

# UK honors Olivia Newton-John, Sam Mendes, Steve McQueen

LONDON, Dec 28, (AP) — Singer Olivia Newton-John and directors Sam Mendes and Steve McQueen all received high honors from the British government Friday.

“Grease” star Newton-John was made a dame — the female equivalent of a knight — for her singing and acting and for her charitable work supporting cancer research. Oscar-winning director Mendes of “American Beauty” fame was made a knight along with McQueen, director of “12 Years a Slave,” winner of the Oscar for best picture.

The three were among more than 1,000 people named on the New Year’s Honors list. Britain’s Cabinet Office publishes a list of the people receiving honors for merit, service or bravery twice a year: shortly before New Year’s Eve and on the Saturday in June when Queen Elizabeth II’s birthday is officially observed.

The list of 1,097 people made public late Friday gave recognition to standouts in the arts, science, research, charity, politics, community development and many other fields.

Newton-John, 71, said the honor was a recognition of her British heritage. She was born in Britain but moved to Australia with her family when she was 5.

“As a girl born in Cambridge, I am very proud of my British ancestry and so appreciative to be recognized in this way by the United Kingdom,” she said.

Newton-John, who has spoken eloquently about living with breast

cancer, said she was “grateful beyond words to be included with such an esteemed group of women who have received this distinguished award before me.”

Mendes, who has also directed two James Bond films and a number of well-received plays, said he was “amazed, delighted and extremely proud” with the news of the knighthood.

“I have stood on the shoulders of so many collaborators and colleagues over the last 30 years — actors, writers, designers, producers, technicians — to whom I owe a huge debt of gratitude. I would not be receiving this honor without them,” said the 54-year-old Mendes.

Singer Elton John, who has spent many years raising money to fight AIDS, was given an additional honor to go with the knighthood he received 21 years ago. He was appointed to the Order of the Companions of Honor.

### Charity

Another entertainer, hospital chaplain Wynne Roberts, received the British Empire Medal for raising roughly 250,000 pounds (\$328,000) for charity by performing as Elvis Presley dozens of times a year. He also performs many free shows in nursing homes, particularly for people with dementia, and credits Presley’s hits for spreading good cheer.

“When you’re singing these songs the negative effect of that ill-

ness is taken away from people because they are actually taken back, through music, to a very happy time,” he said.

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The first-ever **Amy Winehouse** exhibit in the **United States** will debut at the Grammy Museum in **Los Angeles** next month.

The Recording Academy told The Associated Press on Thursday that the late British singer’s popular outfits — including her halter dress worn at her final stage performance in **Belgrade** in 2011 — never-before-seen handwritten lyrics and home video, journal entries and more from her family’s personal archive will make up “Beyond Black — The Style of Amy Winehouse.” The exhibit opens Jan 17 and will run through April 13.

Winehouse died July 23, 2011, at her **London** home from accidental alcohol poisoning at age 27. She only released two albums, “Frank” and “Back to Black,” but had a tremendous impact on music fans and her peers, being praised for her jazz-like vocals and honest lyrics. She won five Grammys at the 2008 show, which she couldn’t attend because she was rejected for a US work visa. The singer, whose hits included “Rehab” and “You Know I’m No Good,” was also known for her distinctive look, including her beehive hairdo, cat eyeliner, ballet shoes, tattoos and more.

“Amy always credited my mother, her grandmother **Cynthia**, as a major influence, both stylistically — as she taught her the importance of grooming and having a look — and musically,” the singer’s father, **Mitch Winehouse**, said in a statement.

People

Variety



This Nov 24, 2019 file photo shows Lizzo performing ‘Jerome’ at the American Music Awards in Los Angeles. Lizzo has been named Entertainer of the Year by The Associated Press. Voted by entertainment staffers of the news cooperative, Lizzo dominated the pop, R&B and rap charts in 2019 with songs like ‘Truth Hurts’ and ‘Good As Hell.’ Though she released her first album in 2013, Lizzo dropped her major-label debut, ‘Cuz I Love You,’ this year and the success has made her the leading nominee at the 2020 Grammy Awards, where she is up for eight honors. (AP)

Film

Actress-singer takes a career victory lap

## Docu explores Ronstadt’s life, career

By David Bauder

Between the Kennedy Center Honors and a CNN documentary about her life debuting on television New Year’s Day, Linda Ronstadt is taking a career victory lap.

Ronstadt drew attention this month for a comment at a dinner for Kennedy honorees hosted by the State Department and Secretary Mike Pompeo. Ronstadt said she hadn’t planned to mention the Trump administration but did so to show support for fellow honoree Sally Field. The actress had remarked about living in an era where the idea of truth was being challenged, Ronstadt said.

“Half the room applauded and the other half sat in silence,” Ronstadt recalled. “I just wanted to say that I was in solidarity with her. I didn’t want her to stand up there by herself.”

During his remarks, Pompeo referenced a Ronstadt hit, “When Will I Be Loved,” saying he wondered when he’d be loved. When it was Ronstadt’s turn to speak, the 73-year-old retired singer tartly answered the question and said it would be “when he stops enabling Donald Trump.”

When will Ronstadt be loved? Now seems to be the time, with the well-received documentary, “Linda Ronstadt: The Sound of My Voice.” Viewers will see that Ronstadt’s career had two distinct stages.

There was the rock star, sex symbol days with hits like “You’re No Good,” “Heat Wave” and “Blue Bayou.” Part two began with her 1980 New York stage role in “The Pirates of Penzance,” ushering in adventurous projects featuring jazz standards, traditional Mexican recordings and trio discs with Emmylou Harris and Dolly Parton. Despite the fear of record company executives, many of the projects did quite well.

She now lives a quiet life in the San Francisco area,

her singing voice stilled by Parkinson’s Disease. Her last album, a collaboration with Cajun singer Ann Savoy that Ronstadt considers one of her best, was released in 2006. She performed her last concert in 2009.

“I didn’t do the work for prizes. I never took that into consideration,” she said. The recent recognition is “lovely, you know. I’m glad they like it. I like some of it and don’t like most of it. The good thing is it got better. My early work makes me cringe. Later on it got better.” She also had an admirer in Amy Entelis, an executive at CNN.

“She was iconic in my life,” said Entelis, who is in charge of CNN Films, and therefore, in position to green light the Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman documentary. It’s not charity work; biographies have done well for CNN’s film division, most notably “RBG” about Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and others are in the works on Anthony Bourdain and Julia Child.

### Admired

Ronstadt hasn’t been interested in cooperating with documentaries in the past but admired a film that Epstein had made about pioneering gay politician Harvey Milk.

Her participation was minimal, aside from narrating stories about her early life, including her Mexican heritage and family’s musical background, and a key final scene. Plenty of compatriots in the 1970s Los Angeles music scene were happy to talk, most notably J.D. Souther and Harris.

Ronstadt has deep roots in that scene; an early backing band eventually morphed into the Eagles. She paid Don Henley \$250 a week to play the drums.

One of the things Entelis appreciates about the film is that the music is given a chance to breathe, that it’s not presented as an all-too-brief afterthought.

Filmmakers resisted the obvious temptation to make

a tear-jerker, to completely frame it around the cruelty of a peerless singer no longer able to sing.

“My book doesn’t even mention that I have Parkinson’s, so they didn’t dwell on it,” Ronstadt said, referring to her 2013 autobiography. “I don’t think it would be very interesting. A lot of people get sick.”

Still, with the film nearly done, Entelis said it was clear there was something missing. That’s what led to the final scene, which shows Ronstadt with her cousin and nephew in Mexico as they sing the song “A La Orilla de un Palmar.”

Harris says in the film that her old trio partner doesn’t miss making records, but does miss singing. The ache in Ronstadt’s eyes in that scene is where you can see what Harris means. Ronstadt mouths the words, but you can’t really tell what comes out.

Entelis hopes for a large audience on New Year’s Day, a strategically selected premiere date. On a day when people are relaxed and usually seeking an escape from news, entertainment-oriented films do well for CNN.

CNN released the film in theaters earlier this year, and it earned some \$4.2 million, a strong showing for a documentary. “It’s safe to say that surprised us,” Entelis said. “It’s not that we didn’t love the film and thought it would be good for CNN, but we did not expect it to take off theatrically in that way.”

It surprised Ronstadt, too.

“When they approached me, I thought it would be a documentary film that would have one night on PBS and that would be it,” she said in an interview.

“I’m glad people like it,” Ronstadt said. “Sometimes they like things that aren’t very good and I think they only like it because they don’t have good taste. I think I know what I did. I’m happy with the good things I did and I wish the other parts were better, but I did my best.” (AP)

LONDON: One of pop superstar **George Michael**’s sisters has died exactly three years after her brother’s Christmas Day death in 2016.

A statement from family lawyer **John Reid** confirmed the unexpected death of **Melanie Panayiotou**, 55, on Wednesday and appealed for privacy.

“We can confirm that very tragically Melanie has passed away suddenly,” the statement said. “We would simply ask that the family’s privacy be respected at this very sad time. There will be no further comment.”

London’s Metropolitan Police said it received reports of the “sudden death of a woman” in her 50s in north London at around 7:30 pm on Christmas Day.

Police said the death is not being treated as suspicious and that a report will be given to the coroner.

Michael, whose real name was **Georgios Kyriacos Panayiotou**, compiled a long string of pop hits as a solo artist and earlier with Wham! A postmortem exam attributed his death at age 53 to natural causes — specifically, a heart condition and a fatty liver.

Melanie Panayiotou and other members of the late singer’s family posted a Christmas message on Michael’s official website two days before her death.

In the message, the family thanked fans for their goodwill messages, saying they “lift us when things are tough.” (AP)

LOS ANGELES: **Tom Hanks** may officially consider himself Greek.

Greece’s President **Prokopis Pavlopoulos** has signed an honorary naturalization order allowing the 63-year-old actor to claim Greek citizenship, his office told The Associated Press on Friday.

Hanks frequently spends his summer vacation on the Greek island of **Antiparos** and his wife, actress and producer **Rita Wilson**, is of Greek and Bulgarian ancestry.

Under Greek law, honorary naturalization may be granted to people “who have provided exceptional services to the country

or whose naturalization serves the public interest.” (AP)

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NEW YORK: **Alec Baldwin** didn’t slander a man in interviews about a parking dispute that turned physical, a judge has ruled as dueling lawsuits between the actor and the other driver continue.



Michael



Hanks

Baldwin’s remarks — including claims that **Wojciech Cieszkowski**’s driving was “really fast,” “really aggressive” and made the actor think his wife and son were about to be run over — were “hyperbole” and “rhetorical illustrations,” **Manhattan** judge **David B. Cohen** wrote Thursday.

“They are words of frustra-

tion with someone’s driving,” not accusations that amount to slander, Cohen wrote. He tossed out Cieszkowski’s slander claim, but his assault and battery allegations can proceed toward trial.

“The heart of the case will now move ahead,” said **Doug Lieb**, one of Cieszkowski’s attorneys. “We look forward to holding Mr Baldwin accountable

in court.” Baldwin’s lawyers, **Luke Nikas** and **Alex Spiro**, said Friday they were pleased with the decision.

The Emmy Award-winning actor pleaded guilty to harassment in the November 2018 confrontation. He went on to file a defamation suit of his own against Cieszkowski, a contractor. (AP)