

Grammy Awards edge closer to 'existential crisis' with latest controversies

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This Sunday marked the 62nd annual Grammy Awards, a televised award show that honors outstanding achievements in music. Over the span of several decades the show has become synonymous with a star-studded red carpet, flashy performances and, like the Oscars, an ongoing litany of controversy.

Their president was ousted

On Jan. 16 the Recording Academy's former president Deborah Dugan was placed on administrative leave after only around six months on the job. By Jan. 21 Dugan was already fighting back, filing a 44-page complaint to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Within those pages she accused the Academy of retaliation and voting irregularities, among other things.

In an interview with Good Morning America, Dugan, who was the first-ever female head of the Academy, called it "a boy's club" and claimed that "there are incidents of conflict of interest that taint the results [of the award picks]." She shared board statistics — 68 percent is male and 69 percent Caucasian — to further illustrate the boy's club atmosphere, and alleged that just this year 30 artists that were not selected by the membership were added to the possible nomination list. In addition to these complaints, Dugan also alleges Joel Katz, general counsel for the Academy, sexually harassed her — accusations that Katz vehemently denies.

Less than representative representation

Dugan was tapped by the Academy to take on the role of president in July 2019, following the end of Neil Portnow's contract. Portnow got into hot water for making a comment many saw as sexist following the 60th Grammy Awards in 2018. That year only one woman won a solo award on-screen. Afterwards, Portnow told reporters that women "who want to be musicians, who want to be engineers, producers, and want to be part of the industry on the executive level" need to "step up."

The results of the 2018 Grammy's as well as Portnow's comments only added insult to injury after a revealing study was released only four days prior to the ceremony by the University of Southern California's Annenberg Inclusion Initiative. The study found that only 9 percent of the 899 people nominated over the previous six Grammy Awards were women.

Several high-profile artists have come to Dugan's defense, including Gabrielle Union, Chuck D from Public Enemy and recording artist Sheryl Crow. "I salute Deborah Dugan for her truth and courage to try and effect change," D says. "As always, a bunch of ignorant, testosterone-fueled, usually old white men stop progress and screw it up." Musical artist Taylor Swift also reportedly canceled a surprise performance at the Grammy's in solidarity with Dugan, ironically, to perform her hit "The Man," about gender inequality and the double standards imposed on women.

Swift isn't the only musical artist to call in sick this year either, as other notable absences included Beyonce and her husband Jay-Z, Selena Gomez, Jennifer Lopez and Halsey.

Snubs and a fell swoop

With the passing of each award show comes the inevitable list of those who many consider to have been "snubbed," meaning that the person was expected to win or deserved to win, and was ultimately not recognized for their talents and achievements.

The Grammy Awards in particular have been notorious for the perceived "snubbing" of female contestants and people of color. It has been noted that popular R&B and hip hop artists have also been relegated into lesser categories — very seldom winning awards in the major four categories. This year, hip hop and pop artist Lizzo was the most nominated person of the night, up for eight awards in total. She ended up with three wins, all in lesser categories, such as her win for "Jerome" in the category of traditional R&B performance.

Pop artist Ariana Grande was nominated for five awards and took home zero, despite being asked to perform not one but three of her hit songs on stage that night. It was a snub reminiscent of 2018's awards in which Jay-Z was asked to perform, only to be passed over for wins in both pop and mainstream categories.

The clear winner of the night was young newcomer Billie Eilish, a white 18-year-old who impressively recorded her award-winning album "When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?" with her brother in their bedrooms at home. She took home a whopping five awards, including Best New Artist, Album of the Year and Record of the Year. Many were surprised by Eilish's grand sweep, including the musical artist herself who was seen mouthing "please, don't be me" from her seat in the crowd before taking the prize for Album of the Year. Once she took the stage Eilish said that Ariana Grande should have won the award.

"The Grammys are facing a credibility crisis," Bill Werde, a former editorial director at Billboard magazine and director of Syracuse University's Bandier music-industry program told. "The question is: Do they want to try and weather this, or do they want to fix the perceived problems? If they don't, then, over the long haul, I do think they are facing an existential crisis."

Perhaps it was the night's host Alicia Keys who put it best during her opening remarks: "It's

time for newness. And we refuse the negative energy. We refuse the old systems.”