

"16th Annual American Music Awards"

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Michael Jackson, "Award of Achievement" speech transcript

I'd like to thank God, who makes all things possible. I'd like to thank my mother and father, Katherine and Joseph Jackson. I'd like to thank Berry Gordy, who gave me my first professional start in show business, the Epic family, Walter Yetnikoff, Larry Stessel, Glen Bundman, Frank Dileo, Quincy Jones, and Bruce Swedien. I love you. And the public. Thank you.

"Los Angeles Times" (February 1, 1989) (archived)

On stage at the 16th annual American Music Awards Monday at the Shrine Auditorium, the evening belonged to George Michael and Michael Jackson.

Backstage, however, the two did little to liven up a generally gray parade of mainstream performers who seemed to have little to say and little to show in terms of fashion.

Appearances before the press by two members of L.A.'s renegade metal band Guns N' Roses--which had already disrupted the show's schedule by arriving late for its live performance--and by a posse of rappers congratulating double rap winners D.J. Jazzy Jeff & the Fresh Prince were the shining moments in an otherwise gray parade.

While the notoriously shy Jackson--the recipient of a special "Award of Achievement"--did stop in the photo pit, he declined to take questions.

George Michael, however, did come through the interview area--a small curtained-off section within a cavernous wing of the Shrine. But the bestubbed singer, whose three wins Monday tied him with country singer Randy Travis as the evening's most-honored performer, displayed little of the show-biz flash or fashion sense that has helped make him so popular.

Michael's awards in the male soul/R&B; singer and favorite soul/R&B; album categories (the other was for favorite pop/rock singer) did represent something of a breakthrough--the first time these awards have gone to a white performer. The English singer said that winning in the soul categories was his "greatest honor."

But he refused to speculate on his chances at the Grammy Awards ceremony, which will be held Feb. 22 at the same site. He did acknowledge, though, that he cannot repeat his American Music Awards sweep, since he is nominated for only two Grammys.

"In terms of awards, I've always done better with the public than with the industry," Michael told about 50 members of the media, referring to the fact that the American Music Awards are based on a poll of 20,000 consumers, while the Grammys are voted on by members of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences.

Monday's show, telecast Monday evening by ABC on a tape-delayed basis, was largely notable for precision, starting right at the scheduled 4 p.m. and ending within its allotted three hours. It was left to the upstarts in the heavy-metal and rap categories (both part of the show for the first time this year) to liven things up backstage.

Guns N' Roses guitarist Slash had this to say when asked whether winning awards like the trophy it took for the favorite pop/rock single ("Sweet Child O' Mine") matters to the band:

"Yeah, it means we've been accepted by the industry that tried to put us down. It's like giving the finger to everybody."

Asked how he is enjoying his success, the grinning, bleary-eyed, staggering Slash simply raised his cup and named his favorite liquor store.

Philadelphia-based D.J. Jazzy Jeff & the Fresh Prince, spouting anti-drug and clean-living messages, were quite a contrast to that display. But their statements about rap's acceptance rang just as much of vindication as Slash's comments.

"It means people see rap is music," said the Fresh Prince, who rattled off sales figures of top rap acts to show that the genre is more than a fad.

If the pair, whose "He's the D.J., I'm the Rapper" album brought them their trophies, were somewhat reserved, fellow nominees Run-D.M.C. and Public Enemy's Flavor Flav compensated when they joined them around the interview microphone.

Flav--who commented that just having the rap categories was a victory for all rappers--was particularly noteworthy: With his Grace-Jones-meets-Don-King haircut, gold teeth, white leather jacket and trademark clock hanging from his neck, the rapper provided the closest thing to a fashion statement the evening had to offer.

And while most of the participants quietly went their way after meeting the press, Flav hung around posing for pictures and bantering with anyone within earshot long after the show was over.

The only other apparel of note belonged to award presenter Paula Abdul, who easily took this year's unofficial cleavage award.

Among the no-show winners were Def Leppard, which won in the heavy-metal band and album ("Hysteria") categories; Tracy Chapman, the expected Grammy champion, who took new artist honors Monday, and Guns N' Roses drummer Steven Adler (sick with the flu), who was replaced for the band's performance by notorious heavy-metal madman Don Henley.

"Video Pioneer Award" inscription. Chris Cadman's "Michael Jackson the Maestro"

For his pioneering efforts in the field of music videos epitomized by 'The Triumph', a pre 1980's breakthrough in concept and special effects, and THRILLER, an innovative combination of drama, music and dance. The Video Pioneer Award is given to Michael Jackson on the occasion of his new feature length anthology, Moonwalker becoming the largest selling music home video of all time.

"Award of Achievement" inscription. Chris Cadman's "Michael Jackson the Maestro"

Because his album, BAD, is the first ever to generate five number one singles, because it has been a number one bestseller for a record breaking twenty five countries around the world, and because it has been the largest international seller in each of the last two years, the American Music Award of Achievement is presented to Michael Jackson on January 30, 1989.