

FEATURES

All that glitters isn't golden

Not everyone agrees with the Golden Melody Awards' language-based categories

BY HO YI
STAFF REPORTER

AT the 20th Golden Melody Awards (第二十屆金曲獎) that took place at Taipei Arena (台北巨蛋) on Saturday night, pop sensation Jay Chou (周杰倫) took home the Best Mandarin Male Singer, Best Song and Best Music Video awards. Crowd Lu (盧廣仲), a young pop star on the rise, received top honors in the Best Newcomer and Best Composer categories for his debut album *100 Ways of Living* (100種生活).

The Nanwan Sisters (南王姐妹花), a trio of Puyuma (卑南) singers from Taitung won the Best Aboriginal Album Award, and, much to their surprise, beat out pop groups such as Da Mouth (大嘴巴) to win best singing group as well.

The *Taipei Times* caught up with some of the winners and jury members backstage to ask their views about the awards.

Award-winning Pau-dull (陳建年) said the Nanwan's Sisters' eponymous album, for which he picked up Best Album Producer Award, took two years to complete at his home on Orchid Island (Lanyu, 蘭嶼) and a makeshift recording studio in Taitung. The recording sessions usually began around 10pm, after the three Sisters, all mothers, put their children to bed.

"I am just an amateur, making music the way I like," said the Puyuma musician. "I often ask myself: what is pop music? Are the songs in my tribe not pop music? I feel that it doesn't matter as long as it's music people love to hear. For this album, I didn't attempt to make pop or convey cultural messages. I wanted to document the three sisters' voices."

Pau-dull said that if he produces another Aboriginal album, he wants to find a person who loves to sing rather than one who knows how to sing beautifully, "like an Aboriginal mother who hums and sings in the tribe with a comforting and natural voice," said the full-time policeman, who makes music in his spare time.

As shiny and dorky-chic as his music, Lu explained why the daily routine of eating breakfast featured predominantly in his album: "Eating breakfast is a very rock 'n' roll thing to do. I come from a small town in Tainan. Workers there eat lots of food to begin the day. When I first came to Taipei, I found that people here don't eat breakfast, and I thought, 'breakfast rocks!'" the 24-year-old singer and songwriter said.

Winner in the Best Hakka Singer category, his fourth Golden Melody Award, Liu Shao-hsi (劉劭希) bemoaned Hakka musicians' low profile and said they should be given more opportunities to showcase their diverse sounds.

"We've been innovating traditional music for more than a decade, but younger musicians still lack a platform to show off their creations, not even on Hakka television channel. You don't hear Hakka voices at government-funded events and activities. Even if you do, it's mostly stereotypical sounds, through which members of the general public come to know of Hakka music," Liu said backstage after the ceremony. "I am not saying that the Golden Melody Awards are of no worth. But without other measures and platforms to encourage our music, it is just

a once-a-year ritual at which Hakka musicians feel as out of place as aliens."

Suggestions for improving the Golden Melody Awards include changing the competition's language-based classifications to a genre-based system.

"People still have a limited perception of how Mandarin, Taiwanese and Hakka music should be.

They can't imagine Hakka music as rock 'n' roll or electronica," Liu said. "I am all for genre classification. It's an ideal. Actual changes will come when people have more understanding about music."

To Ma Shih-fang (馬世芳), music critic and a Golden Melody jury member, there is no doubt that the awards should focus on music rather political or linguistic agendas.

"I like the comparison of the Golden Melody to baseball made by Lin Sheng-xiang (林生祥). For baseball, we have the best player of the year, but not the best Hakka or Aboriginal player," Ma said. "I understand that the Government Information Office (GIO, 新聞局) sets the language-based categories as a means to encourage native-language music. But does the

policy work? The government-funded event is innately awkward. On the one hand, it provides entertainment value and effect. On the other, it is closely connected to national policies."

In a bid to enhance the competition's credibility and impartiality, starting this year the judging process has been divided into two sections: a preliminary round, with 40 judges, followed by the final stage, with 19 judges, 15 of whom served in the first section.

"An award is not like sports where the winner is decided at the click of a stopwatch," Ma said. "There is no such thing as a completely fair and objective result. It's always a compromise reached among different opinions. I am fine with these changes as long as ... the jury committee is independent of governmental officers, record companies and sales figures."

Chen Le-jung (陳樂融), convener of this year's jury panel, welcomed changes to the award system.

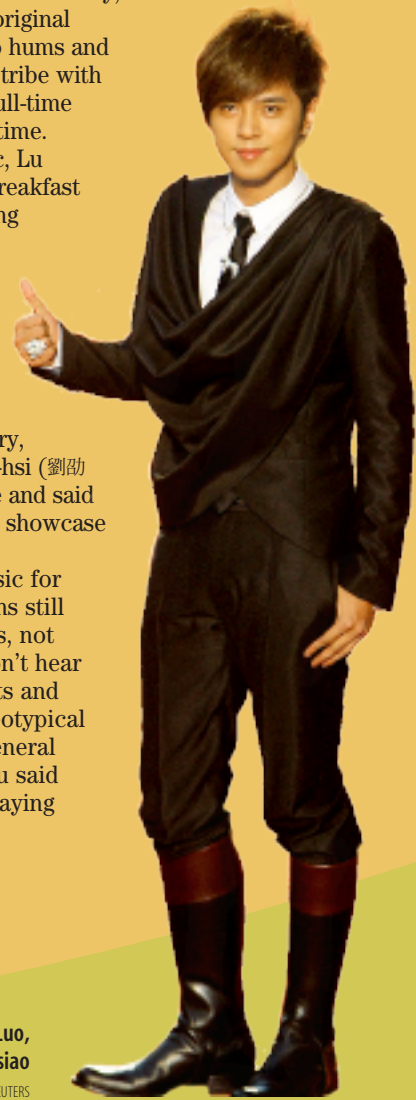
"The jury has been off limits to those artists and professionals in related fields who participate in nominated works. That proviso may be lifted if the jury is expanded and no individual judge is powerful enough to influence the results. This way, those who are active in the industry can express their ideas and people will stop saying that the Golden Melody Awards judges are a bunch of has-beens," Chen said.



The Nanwan Sisters. PHOTO: TAIPEI TIMES



Liu Shao-hsi, left. PHOTO: TAIPEI TIMES



From left to right: Singer and TV show host Alan Luo, Singaporean singer Stefanie Sun, Taiwanese singer Hsiao Huang-qi and Patty Hou. PHOTOS: AP AND REUTERS



Weird shapes and mystifying menswear

BY CATHERINE SHU
STAFF REPORTER

Playful silhouettes and wacky menswear were the order of the day on the red carpet at the Golden Melody Awards on Saturday night. Singaporean singer Stefanie Sun (孫燕姿) stole headlines with her "black swan" Dsquared gown, but it wasn't her heavily feathered bodice that got the press' attention. It was the slit on her slinky black skirt, which was high enough to induce a nosebleed in spectators and looked like it probably necessitated a bikini wax on the morning of the awards.

If Sun's dress was top-heavy, then Taiwanese singer Senda Aisa (千田愛紗) went in the opposite direction. The extremely puffy skirt of the Da Mouth vocalist's hot pink mini-dress was layered with row upon row of large and tightly gathered horizontal ruffles, making her look like a cross between a flamingo, a topiary and Marilyn Monroe.

Other offbeat silhouettes included best Taiwanese Female Singer winner Huang Yi-ling (黃乙玲) deep purple bubble dress with a sloping hemline and Singaporean singer Tanya Chua's (蔡健雅) short tomato red Lanvin number, which was ruffled and gathered into a giant, loose rosette over her left shoulder. Best Mandarin Female Singer winner Sandee Chen's (陳珊妮) rock-inspired Vivienne Westwood gown was a counterpoint to all the girliness. The black metallic fabric was draped and gathered around her body in artfully haphazard folds and accentuated with a pair of heavy black gladiator sandals.

Despite all the playful looks, many stars still reached for surefire goddess gowns, including Taiwanese television host Matilda Tao's (陶晶瑩) gleaming pewter MaxMara dress with a low sweetheart neckline, Taiwanese actress Tian Xin's (天心) elegant lavender Dior and Chan Ya-wen's (詹雅雯) custom-made toga dress with a jeweled shoulder strap.

The prize for craziest menswear arguably went to Best Mandarin Album winner Eason Chan's (陳奕迅) tuxedo, which seemed to be inspired by ballet

costumes. The Hong Kong singer's jacket flared into an a-line at his waist, with layers of baby pink tulle peeping out from underneath. His shortened trousers, black-and-white striped ankle socks and bright red shoes, on the other hand, would have made Ronald McDonald green with envy.

Malaysian singer Gary Cao (曹格) combined a checked grey-and-black sleeveless jacket with a knee-length tunic and black trousers with one leg rolled up, like an old-school rapper. Taiwanese singer Alan Luo (羅志祥) said that his self-designed outfit was inspired by Indian saris, but the snazzy black sharkskin knickerbockers, short cutaway jacket, tall boots and swath of fabric wrapped around his torso made him look more Little Lord Fauntleroy than Bollywood.

Unlike many of the attendees, Taiwanese singer Ricky Hsiao (蕭煌奇) wore an outfit by a Taiwanese designer. The visually impaired star's oversized tuxedo jacket had giant sequined eyeballs marching down the front and was designed by an artist and performance artist named (surprise, surprise) Mr Eyeball (眼先生). It made the schoolboy-on-crack striped blazer, matching shirt and white shorts worn by Best New Artist and Best Composer winner, Crowd Lu (盧廣仲), look positively tame in comparison.



Hong Kong pop group Grasshopper smile as they arrive at the 20th Golden Melody Awards held on Saturday, in Taipei. PHOTO: AP

Golden Melody presents awards for artistic and traditional music

Winners in the 14 categories include first-time nominee Tung Shun-wen and guzheng player Ren Jie

BY HO YI
STAFF REPORTER

The 20th Golden Melody Awards' (金曲獎) ceremony handed out honors in artistic and traditional music categories at Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall (國父紀念館) on June 6 with 72 works selected from 1,508 entries competing in 14 categories.

One of the surprise winners was sax player Tung Shun-wen (董舜文). The first-time nominee beat veterans Matthew Lien and Gerald Shih (史擲詠) to pick up the Best Arrangement Award for his jazz album *One Day* (歡日記).

First-time winner Li Ching-fang (李靜芳) welled up when her independently produced Taiwanese opera album was announced as the Best Traditional Opera Album Award.

Highly esteemed for his modern compositions, composer and educator Lu Yan (盧炎), who died of cancer last year aged 78, was honored for his contribution to

Moving Sound (聲動), produced by Music Forum (十方樂集). A compilation of works by contemporary composers in Taiwan, the album was also awarded top honors in the Best Classical Album category.

With seven accomplished musicians and music groups vying for the award, the hotly contested Best Performance gong went to *guzheng* (古箏) player Ren Jie (任潔). China's renowned *kunqu* (昆曲) artist Wen Yu-hang (溫宇航) received the Best Traditional Interpretation Award, while Taiwanese *erhu* (二胡) player Mia Wang (王明華) took home the Best Crossover Music Album Award for her mold-breaking renditions of jazz numbers.

The Lifetime Contribution Award went to Wu Jau-nan (吳兆南), the revered maestro of Chinese stand-up

comedy, or cross talk (相聲), who promotes the ancient folk art.

First-time Golden Melody winner Li Ching-fang, left. PHOTO: TAIPEI TIMES



PHOTO: TAIPEI TIMES