

The late John Prine is among those honored on "Great Performances: GRAMMY Salute to Music Legends" Friday on PBS



A new 'GRAMMY Salute to Music Legends' honors John Prine, Chicago and others

Each year, several music icons get a special tribute from the organization that presents the Grammy Awards – and, at least in that respect, this year is no different.

Airing again as a PBS "Great Performances" presentation Friday, Oct. 16 (check local listings), the "GRAMMY Salute to Music Legends" honors another diverse assortment of singular talents who have received the Recording Academy's 2020 Lifetime Achievement Awards: Roberta Flack, Iggy Pop, the groups Chicago and Public Enemy, and – posthumously – Isaac Hayes, John Prine and Sister Rosetta Tharpe. Among others feted are composer Philip Glass and longtime Grammy-show producer Ken Ehrlich.

Jimmy Jam hosts the program, which features performances of the honorees' music by Laurie Anderson, Philip Bailey, Brandi Carlile, Cynthia Erivo, Chris Isaak, Jason Isbell & Amanda Shires, Cyndi Lauper, Sam Moore, Leslie Odom Jr. and Yola. Presenters include John Legend, LL Cool J, Joe Mantegna ("Criminal Minds"), Henry Rollins, Rhiannon Giddens and music producer Don Was.

Jimmy Jam notes he has "some connection" to every artist celebrated on the show, "because that's the great thing about what music does. I have to say Chicago was my favorite group growing up. I was a sax player when I was younger, and I tried to play all their horn parts. I was a drummer, and I tried to play all their drum parts.

"The first concert my parents took me to when I was young was a Chicago concert," adds Jimmy Jam. "When my partner Terry (Lewis) and I were inducted into the (Songwriters) Hall of Fame, we went in the same year as Robert Lamm of Chicago, so I got to meet my hero."

The "Salute's" writer, journalist and musicshow staple David Wild, laments that Prine being named such a "Legend" came in the same year the singer-songwriter died of coronavirus complications. "He wanted to perform" on the special, Wild reports. "He was scheduled to fly back, I think it was, from Dublin. Instead, we are going to honor him. One way or another, we are going to keep that music going." (Carlile, Isbell and Shires perform Prine songs on the program.)

Staging familiar events such as the "GRAMMY Salute to Music Legends" during a pandemic can be challenging, but Wild maintains, "The writing is the last and easiest part. Working with people like Jimmy Jam ... like, when Prince passed. I had worked with Prince and knew him. Jimmy happened to be already in the room, and I said, 'Jimmy, we need you to go out there and say something about Prince before we say anything else.' When you have the right talent to work with and the right sort of souls to work with, everything else is possible."

