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A Night to Honor Bands That Jam

By JON PARELES

Imagine current pop turned inside out. Playing concerts would be a living rather than a promotional tool, bands would take musical chances nightly, wardrobe would be an afterthought, a group could release a dozen live albums a year, and gray hair and wrinkles would garner respect. Fans would bypass radio and television and get information from other fans (via the Internet), and music's past would be a foundation rather than a scrap heap.

That is the realm of jam bands, who had their annual reckoning with the fourth Jammy Awards on Tuesday night at the Theater at Madison Square Garden, with dancers on their feet and marijuana smoke in the air. Jam bands bring music's ancient business model - the roving troubadour - to the interconnected modern world. While selling pop music on expensively produced and promoted CD's is a paradigm under siege, jam bands have flourished as concert mainstays and as an alternative to canned music.

Presentations of the awards, chosen by 50,000 online voters, whiled away set changes as the concert celebrated the cooperative, genre-hopping spirit of jam bands. No group stayed insular for long. The Harlem Gospel Choir sang "Higher and Higher" to start the concert, then joined the funk band Soulive. Slick Rick rapped with the Disco Biscuits, whose jams use mix funk and pulsating dance-floor electronica.

Reggae met New Orleans rhythm-and-blues as the Jamaican songwriter Toots Hibbert (minus the Maytals) sang with Dr. John on keyboards, George Porter Jr. of the Meters on bass and a New Orleans band. Perry Farrell of Jane's Addiction sang with the String Cheese Incident, which brings Celtic touches to its Grateful Dead emulation.

The scene is full of paradoxes. Dedicated to improvisation, jam bands have also become preservationists for older styles. And fans drawn by the present-tense concert experience are equally determined to record and tabulate them.

The audience holds on to a 1960's-flavored sense of community. An award was given to Justin Baker, whose nonprofit Conscious Alliance collected 20 tons of food for the hungry at jam-band shows last year. "We just rent the trucks; you guys fill 'em up," he said. Drugs were not disowned; Alan Grey, who won an award for the album

cover of the String Cheese Incident's "Untying the Not", said, "I'd like to thank God and LSD and all the psychedelics for the beautiful visions of our infinite being."

But the winner of the new groove (for new bands) award, Psychedelic Breakfast, recently changed its name to the Breakfast. Phish's summer tour was named Tour of the Year, and Moe's "Wormwood" won the studio album award.

Fans continue to cherish the legacy of the Grateful Dead - whose album "The Closing of Winterland: Dec. 31, 1978," won the award for Archival Live Album - and of the Allman Brothers Band, whose past and present members dominated the program.

The Allmans' bassist, Oteil Burbridge, played fleet melodies (sometimes scat-singing along) over percussive, thumb-popping riffs from Victor Wooten, the Flecktones' bassist. Dickey Betts, a founder of the Allmans who was fired from the band, played guitar and sang his Allmans hits with Reid Genauer and the Assembly of Dust, along with Edie Brickell. Later he jammed with bands led by his replacements, Derek Trucks and Warren Haynes.

The Derek Trucks Band was taken over by the venerable soul singer Solomon Burke, who traded vocal lines with Mr. Trucks's stinging slide-guitar leads and preached an election-year mini-sermon: "Come November, we need to make the change," he exhorted.

Mr. Haynes also leads Gov't Mule. He collected multiple awards: as songwriter for the Allmans' "Old Before My Time" and for live performance and live album with Gov't Mule on "The Deepest End," a New Orleans concert. He accepted the award for DVD for the Dave Matthews Band's "Central Park Concert," where he sat in.

Gov't Mule performed its brawny, doleful Southern rock, and Chris Robinson, formerly of the Black Crowes, shared the vocals on Neil Young's "Southern Man." Then the rest of the Black Crowes reunited alongside Gov't Mule to perform "Sometime Salvation."

Mr. Haynes, Mr. Betts, the guitarist Robert Randolph, the jazz saxophonist James Carter and the fiddler Michael Kang from the String Cheese Incident also sat in with Steve Winwood, who won a lifetime achievement award. The night before Mr. Winwood was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame for albums with Traffic, Blind Faith and his own bands. "It's wonderful to know that I've been jamming for the past 40 years," he said.