

Skinny When Wet ... Leonardo DiCaprio shows off his slim, sexy self in "The Beach," an action flick that succeeds despite its unrealistic plot. ... [page 8](#)

The Best and the Last ... Rock band Morphine recently released an album to remember — not only as its best work, but as its last after losing singer Mark Sandman to a heart attack. ... [page 7](#)

Singing in the, uh, Cabaret ... Pauper Players will take the stage tonight with its annual performance of Broadway Melodies, offering viewers a sampling of songs from popular shows. Broadway Cliff Notes. ... [page 6](#)

# DIVERSIONS

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## EMPTY PRAISE



Breakthrough rapper Eminem received Grammy nominations in three categories, best rap album, best rap solo performance and best rap performance by a duo or group, for *The Slim Shady LP* and its tracks "My Name Is" and "Guilty Conscience" (featuring Dr. Dre).



Grammy nominees, including Macy Grey, Martina McBride, Mary J. Blige, Sarah McLachlan and Christina Aguilera, posed with Recording Academy President Michael Greene and other Academy members.

The Grammys are the highest honor in music. But how well do they reflect what's actually good about the contemporary music world?

## Grammys, Industry Out of Tune

By ASHLEY ATKINSON  
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"I don't know what this means," Pearl Jam frontman Eddie Vedder said as he accepted the 1995 hard rock Grammy award. "I don't think it means anything."

Vedder expressed the sentiments of critics everywhere who say the Grammys are out of touch with the contemporary music industry, rewarding high sales and high-profile artists instead of real quality work.

The Grammys are only relevant to music "as entertainment, as in pointing your finger and holding your sides," said Scott Frampton, editor in chief of CMJ New Music Monthly.

"The Grammys," some have mockingly called the Recording Academy's highest honor. These are, after all, the people who gave Milli Vanilli the best new artist award in 1989.

And Grammy history is dotted with similar faux pas. In 1989, when the Grammys added the hard rock/metal category, the Academy chose not Metallica or Anthrax, which were both nominated, but flute-playing progressive rockers Jethro Tull.

The Rolling Stones didn't even get a Grammy nomination until 1994. Elvis won only three.

The Grammys, the official Web site proclaims, "are awarded by and to artists and technical professionals for artistic or technical achievement, not sales or chart positions."

But still, the awards can't seem to shake their reputation as nothing more than a musical name-recognition game.

This year's general-category nominations gave expected nods to teen pop and the Latin invasion. The Backstreet Boys, Ricky Martin, Santana and TLC all make multiple appearances.

Recording Academy Publicist Rudy Simpson said the 2000 nominations seemed to have gone over well. "Certainly a lot of people felt there was something for everyone as far as all the different genres are concerned," he said. "There hasn't been any negative feedback ... about this year's nominations."

The most surprising nominees were blues songstress Susan Tedeschi for best new artist, and jazz vocalist Diana Krall for album of the year. Both are virtually unknown to the audience that provides for the success of nominees like the Backstreet Boys.

In the company of the strictly pop artists that compose the rest of the album of the year nominees, Krall's album seems out of place. But, said Michael Kauffmann, Verve Records' senior vice president of sales, "It's as good as any record that's on the market in any genre. Comparing it to pop records is kind of apples-to-oranges, but in its realm it's been one of the best records of the year."

Krall and Tedeschi might have their day, but many talented artists are still passed over in favor of their more visible peers. Take the indie-pop outfit Magnetic Fields. The group's *69 Love Songs* grabbed the No. 3 spot on Spin's best-of-the-year list, and the 16th on CMJ's.

But there's nary a Grammy nomi-

nation in sight, not even in the best alternative music category.

Why? Critics say bands like Magnetic Fields are overlooked in the rock and pop categories because they don't get top 40 radio airplay and aren't supported by a major label — Magnetic Fields resides on Chapel Hill's own Merge Records. As to the Grammys' relevance to Merge and its artists, "There is none," said an employee. "It's something that we don't ever think about when we're putting out records here."

Best female rock vocal nominee Ani DiFranco was one of the few independent-label artists nominated in a major category this year. Tracy Mann, publicist for DiFranco's Righteous Babe label, said "statistically, it's quite unusual that someone who doesn't sell millions of records would get nominated."

According to CMJ's Frampton, a Grammy doesn't mean anything — unusual or not. "If you want to say they're relevant as in having an effect on what anyone is listening to and buying and caring about among our audience, they aren't," he said.

What he calls the Grammys' "track record of missing the mark by a wide margin ... just shows how the people in those kinds of organizations don't get it and never will," he said.

"And that only strengthens the underground."

There's no denying, however, the Grammys' potential to jump-start sales and interest in an artist. Bob Dylan's *Time Out of Mind* leaped from No. 122 to No. 27 in the Billboard charts the week after its album of the year win in 1998.

Kauffmann said it's when an artist gets to perform that the Grammys really make a difference in sales. "Historically, it's the non-pop artists, when they do have a chance to perform, that it makes an impact," he said. In 1998, Krall performed with a group on the telecast. "After the 11 seconds that she did some vocals, we actually saw her sales in the week following the Grammys go up about 120 percent," Kauffmann said.

And some maintain that the Grammys still mean something to an artist, not only on a sales level. "To be nominated is a great thing because it's recognition that what you're doing with your craft is something that people are supporting," Kauffmann said.

Academy President Michael Greene, who took the post in 1985, has been credited with what improvements in credibility the Grammys have made. He's increased academy membership by 8,000, changed voting procedures and added new categories. They now total 91, including 1998's best dance album, remixer of the year and best Latin rock/alternative additions.

The awards began making their first strides toward contemporary appeal in 1995, when Alanis Morissette's edgy *Jagged Little Pill* took home album of the year. 1999's Grammys saw further growth in street credibility, with five awards for hip-hop diva Lauryn Hill, the kind of just-out-of-the-mainstream artist that the general-category Grammys traditionally ignore.

To vote, members must be creative or technical professionals who have worked on at least six albums. This requirement limits voters, to some extent, to older members — those that critics allege are behind the times. About 9,000 members qualify.

Voting members and record labels submit recordings, which are then categorized. Voters pick their top five from each list to decide the nominees, and vote again to determine the winners.

But even with recent improvements, the awards continue to waver between clarity and cluelessness: Bubblegum rapper Will Smith took home best rap solo in both 1998 and 1999, and there's still the confused distinction between the rock, hard rock, metal and alternative fields (Nine Inch Nails is metal? Who knew?)

It remains to be seen whether the Grammys will progress beyond their popularity-contest mentality. Just as long as Ricky Martin hasn't been lip-syncing ...

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### The Year's Best

#### Album of the Year Nominees

Backstreet Boys, *Millennium*  
Dixie Chicks, *Fly*  
Diana Krall, *When I Look in Your Eyes*  
Santana, *Supernatural*  
TLC, *Fanmail*

#### Billboard Top 200 Chart

1. Backstreet Boys, *Millennium*  
2. Britney Spears, ... *Baby One More Time*  
3. Shania Twain, *Come On Over*  
4. 'N Sync, *'N Sync*  
5. Ricky Martin, *Ricky Martin*

#### CMJ New Music Monthly

1. Tom Waits, *Mule Variations*  
2. Flaming Lips, *The Soft Bulletin*  
3. Wilco, *Summer Teeth*  
4. Moby, *Play*  
5. Rage Against the Machine, *The Battle of Los Angeles*

#### Spin Magazine

1. Nine Inch Nails, *The Fragile*  
2. Rage Against the Machine, *The Battle of Los Angeles*  
3. Moby, *Play*  
4. Magnetic Fields, *69 Love Songs*  
5. Prince Paul, *Prince Among Thieves*  
Handsome Boy Modeling School, *So ... How's Your Girl*



Garbage received Grammy nominations for best rock performance by a duo or group and best rock song, for "Special" from the album *Version 2.0*.