

A show of talent

Inaugural valley awards spotlight top valley performers

BY BRUCE FESSIER
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The first Coachella valley Music Awards took tentative first steps into the arena of awards show pageantry Tuesday, providing a ceremony that was musically satisfying, if academically bewildering.

The event was staged at the Spotlight 29 Casino showroom by independent music promoter Tracy Dietlin of Mystic Avalanche, with critical late assistance from Lola Rossi and Johnny Meza of Prestige Entertainment. More than 700 people attended the \$30-a-person show, but Dietlin said she comped the 565 nominees, putting her well into the red.

The evening's big winner was Wiseman, an alt-rock band with a goth-vocal sound. It won four awards, including best alternative rock band and best lead vocalist in a band for Zachariah Wiser.

Rossi & Meza and House of Broken Promises each won three awards.

The four-hour music and awards presentations started 30 minutes late and faded to black about an hour later than scheduled. Dietlin said she arrived late to the casino because she was double-checking the tabulations up to the last minute.

Some 2,400 people cast votes for nominees selected by more than 100 judges. Some 700 voters filled out ballots from bars while 1,700 others voted online.

Music promoters from the McCalum Theatre, the Annenberg Theatre and the Coachella Valley Music & Arts Festival were not nominated, so the ceremony had the feel of being a celebration of bar bands. The winner of the best out-of-town band

was JD Priest, a jazzy, adult contemporary solo performer who has played at Caramba's in Rancho Mirage. The best promoter was Ming Bob, whose band, Ming Tran, won the dubious honor of being named best emo band.

John Stanley King, a favorite of The Desert Sun "Best of the Valley" readers polls, received the most overall votes from 10 nominations, Dietlin said, but won only two awards—for best cover band and best lead vocalist in a cover band.

But King, a former member of the Fred Waring Chorale, got to show off his musical and songwriting skills in a performance of his rhythmic original song, "Sippin' On My Coffee," that wowed even music fans not usually inclined to horn-driven rock.

As the event was winding down, King said the ceremony deserves support from the valley.

"If they can keep this going, if the bands will support this, it's going to be great," he said.

King and others lauded the great variety of music at the ceremony.

Highlights included performances by the Latin band Fronteras, featuring colorfully costumed dancers and an infectious rendering of their original song "Bendito Amor"; the hard-rock band House of Broken Promises, playing their deservedly nominated song, "Solver Spoon"; the award-winning jazz vocalist Mike Costly, playing the Duke Ellington classic "It Don't Mean A Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)" with a jazz band featuring Pat Rizzo and Marty Steele; and country singer Brian Scott, swinging hard on the

Elton John standard "Candle in the Wind."

Hosts Craig Michaels, Pattie Caruso and Rachel Spooner also kept the show moving smoothly once it actually got off the ground. Spooner sang a tuneful beginning of "Cold As Ice" to describe the backstage temperature.

But several of the bands didn't come close to fitting the categories for which they were nominated and some won! The classic-rock band, Feisty Joe, laughed at winning the best country rock band, and the hip-hop band winner, B Movie Superstars, showed they're not even a rap-rock band in their hard-rocking performance.

Dietlin said she resisted requests for even more categories, such as best karaoke. But she said she will trim the show next year by eliminating certain categories such as best emo.

The celebrity special award winners, include Queens of the Stone Age, Tyler Hilton, Eagles of Death Metal and Herb Jeffries, didn't show up to accept their awards, but the evening was still successful because of the spirit among the bands.

"This is the first time a lot of these kids have had dressing rooms and a full-blown stage like this," said Bruce Cathcart, manager of the best pop-punk band, JeKKel. "And the camaraderie backstage! They're high-fiving, they're hugging. And that makes it all worthwhile."

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