

Grammy Awards nominations are out

By Shannon Sneed
Entertainment Reporter

Ahh, the Grammys ... Those highly esteemed, coveted little bronze statues sought by thousands but given to only a handful of the most deserving of contemporary musicians — those who have made a brilliant and lasting impact in the hearts and souls of Americans everywhere. Those who have boldly gone where no artist has gone before, seeking out new musical horizons and providing inspiration to fans everywhere.

Like Hanson, for example. Or the "Space Jam" soundtrack.

Yes, folks, it's Grammy season yet again, and the powers that be have yet again come up with a truly stellar lineup of relentlessly mediocre acts, with only a smattering of actual talent in between. In fact, the Grammys have become such a pathetic measure of musical excellence that they were even made a joke on an episode of "The Simpsons" (which, as we all know, is quite an accurate barometer of the general inanity of contemporary American culture).

There are, however, a few new acts actually deserving of recognition this year, as well as a few old ones who have released impressive albums recently. (For their sake, though, I hope they don't win. It might be construed as an insult.)

Here's a few of the nominees:

Single of the Year

Paula Cole, "Where Have All the Cowboys Gone?"; Shawn Colvin, "Sunny Came Home"; Sheryl Crow, "Every Day is a Winding Road"; Hanson, "MmmBop"; and

ALBUM of the year

- Babyface, "The Day"
- Paula Cole, "This Fire"
- Bob Dylan, "Time out of Mind"
- Paul McCartney, "Flaming Pie"
- Radiohead, "OK Computer"

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- R. Kelly, "I Believe I can Fly"

R. Kelly, "I Believe I can Fly" (from the "Space Jam" soundtrack). Although Hanson is already a shoo-in for the categories of "Most Overexposed," "Most Radio Airplay" and "Most Annoying Hair," Paula Cole may just edge out those Midwestern cuties for her song about being rescued from the drudgery of everyday life by the Marlboro Man. Ugh.

Album of the Year

Surprisingly, this category actually contains some quality artists. Nominated are: Babyface, "The Day"; Paula Cole, "This Fire"; Bob Dylan, "Time out of Mind"; Paul McCartney, "Flaming Pie"; and Radiohead, "OK Computer." Dylan or McCartney may win just because they're, well, Dylan and McCartney, but press darlings Radiohead may be the most deserving. The dreamy, experimental "OK Computer"

was one of the best rock albums released in a long time. And that's saying a lot.

Best Rap Album

No big surprises here. Naturally, the Notorious B.I.G. was nominated for his posthumous "Life After Death," as was Puff Daddy's "No Way Out"; Missy "Misdemeanor" Elliott's "Supa Dupa Fly"; Wyclef Jean's "Carnival"; and the Wu-Tang Clan's "Wu-Tang Forever." Biggie might win for posterity's sake, but it'll be a tight race with Missy Elliott, who garnered wide acclaim this year for her debut release.

Best New Artist

Fiona Apple, "Tidal"; Erykah Badu, "Baduizm"; Paula Cole, "This Fire"; Hanson, "Middle of Nowhere"; and Puff Daddy, "No Way Out." Badu should win just for those cool head wraps she wears. Apple should not win just because of her annoying, overly trendy "Criminal" video. But Hanson will win because they're what all Grammy nominators dream of: They're radio-friendly, non-threatening, and most importantly, pre-teen girls drool over them enough to make them a marketable commodity.

That's the formula, folks. Want a Grammy? Find a recording studio and a hair salon, and get to work. The awards are coming up on Feb. 25, and you've got some very stiff competition.

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