RECORD OF THE YEAR

The diverse array of nominees includes a soul-shaking ballad about lost love, a wistful remembrance of youth and an angst-filled rap-rockbreakout.

“Hello”
ADELE
Producers: Greg Kurstin, Engineers/Mixers: Julian Burg, Tom Elmhirst, Greg Kurstin, Liam Nolan, Alex Pasco
Mastering Engineer: Tom Coyne, Randy Merrill
From: 25
Label: XL Recordings/Columbia Records

“Formation”
BEYONCÉ
Producers: Beyoncé Knowles, Peter Rice, Steve Mac, Jordan Terrell Carter, Stuart White, Mastering Engineer: Dave Kutch
From: Lemonade
Label: Parkwood Entertainment/Columbia Records

“7 Years”
LUKAS GRAHAM
Producers: Future Animals, Pilo, Engineers/Mixers: Delbert Bowles, Sebastian Fugh, Stefan Forrest, David Latief, Mastering Engineer: Tom Coyne
From: Lukas Graham
Label: Warner Bros. Records

“Work”
RIHANNA FEATURING DRAKE
Producers: Boi-1da, Engineer/Mixers: Noel “Gadget” Campbell, Kuk Harrell, Manny Marroquin, Noah “40” Shebib, Marcos M. Tovar, Mastering Engineer: Chris Gehringer
From: Anti
Label: Westbury Road Entertainment

“Stressed Out”
TWENTY ONE PILOTS
Producers: Mike Elizondo, Tyler Joseph, Engineer/Mixers: Neal Avon, Adam Hawkins
Mastering Engineer: Chris Gehringer
From: Blurryface
Label: Fuel by Ramen

Five years after taking home record of the year for “Rolling in the Deep,” Adele could become the first artist with multiple wins in the top song category since Norah Jones in 2003 and 2005. Released in October 2015, “Hello” announced the U.K. superstar’s return to music after a three-year absence (since “Skyfall”) and swiftly became the 15th song to debut at No. 1 in the history of the Billboard Hot 100 (which is ultimately topped for so consecutive weeks). A love ballad ballad in the mold of her earlier hit “Someone Like You,” “Hello,” the lead single off 25—which is nominated for album of the year—was produced and co-written by Greg Kurstin (Six, Pink, Kelly Clarkson), who’s up for his third producer of the year, nonclassical Grammy.

“Formation” is Beyoncé’s third song to win record of the year. The multi-hyphenate released Lemonade in June, a powerful visual album with a hour-long HBO special in April, but lead single “Formation” was released two months earlier, along with a music video evoking both the Black Lives Matter movement and Hurricane Katrina. (A day after its release, Beyoncé made news when she performed the song during halftime at Super Bowl 50, flanked by dancers dressed as Black Panthers.) Co-produced by Mike Will Made It and co-written by Rae Sremmurd’s Swae Lee, “Formation,” which reached No. 10 on the Hot 100, is Lemonade’s highest-charting single. She has been nominated three times as solo artist (and once with Destiny’s Child) for record of the year but has yet to win the category.

“7 Years” was Lukas Graham’s breakthrough American hit—peaking all the way at No. 2 on the Hot 100—rightfully evoked comparisons to Cat Stevens for its mellow pop-pop. ("Will I think the world is cold?/Will I have a lot of children who can warn me?""). But don’t call it “Father and Son, Pt. 3.” There is an edge to frontman Lukas Forchhammer’s storytelling, as he recalls smoking pot by age 11 and respectfully acknowledges the friends he had to leave behind as an adult in his quest for musical glory, that makes this saga entirely the Danish quartet’s own.

“Work” is a follow-up to Rihanna’s 2010 smash “What’s My Name,” became the 14th chart-topper of her career, putting her ahead of Michael Jackson (13) and third only to The Beatles (30) and Mariah Carey (19). A midtempo dancehall track that’s more minimal than recent Rihanna hits “We Found Love” and “Diamonds,” “Work” was released just hours before the long-delayed Anti finally dropped in January, and it’s one of eight nominations for Rihanna—the most the artist has received in a single year.

“Stressed Out” will compete at the Grammys nearly two years after Twenty One Pilots released it. The Columbus, Ohio, duo (Tyler Joseph and Josh Dun) broke through with fourth album Blurryface, earning its first No. 1 debut on the Billboard 200, while “Stressed Out” slowly crossed over from rock to pop and eventually reached No. 2 on the Hot 100. Top five singles “Ride” and “Heathens” followed, and did an appearance on Saturday Night Live. A rap-rock track sung from the point of view of irascible fictional character Billie Jean, “Stressed Out” was co-produced by Mike Elizondo, who co-wrote 50 Cent’s “In Da Club” before going on to work with rock acts Linkin Park and Avenged Sevenfold.
SONG OF THE YEAR

**“Hello”**
ADELE

*Songwriters* Adele Adkins, Greg Kurstin
*Publishers* Universal Songs of PolyGram International, EMI April Music/Kurstin Music
*From* 25
*Label* XL Recordings/Columbia Records

December 31, 2016 – January 7, 2017

What links a sure-thing like “Hello” and a left-field smash like “I Took a Pill in Ibiza” — or any of these nominees? That’s easy: sincerity, and mastery of craft.

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**“Formation”**
BEYONCE

*Songwriters* Khaiil Brown, Achaton Hogan, Beyoncé Knowles, Michael L. Williams II
*From* Lemonade
*Label* Def Jam Recordings

Released just a day before it was performed for more than 100 million people at Super Bowl 50 in February, “Formation” was the foundation of a landmark year for Beyoncé. The spare song consisted of just Bi$es and guitar, with assistance from Ed Sheeran on backing vocals and a clutch trumpet break from Phillip Bailey. The gently dismissive kiss-off showcases some of the most cutting break-up lyrics in recent pop — “My mama don’t like you, and she likes everyone” — but burns by on such a sweet breeze that it somehow never comes off sour. “Love Yourself” did the trick for solo Bieber: The song became his third straight No. 1 on the Hot 100 in February.

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**“Love Yourself”**
JUSTIN BIEBER

*Songwriters* Justin Bieber, Benjamin Levin, Ed Sheeran
*Publishers* SONGS OF Universal 0/b/o Please Don’t Forget to Pay Me Music/Universal Music 0/b/o Bieber Time Publishing/Sony-ATV Songs
*From* Purpose
*Label* Def Jam Recordings

As if to show that he didn’t need the help of megaproducers like Skrillex and Diplo to have grown-up hits, Bieber released a fourth single, “Love Yourself,” from Purpose that didn’t have a beat. The sparse song consisted of just Bi$es and guitar, with assistance from Ed Sheeran on backing vocals and a clutch trumpet break from Phillip Bailey. The gently dismissive kiss-off showcases some of the most cutting break-up lyrics in recent pop — “My mama don’t like you, and she likes everyone” — but burns by on such a sweet breeze that it somehow never comes off sour. “Love Yourself” did the trick for solo Bieber: The song became his third straight No. 1 on the Hot 100 in February.

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**“7 Years”**
LUKAS GRAHAM

*Songwriters* Christopher Brody Brown, Lukas Forchhammer, Stefan Forrest, David LaBr, Mortel Pilegaard, Morten Ristorp
*From* Lukas Graham
*Label* Warner Bros. Records

One of the year’s most unpredictable smashes, “7 Years” took a music-box melody and an unapologetically sentimental lyric to No. 2 on the Hot 100. Sung with confidence (“Too many people don’t have big enough balls or ovaries to be themselves,” frontman Lukas Forchhammer told *Billboard*), and sincerity, the group’s story of friends, family and music through the decades connected with audiences like few other songs in 2016. “I know the smallest voices, they can make it major,” sings Forchhammer. The song proved as much.

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**“I Took a Pill in Ibiza”**
MIKE POSNER

*Songwriter* Mike Posner
*Publishers* North Greenway Productions/Sony-ATV Music
*From* North Greenway Productions/Sony-ATV Music
*Label* Island

It took a trop house-oriented remix from Norwegian trio SeSe to propel it to No. 4 on the Hot 100, but what kept Posner’s “I Took a Pill in Ibiza” in rotation was the unflinching straightforwardness — right down to the song’s title — in which the 28-year-old Southfield, Mich., native sang about his own faded celebrity. (As he puts it, “I’m just a singer who already blew his shot.”) Beginning with Posner taking the titular pill to impress the younger (by a year) and much cooler Avicii, and peaking with him finding common ground with older folks because his name reminds them “of a pop song people forgot,” the singer-songwriter’s melancholy, self-lacerating hit is a fascinating but relatable tale of feeling out of place among your contemporaries. And its success ensures that people won’t forget him again anytime soon.