

# BET Awards Full of Prince tributes and Political Moments

Jesse Williams' fiery, six-minute speech on racism and racial justice brings audience to its feet

By **MESFIN FEKADU**  
AP Music Writer

The BET Awards — or “The Prince Tribute Show” — featured emotional and energetic performances from Sheila E., Stevie Wonder and Jennifer Hudson honoring the Purple One, along with political statements on issues ranging from racial injustice to the U.S. presidential election.

Sheila E., jamming on the drums and guitar, singing and dancing without shoes, closed the three-hour-plus show at the Microsoft Theater in Los Angeles with “Let’s Work,” “A Love Bizarre,” “The Glamorous Life,” “America” and more. She was joined by “Purple Rain” actor Jerome Benton and Prince’s ex-wife, Mayte Garcia, who danced alongside the background dancers throughout the set. They ended by raising a purple guitar in the air as the audience cheered them on.

Hudson, rocking a white-hooded blazer, and Wonder, clad in a purple suit, sang “Purple

ple Rain” — a month after the piano-playing icon performed the song with Madonna at the Billboard Music Awards, which BET dissed on Twitter. This time, Hudson was a vocal powerhouse, delivering screeching vocals while Wonder played piano and Tori Kelly was on guitar while a photo montage of Prince appeared on the purple-lit stage.

Janelle Monae was animated and funky as she danced and ran through Prince tunes, including “Kiss,” “Delirious” and “I Would Die 4 U.” Bilal was sensual and passionate during “The Beautiful Ones,” even lying on the floor while singing near the end of the performance. The Roots backed Bilal, and the band was also behind Erykah Badu as she performed “The Ballad of Dorothy Parker,” singing softly as she grooved in place.

After singing an original song, Maxwell went into “Nothing Compares 2 U,” changing some of the lyrics while honoring Prince.

Though the BET Awards were heavy on



Sheila E., left, and Mayte Garcia stand on stage following a performance in tribute to Prince at the BET Awards at the Microsoft Theater on Sunday, June 26, 2016, in Los Angeles.

honoring the icon who died on April 21, the show went from Prince to political throughout the night.

“Grey’s Anatomy” actor Jesse Williams, who earned the humanitarian award for his efforts as an activist, gave a fiery, nearly six-minute speech that brought the audience to its feet.

“We’re done watching and waiting while this invention called whiteness uses and abuses us, burying black people out of sight and out of mind while extracting our culture, our dollars,

our entertainment like oil, black gold, ghettoizing and demeaning our creations then stealing them; gentrifying our ge-

“It’s serious out here, and for those who think that, you know, ‘Oh he’s not going to win’ — think again

nus and trying us on like costumes before discarding our bodies,” he said onstage.

Williams was introduced by BET CEO Debra Lee, who spoke

about gun violence and brought up the recent Orlando shooting at the Pulse nightclub.

“We all need to take stance against gun violence. You can make a difference,” Lee said onstage. “Use your voice and vote.”

When “Empire” star Taraji P. Henson won best actress, she encouraged the audience to vote against presumptive Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump.

“I’m really not political but it’s serious out here, and for those who think that, you know, ‘Oh he’s not going to win’ — think again. So we really need to pull together and turn this country around,” she

Clinton has a past with BET: She appeared at BET’s “Black Girls Rock!” event in April and told the audience “my life has been changed by strong black women leaders.”

The BET Awards wasn’t all serious, though. Beyonce kicked off the show with a surprise performance featuring Kendrick Lamar and multiple background dancers of her song “Freedom,” dancing in a pool of water to the song’s heavy beat. At one point, Lamar and Beyonce kicked the water and danced in sync, drawing a heavy applause from the audience.

Beyonce won video of the year and the fan-voted viewers’ choice award for her hit “Formation.” Her mother, Tina, accepted the

awards and said Beyonce had to quickly leave the show after her performance for a concert in London.

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