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MUSIC

Grammys give a tip of the hat to Nile Rodgers

Producer, co-founder of Chic is saluted for 40 years of hitmaking

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LOS ANGELES In an early event, the Grammys honored producer Nile Rodgers for his four-decade career in music, which includes co-founding the disco group Chic.

Musicians such as Kathy Sledge; Diane Warren; Earth, Wind & Fire's Verdine White; and "Weird Al" Yankovic gathered Tuesday at Village Studios for the event, sponsored by the Producers and Engineers Wing of the Recording Academy. Among the most interesting takeaways from the evening:

He's taking an emotional approach to the new Chic album. The first Chic album in more than two decades is set for release this year, and the first single arrives next month.

Rodgers began work on the album four years ago when tapes from the Warner library were returned to him. Given that most members of Chic have since died (including co-founder Bernard Edwards in 1996), "I approached the music as if somehow they were resurrected," Rodgers says. "It's almost like two strangers in a strange land, like talking to a brother who's been away for a long time, wakes up from a coma and is like, 'What world is this?'"

The key to Rodgers' career longevity is determination.

"When I was younger, one of my most influential music teachers told me that the only working



MAURY PHILLIPS, WIREIMAGE

Rodgers, founding member of the '70s group Chic, is honored by his peers Tuesday in L.A.

definition of discipline I needed to know was, 'Discipline is the ability to delay gratification,'" Rodgers told USA TODAY on the red carpet before the event. "So you just go to work every day and hope things work out. That's what I do."

I'm Coming Out was inspired by Diana Ross impersonators.

Rodgers was at a gay club checking out new music and saw "at least six Diana Ross impersonators in the bathroom," he says. Running outside to a payphone, he called Edwards and said, "Yo, bro, write this down. Write down: 'I'm coming out.' ... We got to write a song called *I'm Coming Out* to show Diana Ross' allegiance, or just the way the gay community admires her."

He won his first Grammys last year. It's hard to believe that

Rodgers took home his first statuettes in 2014, including album of the year for his work on Daft Punk's *Random Access Memories*. He also won for record of the year and pop duo/group performance for *Get Lucky* with Daft Punk and Pharrell Williams.

"Pharrell and Daft Punk kept looking at me, going, 'This should be old hat to you.' And I'm like, 'What're you talking about?' (They said), 'You didn't win a Grammy for (producing) *We Are Family* (by Sister Sledge)? *Like a Virgin* (by Madonna)? *Let's Dance* (by David Bowie)? ... How could that be possible?'"

When they won the night's top honor, "I was blown away," he continues. "I couldn't believe that a dance record won album of the year. So I am honored to be standing here. Because dance music changed my life."