

# Alicia Keys Seems to Reference Grammys Turmoil in Speech

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 [nytimes.com/2020/01/26/arts/music/alicia-keys-grammys-speech.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/26/arts/music/alicia-keys-grammys-speech.html)

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The insider turmoil looming over the Grammy Awards was summed up pretty succinctly early in the ceremony on Sunday night.

“Let me be honest with y’all,” Alicia Keys, the ceremony’s host, said in a pre-song spiel from behind the piano. “It’s been a hell of a week. Damn.”

The longer version: A battle within the Recording Academy, the organization behind the awards show, came to a head 10 days before the ceremony when the academy’s new chief executive, Deborah Dugan, was removed from her position.

Dugan, in a complaint to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, said the organization retaliated against her for exposing sexual harassment, corruption in the awards’ nominations process and conflicts of interest. The academy in turn said Dugan fostered a toxic work environment.

Dugan’s tenure, as brief as it was — she joined in August — signaled what could have been a step forward for an institution criticized for a gender imbalance and lack of diversity.

For a community of artists anxious for progress, her abrupt exit struck a sour note — a sentiment Keys seemed to echo in her speech.

“It’s a new decade,” she said. “It’s time for newness. And we refuse the negative energy. We refuse the old systems. You feel me on that?”

“We want to be respected and safe in our diversity,” Keys continued. “We want to be shifting to realness and inclusivity. So tonight, we want to celebrate the people, the artists that put themselves on the line and share their truth with us.”

Keys’s performance was a play on the song of the year nominee “Someone You Loved,” by the 23-year-old Scottish singer Lewis Capaldi. The theme of her speech continued with her lyric: “It’s when people do nothing that the bad guys win.”

Dua Lipa, presenting the award for best new artist with Keys, also took a moment to acknowledge gender equality in the music industry. “There are so many stellar female producers, artists, songwriters, engineers,” she said. “And if you’re in the business, and you’re hiring, raise your sights to the amazing, talented women out there, because we all deserve a seat at every table.”

Below is Keys's full speech.

O.K. We're back. And here I am in my favorite place, at the piano, where I always go when I need a little energy. You know what I mean? When I need a little, when I need some good vibes, I come here. So let me give us some background music while I'm talking. Because let me be honest with y'all: It's been a hell of a week. Damn. This is a really, it's a serious one. Real talk, there's a lot going on. And can I also have a little more piano in my ears please so I can properly serenade the people? You know, I need to serenade y'all for a minute.

But you know what? I'm proud to be standing here, you know? I am. I am. And I'm proud to be here as an artist, for the artists, with the people. And I feel the energy of all the beautiful artists in this room. It's going to be an amazing night, amazing night. Because it's a new decade. It's a new decade. It's time for newness. And we refuse the negative energy. We refuse the old systems. You feel me on that? We want to be respected and safe in our diversity. We want to be shifting to realness and inclusivity. So tonight, we want to celebrate the people, the artists that put themselves on the line and share their truth with us.

And I mean, we got the incredible Billie Eilish right here in this building. That's great. That's my little sister right there. We got Lizzo, who just owned the stage. Eight nominations and already a winner tonight. We have the magnificent Ariana right here in the building tonight. You see us? You see us? We're unstoppable. We get to be who we want to be. We get to be different. We get to be unique. We get to be everything, right now.

So I'm looking forward to being here together with all of us, again, celebrating this music. Because I know how much Kobe loved music. I know how much he loved music. So we've got to make this a celebration in his honor, you know? He would want us to keep the vibrations high. You know music is that one language we can all speak. It don't matter where we're from. We all understand it. So I want to show some love to some of the artists who spoke this language so beautifully with us this year. So I've got something for you.