

Coalition Battles Grammys Over Category Cuts

BY NEKESA MUMBI MOODY
AP Music Writer

NEW YORK — A coalition of musicians is demanding the Recording Academy restore more than 30 categories cut from the Grammy Awards, alleging the reductions unfairly target ethnic music and were done without the input of its thousands of members.

A protest was planned Thursday in Beverly Hills, California, at an academy board meeting. It is part of a campaign by those upset by last month's decision to reduce the Grammy fields, which this year totaled 109, to 78.

Grammy President and CEO Neil Portnow said changes would be in effect for the 2012 Grammys. He urged dissenters to work with the academy, which would examine the effect of the changes for the 2013 awards.

But protesters hope the process could be reversed in time for next year's Grammy ceremony if at least one board member asks the academy to reconsider.

"Hopefully during that time, someone will rise and be brave enough and do this," Bobby Sanabria, a four-time Grammy nominee in the Latin jazz category and a leader of the movement against the changes, said in an interview Wednesday.

"He's being arrogant in saying that it's written in stone when we have a chance to get these categories reinstated," said Sanabria of Portnow. He has called for the resignation of Portnow and the board of trustees.

The Academy announced the changes April 6; the move came after a more than yearlong examination of the awards structure, the first in the Grammys' 50-plus year history. Portnow said at the time that the changes would make the Grammys more competitive, and the awards more coveted.

But the move upset many Academy members, who were taken off guard by the announcement.

Paul Simon wrote a letter to Portnow asking him to reconsider, writing, in part: "I believe the Grammys have done a disservice to many talented musicians by combining previously distinct and separate types of music into a

catch-all of blurry larger categories. ... They deserve the separate Grammy acknowledgements that they've been afforded until this change eliminated them."

Carlos Santana and his musician wife, Cindy Blackman Santana, wrote a letter of protest to the Academy, saying: "To remove Latin Jazz and many other ethnic categories is doing a huge disservice to the brilliant musicians who keep the music vibrant for their fans — new and old. ... We strongly protest this decision and we ask you to represent all of the colors of the rainbow when it comes to music and give ethnic music a

place in the heart of music lovers everywhere."

Sanabria, who is working with musicians including Eddie Palmieri and Arturo O'Farrill, said ethnic music was unfairly targeted, and called it a "subtle form of racism."

"The effect will be that the music will be very, very homogeneous, it's already starting to sound like that already," he said. "Society as we know it now is very multicultural and very diverse, and the Grammys always reflected that."

Portnow, in an interview this week, said he understands the frustration of those affected. However, he denied many of Sanabria's

contentions, including the idea that non-mainstream categories bore the brunt of the reductions.

"In this year's awards, in the 53rd (annual ceremony), there were 34 mainstream categories. Next year, with the changed revision, there will be 20 mainstream categories. That's a significant reduction in mainstream areas. In non-mainstream categories ... there were 71. In the upcoming 54th awards, there will be 54," he said, saying that percentage-wise, mainstream categories were more affected.

"Not only non-mainstream categories were affected here," he said.

"The facts here don't play that out."

Portnow also took issue with Sanabria's assertion that the changes were conducted arbitrarily and in secret, saying the changes were implemented by representatives of the members.

"This is a committee that is made up of members of the academy who include musicians and producers, engineers and experts in the various fields," he said. "There was well over a year and a half discussion within that group, in that committee. They recommended the overall changes to the process to the board of trustees,

which was discussed thoroughly."

Portnow said the changes were already adopted and unless "the board chooses to act in a fashion not consistent with its rules and regulations, (these concerns) will be dealt with in the next cycle."

He also criticized Sanabria for making what he termed personal attacks against him and other board members.

"It is not rational nor is it logical to have a discussion to ask people to resign," he said. "I don't think it endears their cause to board members either."

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"('A History of Yankton' is) probably the hardest show I've ever put together just because of timing and people are so busy," Lambertz said. "I've got three major productions going on at once. It's the most ever that we've tried to accomplish, and it's telling."

Still, he is confident all the hard work will pay off for L&CTC.

"It's going to be a great season, and we hope people come out to help us kick it off," Lambertz said.

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Jazz

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coming up was that we should bring in some jazz," he said. "It should end up being a pretty good performance."

Speirs said the group was honored to be invited.

"When I mentioned to the ensemble that we had this opportunity to play in Yankton, they were all very excited," he said. "We know that Yankton has a really strong arts community. There is always a good crowd that comes out to support live music."

The Dakota Jazz Collective members that will be playing in Yankton include the trumpet-playing Speirs, who also serves on the board of directors for the South Dakota Arts Council and the Dakota Sky International Piano Festival; keyboard player and singer Jeremy Hegg, who performs with multiple groups within the state; saxophone player Nate Jorgensen, director of jazz studies and saxophone professor at South Dakota State University; percussionist Jim McKinney, former director of bands at SDSU; and upright bass player Andrew Reinartz, member of the South Dakota Symphony Orchestra and executive director of the Dakota Sky International Piano Festival.

This ensemble is also part of the Jazz Diversity Project, which is a live jazz education show that introduces elementary, middle and high school students to the history of jazz music and how it relates to common subjects within American history. The group has participated for five years and has performed for over 26,000 students across the state.

For more information about the Dakota Jazz Collective, visit the group's website at www.jazzsd.com. For more information on Yankton's 150th anniversary celebration, visit online at www.cityofyankton.org.



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