

Billie Eilish, a voice of the youth, tops the Grammy Awards

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Image 1. Billie Eilish poses in the press room with the awards for best album and best pop vocal album for "We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?", best song and record for "Bad Guy" and best new artist at the 62nd annual Grammy Awards at the Staples Center on January 26, 2020, in Los Angeles, California. Photo: Chris Pizzello/AP Photo

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NEW YORK, New York — Singer Billie Eilish, who gave voice to young people struggling with depression on a do-it-yourself album she made at home with her older brother, is atop the music world.

The 18-year-old made history at the Grammy Awards January 26. Not only did she become the youngest person to win one of Grammy's top awards — record, song and album of the year, and best new artist — Eilish is the first artist to sweep all four since Christopher Cross in 1981.

Her triumph came on a night made somber by the death of former Los Angeles Lakers star Kobe Bryant. It also ended a tumultuous week for the Recording Academy that included its ousted CEO accusing the Grammys nominations process of being rigged, and Diddy calling out the organization for not giving enough respect to R&B and hip-hop.

Eilish's "When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?" also won best pop vocal album. Her brother Finneas O'Connell also won awards for engineering and producing the album.

"The music I listened to when I was growing up, maybe 7, 8, 9 or 10, 13, that was the most important music to me forever," Finneas said backstage after the ceremony. "Anytime a person that age comes up to either one of us and says (it is their favorite), I know how much that means to them. That's why it means so much to me. I hope they're celebrating. This is all because of them."

He said that they never thought that an album that addresses depression, suicidal thoughts and climate change would be up for a Grammy.

Eilish said they made the album in a bedroom of the Los Angeles-area home where they grew up.

"It's like anything is possible," she said.



Image 2. Lizzo performs a medley at the 62nd annual Grammy Awards. She won awards for best pop solo performance for "Truth Hurts," best urban contemporary album for "Cuz I Love You" and best traditional R&B performance for "Jerome." Photo: Matt Sayles/Invision/AP

In accepting her awards, Eilish noted that she had grown up listening to many of the artists at the ceremony in Los Angeles' Staples Center. She also said she thought Ariana Grande deserved album of the year, an onstage moment that recalled Adele saying the same thing about Beyoncé the same year Adele triumphed.

The success of a young, white girl came on a night the Recording Academy seemingly went out of its way to highlight diversity. Lizzo offered a powerhouse opening performance, and there were tributes to Prince and the late rapper Nipsey Hussle. Tyler, the Creator offered an incendiary version of "Earfquake" with Boyz II Men. Lil' Nas X sang his omnipresent "Old Town Road." Grande sang, as did H.E.R., host Alicia Keys and Gary Clark Jr. with the Roots.

Tyler, the Creator said later that the rap album Grammy was a backhanded compliment.

While he's grateful to be acknowledged, "it also sucks whenever we, I mean guys that look like me, do anything that's genre bending, they always put it in an urban rapper category," he said. "I don't like that urban word. It's just a politically correct way to say the N-word to me."

Earlier in the show, Keys sat at a piano to sing a rewrite of Lewis Capaldi's song "Someone You Loved," which name-checked many of the nominated artists but also included a few pointed lines about respect.

"I'm gonna be honest with y'all," she said. "It's been a helluva week."

Keys also had the delicate task of addressing the shock of Bryant's death in a helicopter crash, while onstage at the same arena where the former Laker won championships.

She sang "It's So Hard to Say Goodbye to Yesterday" with Boyz II Men. References to Bryant abounded — a Lakers jersey held up by Run-DMC during their performance of "Walk This Way" with Aerosmith, and adorning a couch on a set where Lil Nas X began "Old Town Road."

"We're all feeling crazy sadness right now," said Keys, who received praise online for how she handled it.

"Alicia, you've been lighting this awards show up," rapper Common said onstage. "Thank you."

Image 3. Lil Nas X poses in the press room with the awards for best music video and best pop duo/group performance for "Old Town Road." Photo: Chris Pizzello/AP Photo

Besides her big opening, Lizzo took home three Grammys, including best pop solo performance for "Truth Hurts" and two R&B awards. She also seemed noticeably affected by Bryant's death.

"We need to continue to reach out," she told her fellow artists. "This is the beginning of making music that moves people again."

Clark's pointed "This Land" also won for best rock song and rock performance, and he won a third for contemporary blues album.

Among the show's more touching moments was Tyler, the Creator bringing his tearful mother onstage with him to accept his Grammy. Camila Cabello sang "First Man," a song dedicated to her father, and received a bear hug from a sobbing dad when it was done.

DJ Khaled helped lead the emotional tribute to Hush, the Los Angeles rapper who was killed in March, not long after attending his first Grammy ceremony as a nominee. On Sunday, Hush won two posthumous Grammys.

Tyler, the Creator, Lizzo and, of course, Eilish were among the acts who won their first-ever Grammys. Other first-time winners included Tanya Tucker, J. Cole, Lil Nas X, Billy Ray Cyrus, Michelle Obama, Sara Bareilles, Rosalía and 21 Savage.

Gospel legend Kirk Franklin received his 14th and 15th career Grammys.

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