to be the case with the recent VH1 Rock Honors show which featured several of my favorite bands; ZZ Top, Heart, Genesis and Ozzy Osborne. Not only did this show feature lots of great music, they managed to bring in some intelligent presenters to introduce and interview the acts. To tell the truth, I actually enjoyed this show and even taped it for future viewing. Maybe I'll save it for the next time that the MTV Real Teen Lip Sync and Dance Award Show is on.

During this show some interesting questions came up regarding the bands that were selected. If you have a band that has changed members over the years, whom do you honor? If this were the Rock and Roll Hall Of Fame, how would you decide whom to induct into music history? Who decides which members will be part of the festivities? Now I'm sure that some of you are asking "Why could this possibly be important?". Well, the simple answer is that there are lots of well-known bands that have evolved and changed members over their careers. Is it fair that former band members be excluded from an award that is being presented to a band, rather than an individual? For those of you who might not have been keeping track, here are a few examples:

1. The Doobie Brothers are currently touring with their original lineup, which did not include Jeff "Skunk" Baxter or Michael McDonald. Most Doobie Bros. fans wouldn't even recognize the band with out Michael singing lead vocal.
2. Although most people would agree that Fleetwood Mac is Mick Fleetwood, Lindsey Buckingham, Christine McVie, John McVie and Stevie Nicks, Mick is the only original member still in the lineup. The formative years included band members Peter Green, Bob Welch and Danny Kirwan, to name but a few. Another interesting point is that Lindsey and Stevie, two of the most recognizable members, didn't join until 1975, nearly eight years after Peter Green formed Fleetwood Mac in 1967.
3. 2007 VH1 Rock Honors award recipient Genesis, used to include Peter Gabriel, who quit the band in 1975 after eight years as lead singer. Upon his departure, the band decided that drummer Phil Collins would step up and take over the center microphone.
4. Southern-rock icon, The Marshall Tucker Band, is currently performing with only one original member, lead singer Doug Gray. Gray was part of the founding lineup that included brothers Toy Caldwell (d. 1993) and Tommy Caldwell (d. 1980), as well as George McCorkle, Paul Riddle and Jerry Eubanks.
5. During the mid 70's, country-rock influenced Firefall enjoyed widespread success with Gold records and world tours. Though Firefall is still touring, the current lineup includes only one original member, lead guitarist Jock Bartley. Ironically, original keyboardist David Muse now performs with The Marshall Tucker Band.

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6 . The Rolling Stones' original lineup didn't include bassist Bill Wyman, who joined when original member Dick Taylor departed for art school in 1962. Wyman eventually left the band in 1993 and published his autobiography *Stone Alone*.

7. Some people contend that The Who just isn't the same since the death of drummer Keith Moon in 1978 and bassist John Entwistle in 2002. Others flock to see Pete Townsend and Roger Daltrey perform as The Who and never know the difference.

So, do the previous questions seem to be relevant now?

To help answer the original queries, I decided to do a little research for myself. To start, I tried to contact the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Foundation in NYC. This is the organization that nominates new members, votes on who gets inducted and runs the Hall of Fame Museum in Cleveland. Unfortunately the only thing that I could find is a mailing address. No website, email, fax or other helpful information. Other than some brief induction information included on the museum's website there doesn't seem to be a lot of information available on the selection process. It seems that they want to keep a low profile. Since nobody at the museum seemed to offer any help, and I don't have time for the Pony Express to carry a letter to NYC, I decided to move on.

My second stop was the VH1 Rock Honors website, which offered lots of information on the induction process, but didn't mention anything about how they select the band members to be inducted. Emails for some clarification have yet to be answered.

In frustration, I decided to go straight to the source and ask the musicians themselves. Although I do know some famous musicians, I unfortunately don't personally know anyone who has been inducted into the Hall of Fame. Most of the people that I spoke with didn't seem to have an idea on how to make this type of decision and said that they'd just deal with it when the time comes. Unfortunately, I can't wait that long.

So, here is my idea, which I'm sure will be largely ignored by the award-giving establishment. To deal with bands that seem to have the same type of history as those mentioned previously, I came up with the term "Legacy Band". This term could be used as a way to describe bands that have outlived some of the original lineup yet still continue to be popular, relevant contributors to music history. Much like a modern corporation, these bands have changed members, evolved and adapted in order to continue making music and performing for their fans. It's almost as if the band itself has become a single entity, rather than a collection of individual players. When award time rolls around, the honor should be awarded to the band, not the individual players much like companies or other organizations accept awards. You definitely wouldn't see a list of stockholder names on the award for Carmaker of the Year! The honoree could then decide how many plaques, trophies or certificates they need to cover the people who they feel deserve to be included in the award. Voila! Problem solved.

As you might have guessed, it's just not that simple. Band changes aren't always amicable or friendly, which might result in the current band lineup excluding previous members because of hard feelings or bad blood. To find a perfect example of this, you don't have to look any further than the Blondie incident during the 2006 Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction ceremony. For those of you who missed the exchange between Deborah Harry and her former band mates, it wasn't pretty.

In conclusion, I guess that this issue will not be solved with a simple column but will continue to rear its ugly head with each award show. Band awards will be presented and whoever is available will accept on behalf of the band and its history. I don't agree with this practice, but nobody's asking me.