

2006 Canadian Smooth Jazz Awards

On Friday, April 7th, I donned a suit and stepped into my first music industry awards ceremony. I even had the good fortune to be attending as an award nominee.

No, it wasn't the Juno awards, and there wasn't even a red carpet. No, the Canadian Smooth Jazz Awards are still in their infancy, in their second year, and word hasn't yet gotten out to a large enough audience to warrant even local newspaper coverage.

Not that these awards are frivolous or irrelevant, it's just that Smooth Jazz is still a very young musical genre in Canadian radio. I know that many radio listeners can't name 3 radio genres, but certainly a very few of them would be able to describe Smooth Jazz. Even the programmers in Canadian Smooth Jazz radio don't necessarily agree on the right mix of music for their listeners. Around Toronto, Smooth Jazz radio leans heavily towards saxophone, while out in Western Canada, it's more a guitar- and vocal-oriented bent coming out of stations like Calgary's California 103. So what is Smooth Jazz anyway? Traditional jazz curmudgeons will describe it as "the kind of



Allister and Bob Farrow, Broadcaster of the Year



Chris Smith performs his nominated song, "Over The Moon"

maddening muzak that you're forced to hear in the long, slow elevator ride up to your accountant's office". I'd prefer to stay non-partisan (non-genre-san, perhaps?) and describe it as the meeting point of jazz, pop and adult contemporary music. As such, you shouldn't be surprised to hear Rob Thomas, Michael Bubl  and George Benson all playing on the same Smooth Jazz radio station.

Now, back to the awards show. As I said, this is the 2nd annual Canadian Smooth Jazz Awards show, and my hat is off to the organizers and producers of the show. Not only was the array of performers both varied and extremely talented, but the presenters were funny, friendly, and well-prepared for their appearance on-stage. Kudos to the writers – those tele-prompted jokes came across as funny, never corny. Of course, it helped that all the presenters were literate enough to read the lines without stuttering and stammering, a blessing we can't always seem to expect from celebrities...



Steve Oliver wows the crowd with Buffalo Springfield's "For What It's Worth"



Carol Welsman performs "Walkin' After Midnight"

As I said earlier, I was attending the show as an award nominee, and despite the fact that my supporters went totally crazy soliciting votes in my favour, the speech I had rehearsed was my best "it's an honour just to be nominated". After all, not only was I up against popular, seasoned artists like Warren Hill, Dave Sereny, Chris Smith and John Cody, but international pop sensation Michael Bubl  was also nominated in the same category. If it isn't an honour to be recognized in this kind of company, then I must be really out of touch...

So I took my seat (assigned an aisle seat near the front – the organizers seem to have been thinking about how to keep all nominees close enough to reach the stage quickly), with my dazzling wife by my side (formal occasions really agree with her), and looked around me – the hall was packed with artists and fans alike, a terrific turn-out.

Nobody was recognizing *my* face in the crowd, or asking for an autograph or a picture. I'm an award nominee, but I'm still an unknown in this crowd. Heck, I won't even describe myself as a Smooth Jazz artist. Sure, there's a definite jazz/blues influence in my style, and my song "If Ever I Cried" has been enthusiastically adopted by a few radio programmers across the country, but nobody in this crowd would have heard much about me (yet...). Guess what? I'm just as guilty as them, since I don't even recognize half the names on the nominee list, and for the names I do recognize, I likely wouldn't know the accompanying face even if I spilled my red wine on them. Like I said, I'm not exactly a Smooth Jazz artist myself. I *did* recognize that Bubl  guy's name...



Full stage, fuzzy photo – but isn't all jazz kind of fuzzy?...

So I sat and thoroughly enjoyed the performances, the presenters, and the winners accepting their awards. Especially awesome were the performances by Warren Hill (a wizard on the saxophone) and Steve Oliver (a brilliant solo rendition of Buffalo

Springfield's "For What It's Worth" on guitar, vocal and vocalized percussion sounds), and of course the show finale, with a stage packed with performers also including Bob James (recognized with a lifetime achievement award), Jeff Golub, and Alexander Zonjic (who also did an excellent job as host of the show).

Late in the show, Marc Jordan and Carol Welsman appeared on-stage to present the award in my category, "Best Original Composition". As I said, I pretty much figured Michael Bubl 's "Home" was going to sweep up, but still there was a moment when my hairs stood on end, as they read the names of the nominees before tearing open the red envelope. It was like listening to the lottery results, when you've already matched 5 out of 6 numbers, just waiting to hear that last number announced. Bubl  had already taken the prize in his two other nominated categories, but could it be possible that the unknown, the underdog, might get to take home an award? It seemed like a long time waiting for the result, the

exhilaration bursting up from inside my gut. Of course, Michael Bubl  won the award, what were we all expecting? But it didn't hurt, I didn't suddenly feel like throwing up on my new shoes, I was genuinely happy that the award went to the international superstar. Sure, it would have been fantastic to hear my name called, but it would feel all wrong, like the entire audience would be saying to themselves, "Huh? I've never even heard that song...". No, in the end, I think being nominated at this point in my career was even *better* than winning. I haven't done the homework yet, haven't garnered the huge following yet, honestly haven't earned it. It's better not to peak too soon, eh?

The awards show was filmed by Rogers for broadcasting April 23rd, 2006 on Rogers cable channel 10/63, beginning at 8pm. Check it out - without all the pretention and fanfare that accompanies, say, the Junos, the 2nd annual Canadian Smooth Jazz Awards stands up as a professional and thoroughly entertaining night of entertainment and recognition.



Warren Hill and Allister share the experience of "not winning" in the "Best Original Composition" category.



Allister and Carol Welsman (winner, "Keyboardist of the Year") have a pianist-to-pianist chat.

Awards were presented to:

- The Clayton/Scott Group - "Group of the Year"
- Michael Bubl  - "Album of the Year"
- Molly Johnson - "Female Vocalist of the Year"
- Jesse Cook - "Guitarist of the Year"
- Carol Welsman - "Keyboardist of the Year"
- Michael Bubl  - "Male Vocalist of the Year"
- Bob Farrow, Wave 94.7 FM - "Broadcaster of the Year"
- Warren Hill & Alexander Zonjic (tied) - "Wind Instrumentalist of the Year"
- Michael Bubl  - "Best Original Composition of the Year"
- Chris Botti - "International Artist of the Year"

Bob James - George Benson Lifetime Achievement Award

Congratulations to all the winners!!



Up And Coming...

- ▶▶ Saturday, April 15th, see Allister Bradley & Atlantic Ave. on stage at Lulu's Dine and Dance in Kitchener. Show runs from 7:30pm to 11:30pm, and this will be the first show as a duo, so check out the new songs and new sound!
- ▶▶ Wednesday, April 26th, see Allister playing with a new jazz trio (yet to be named) at Bingeman's in Kitchener, for CHYM's Professional Assistant Day luncheon.
- ▶▶ See www.allisterbradley.com for more information on these and other upcoming appearances.