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Schooling The Next Generation Of Grammy Winners

In the face of budget cuts, new technologies and shrinking industry profits, the Recording Academy and the Grammy Foundation are expanding their music education push
By Gail Mitchell

The Grammy Awards are only one night. The other 364 days of the year, the Recording Academy and the Grammy Foundation are focused on a less glamorous, but arguably more vital initiative: music education. Emphasizing its importance—and even teaching aspiring musicians directly—has been a founding tenet of both organizations, but this year their efforts seem to be intensifying.

“It has always been my belief that music and music education have a significant impact on a child’s life—academically, socially, culturally and spiritually,” says Neil Portnow, president/CEO of the Recording Academy and the Grammy Foundation. “It made all the difference for me, and I’m proud that we uphold that mission with the many hands-on programs and opportunities we offer students who want to pursue a career in music.”

Earlier this year, the Recording Academy and the Grammy Foundation announced the first Music Educator Award, which recognizes music educators “for their contributions and their positive influence on their students’ musical experiences,” Portnow says. More than 30,000 initial nominations will be winnowed down to 10 finalists, with the inaugural award presented during Grammy Week 2014. The winner will attend the Grammys and receive a \$10,000 honorarium. The remaining nine educators will receive \$1,000, and the schools of all 10 finalists will be awarded matching grants.

The Music Educator Award is among a host of new and ongoing educational initiatives by the Recording Academy and the Grammy Foundation. In July, Grammy U began its Summer School session with “Art of the Crossfade: Life According to the Mix.” Streamed live from Red Bull’s headquarters in Santa Monica, Calif., through Google Hangout, the multimedia presentation/performance featured DJ/producer J. Period and University of Southern California professor of music and culture Josh Kun discussing DJ’ing, popular music and more. Finding a progressive way to merge academic and musical experiences is the premise behind the series. As Kun lectured, J. Period simultaneously underscored key points through live demonstrations. “It’s an evolution of the academic lecture—a real immersive experience,” J. Period says. “This next generation is preprogrammed to lose attention after a short amount of time; this

series engages them in a different way.”

The Grammy Foundation also oversees the Grammy Signature Schools program, which recognizes schools for their commitments to music with an annual grant; Grammy in the Schools, which includes USC’s yearly Grammy Career Day; and Grammy SoundChecks, where students sit in on a pro soundcheck and learn about touring. Grammy Camp—where high schoolers study engineering, performance, business and more—just closed out its ninth year.

“In this day and age where music budgets are typically the first to be cut, it’s more important than ever to ensure that youth have access to music programs,” Portnow says. “I’m also pleased to say that many students in our programs are transitioning into careers in the music industry, which certainly bodes well for the health and future of our business.” ●



J. Period at a Grammy U Summer School session.