

People & Places



Mickey Guyton (right), and Keith Urban perform 'What Are You Gonna Tell Her?' during the 55th annual Academy of Country Music Awards at the Grand Ol' Opry House on Sept 16 in Nashville, Tenn. (Inset): Carrie Underwood (left), accepts the entertainer of the year award in a tie with Thomas Rhett (right), during the annual Academy of Country Music Awards. (AP)

Music

Musical portraits

On new album, Corea plays with piano, fans

By Mark Kennedy

If you're very lucky, one day Chick Corea will make your portrait. And because he's a formidable musician, it will be a portrait entirely in musical notes.

Corea likes inviting volunteers onto the stage during solo concerts, sitting them down near his piano and creating spontaneous, entirely subjective tone poems about the person.

"It starts as a game — to try to capture something I see in music," he says. "While I play, I look at them a couple of times like a painter would. I try to see if, while I'm playing, are they agreeing with what I'm playing? Do they think that this is really a portrait of them? And usually they do."

Two such vivid portraits are included on his new double album "Plays", which captures Corea at various concerts armed simply with his piano. He's been playing solo piano shows since 1971 and likes the purity of it.

"Like a runner loves to run because it just feels good, I like to play the piano just because it feels good," he says. "I can just switch gears and go to another direction or go to another song or whatever I want to do. So it's a constant experiment."

Corea has earned his right to do whatever he wants, with a staggering 23 Grammy Awards. In 1968, he replaced Herbie Hancock in Miles Davis' group, playing on the landmark albums "In a Silent Way" and "...Brew".

Tributes

He formed his own avant-garde group, Circle, and then founded Return to Forever. He's worked on many other projects, including duos with Hancock and vibraphonist Gary Burton. He's recorded and performed classical music, standards, solo originals, Latin jazz and tributes to great jazz pianists.

The new double album is a peek into Corea's musical heart, containing songs he wrote about children decades ago as well as tunes by Mozart, Thelonious Monk and Stevie Wonder, among others. Their music is alive to him now, regardless of the era they performed. "My love for Mozart is now. My love for Stevie Wonder and Miles Davis is now," he says by phone from his home near Tampa, Florida. "So when I take that onstage and I mix it together, it's totally natural to me. It's how I think."

Bernie Kirsh, who recorded and co-produced the album, has been working with Corea since 1975 and says his friend combines remarkable technique, generosity of spirit and a sense of freedom.

Kirsh has worked with lots of musicians and knows they can be brusque. On the very first song he and Corea worked on, something went awry on the console. Kirsh braced for "a not exactly very friendly response". But Corea calmly said: "OK, let's do it again". Kirsh then knew: "This is going to be a blast. And it's been a wonderful, wonderful rise all these years."

In addition to the interpretations of great composers and the musical portraits on the new album, Corea also recorded two examples of a feature he's also been playing with onstage: The guest improviser.

He'll invite someone from the audience — it can be a 4-year-old who simply wants to poke at the piano or a professional musician who wants to go note-to-note with Corea — and they'll jam.

"It's pretty dangerous, man. And that's the fun of it. The fun of it is that it's dangerous," he says. "All kind of stuff happens when people come up". (AP)



Corea



Maren Morris accepts the female artist of the year award during the 55th annual Academy of Country Music Awards at the Grand Ol' Opry House on Sept 16 in Nashville, Tenn. (AP)

Variety

NEW YORK: Playwright-novelist Ayad Akhtar has been named the new president of PEN America, the human rights and literary organization.

Akhtar, who assumes the presidency Dec 2, succeeds novelist Jennifer Egan.

"PEN America has its work cut out for it in an era when the quest for truth is challenged as never before," Akhtar said in a statement. "PEN America has become a powerful bulwark standing for the power of literature to reveal truths and bridge divides, an essential force amid today's overlapping crises."

Akhtar, who turns 50 next month, is known for such plays as "Junk" and the Pulitzer Prize-winning "Disgraced." (AP)

NEW YORK: Stanley Crouch, a contentious and influential critic, columnist and fiction-and nonfiction writer who inspired by his knowledge and love of blues and jazz and his impulse to step over the line, died Wednesday at age 74.

His wife, Gloria Nixon-Crouch, told The Associated Press that he died at a hospice in New York City. He had been in poor health in recent years after suffering a stroke.

In a career dating back to the 1960s, Crouch was a columnist for the Village Voice and the New York Daily News, a guest on NPR and Charlie Rose's show, a jazz drummer, a founder of what became Jazz at Lincoln Center and mentor to Wynton Marsalis and many younger writers and musicians, an aficionado of baseball and American folklore and scourge of Toni Morrison, Spike Lee and Amira Baraka among others.

At home, he read, wrote and listened to music. Away from home, he might turn up anywhere — dining with then-Vice President Al Gore, chatting up musicians at the Village Vanguard or making a special appearance at a ceremony for the National Board of Review awards, when he accepted a prize on behalf of Quentin Tarantino, who appreciated Crouch's praise for "Pulp Fiction." He was also a favorite of documentary maker Ken Burns, his commentary appearing in "Jazz" and "The Civil War" among other films.

ACMs

Taylor Swift back with acoustic performance

Underwood, Rhett tie for top prize

NASHVILLE, Tenn., Sept. 17, (Agencies) — In a surprise twist that fit an unexpected year of firsts, Carrie Underwood and Thomas Rhett tied for entertainer of the year at the Academy of Country Music Awards (ACMs), the first time the top prize has been split between two artists.

Underwood and Rhett seemed equally taken back after host Keith Urban announced the tie at the awards show held at the Grand Ol' Opry House in Nashville, Tennessee, on Wednesday.

"Keith, what is happening right now?" Rhett asked, astounded, before thanking his family. Underwood appeared right after him remarking, "2020, man?" before adding, "I am more than happy to share this with Thomas Rhett."

The show on CBS had been delayed for months because of the pandemic, moved from Las Vegas to Nashville for the first time and held without audiences in empty venues. There was a lot of anticipation for the show, which featured Taylor Swift making her first appearance at the ACMs.

Underwood's win is her third total in that category and Rhett's first win. They beat out other nominees Eric Church, Luke Bryan and Luke Combs. Coincidentally, a woman hasn't won that award since 2011 when Swift last won it.

Swift didn't need a lot of bells and whistles for her highly anticipated return to the Academy of Country Music Awards. Swift made her first appearance at the ACMs in seven years on Wednesday with an acoustic performance of her song "betty" from her new record "folklore" in a darkened Grand Ol' Opry House. Unlike her extravagant tours and other awards show appearances, Swift kept it simple with just a couple of stage floodlights and a harmonica player for accompaniment, but her smile glowed as she strummed and sang the heartbreak song.

Combs still went home a winner by picking up album of the year and male artist of the year. After amassing tremendous streaming numbers and nine consecutive No. 1 country radio hits, Combs thanked fans for their support from the Bluebird Cafe.

"This is a lot to process right now, I just can't believe this," Combs said.

"I just want to thank everybody in my life, my team, my beautiful wife and the fans. You guys have done everything for me."

Country group Old Dominion won song of the year and group of the year, and band members Matthew Ramsey, Trevor Rosen and Brad Tursi earned additional individual awards as songwriters for "One Man Band."

The awards show aired from empty venues in Nashville with no fans and no applause, even when winners got up live to accept their awards. Ramsey, the lead singer of Old Dominion, said the empty venue and quiet made him think of friends and family they had lost.

"I can feel them all," Ramsey said. "They are so proud, and it's such an honor to receive this in their presence."

Hurricanes

Urban noted all the changes this year for the show and for the country in general, saying 2020 has been an "unpredictable and unsettling year." After noting wildfires on the West Coast, hurricanes in the South, Urban said the country is battling two pandemics: COVID-19 and social injustice.

"Far too many lives have been lost to both," he said. "But the examples set by essential workers, our first responders, along with the voices crying out for equality in all walks of life, have echoed around the world and right here in our country community."

Maren Morris, who was a leading nominee, won two awards, including female artist of the year and music event of the year, for a collaboration with Miranda Lambert, Caylee Hammack, Tenille Townes, Elle King and Ashley McBryde.

"This is so weird talking to no one, but I have so many people to thank. This is an award that I never expected to win," said Morris, who thanked her husband and baby boy, Hayes, before blurting out "Oh my, I have to pee!"

Blake Shelton and Gwen Stefani, weren't in Nashville, but turned a green screen room into a virtual replica of the Bluebird Cafe for their duet "Happy Anywhere." Shelton won single of the year for his song, "... Country."

Lambert performed a stripped-down version of her No. 1 song "Bluebird,"

at the Bluebird Cafe in a blue fringed shirt and a sparkly belt. Lambert's vocals seemed to fill up the space in the tiny songwriters' club surrounded by tables and chairs, but no fans.

In awards announced before the show aired, Rhett also won music video of the year, while Townes won new female artist of the year. Riley Green won new male artist. Duo Dan + Shay won vocal duo of the year, their second win in that category in a row.

Underwood sang a tribute to iconic female Opry members, including Patsy Cline, Reba McEntire, Martina McBride, Barbara Mandrell, Loretta Lynn and Dolly Parton. She effortlessly breezed through snippets of classics like "Crazy," "You Ain't Woman Enough," "Why'd You Come in Here Lookin' Like That," and "Fancy."

"They are some of my heroes and I am so honored to stand alongside them as a fellow member of the Opry," said Underwood, who sang her heart out to a venue that flickered with lights where people should have been.

Winners

- Entertainer of the year: Thomas Rhett and Carrie Underwood (tied)
- Female artist of the year: Maren Morris
- Male artist of the year: Luke Combs
- Duo of the year: Dan + Shay
- Group of the year: Old Dominion
- New female artist of the year: Tenille Townes
- New male artist of the year: Riley Green
- Album of the year: "What You See Is What You Get" — Luke Combs
- Single of the year: "... Country" — Blake Shelton
- Song of the year: "One Man Band" — Old Dominion
- Video of the year: "Remember You Young" — Thomas Rhett
- Songwriter of the year: Hillary Lindsey
- Music event of the year: "Fooled Around and Fell in Love" — Miranda Lambert feat. Maren Morris, Ashley McBryde, Tenille Townes, Caylee Hammack and Elle King



Crouch



Akhtar

a revolutionary musician, but a kind of exemplary citizen.

"The 21-year-old Parker was possessed by his music — by a ravenous need to improvise, to learn new tunes, to find new ways of getting through the harmonies with materials that would liberate him from clichés," Crouch wrote. "Parker seemed to have a crying soul, a spirit as troubled by the nature of life as it was capable of almost unlimited celebration." (AP)