

December 31, 2016 – January 7, 2017

THE 59TH ANNUAL GRAMMY AWARDS

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-rock breakout



“Hello”

ADELE

Producer Greg Kurstin
Engineers/Mixers Julian Burg, Tom Elmhirst, Greg Kurstin, Liam Nolan, Alex Pasco
Mastering Engineers Tom Coyne, Randy Merrill
From 25
Label XL Recordings/Columbia Records

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 25th song to debut at No. 1 in the history of the Billboard Hot 100 (which it ultimately topped for 10 consecutive weeks). A lovelorn 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 (Sia, Pink, Kelly Clarkson), who’s up for his third producer of the year, nonclassical Grammy.



“Formation”

BEYONCÉ

Producers Beyoncé Knowles, Mike Will Made It, Plus
Engineers/Mixers Jaycen Joshua, Stuart White
Mastering Engineer Dave Kutch
From *Lemonade*
Label Parkwood Entertainment/Columbia Records

Beyoncé unveiled her powerful visual album *Lemonade* with an 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 a solo artist (and once with Destiny’s Child) for record of the year but has yet to win the category.



“7 Years”

LUKAS GRAHAM

Producers Future Animals, Pilo
Engineers/Mixers Delbert Bowers, Sebastian Fogh, Stefan Forrest, David LaBrel
Mastering Engineer Tom Coyne
From *Lukas Graham*
Label Warner Bros. Records

Few pop smashes in 2016 were as satisfyingly cinematic as “7 Years.” With a crystalline sense of both melancholy and nostalgia and trepidation for the future, 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 familial poignancy. (“Will I think the world is cold/Or will I have a lot of children who can warm me?”) But don’t call it “Father and Son, Pt. 2”: There is an edge to frontman Lukas Forchhammer’s storytelling, as he recalls smoking pot by age 11 and regretfully 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”

RIHANNA FEATURING DRAKE

Producer Boi-1da
Engineers/Mixers Noel “Gadget” Campbell, Kuk Harrell, Manny Marroquin, Noah “40” Shebib, Marcos Tovar
Mastering Engineer Chris Gehringer
From *Anti*
Label Westbury Road Entertainment

Before Drake topped the Hot 100 with “One Dance” last summer, the Toronto rapper guest-starred on two Hot 100 No. 1 singles—both for Rihanna. In March, “Work,” a follow-up of sorts to their 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 (20) and Mariah Carey (18). 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”

TWENTY ONE PILOTS

Producers Mike Elizondo, Tyler Joseph
Engineers/Mixers Neal Avron, Adam Hawkins
Mastering Engineer Chris Gehringer
From *Blurryface*
Label Fueled by Ramen

The lone mainstream rock nominee in the four major categories, “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, as did an appearance on *Saturday Night Live*. A rap-rock track sung from the point of view of insecure fictional character Blurryface, “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

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



"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

After releasing the best-selling album of the decade so far — 21 — in 2011, Adele reintroduced herself in 2015 with the forthright greeting only an artist of her humility and humanity could pull off: "Hello, it's me." But by the time she arrived at the song's devastating and — when it came to radio airplay — inescapable chorus, her full-throated belting reminded listeners why the English singer-songwriter had become a pop superpower in the span of just two LPs: by hitting notes and emotions only she could reach. Fans were happy to pick up Adele's call. "Hello" debuted atop the Billboard Hot 100 and stayed there for 10 weeks. Its moody music video racked up 27.7 million views on Vevo in a 24-hour span, breaking a record previously held by Taylor Swift's "Bad Blood."



"Formation"

BEYONCÉ

Songwriters Khalif Brown, Asheton Hogan, Beyoncé Knowles, Michael L. Williams II
Publishers WB Music/Sounds From Eardrums/Warner-Tamerlane Publishing/Oakland 13 Music
From *Lemonade*
Label Parkwood Entertainment/Columbia Records

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 song drew attention for its booming production, incendiary music video and brilliant lyrics, which found racial pride in Jackson 5 facial features, taught suburban America how to "slay" and turned Red Lobster into a date-night destination. When *Lemonade* arrived in April, "Formation" scored the highest Hot 100 debut of Bey's career — No. 10 — and before long, even presidential candidate Hillary Clinton was dropping references to the hot sauce in her bag.



"Love Yourself"

JUSTIN BIEBER

Songwriters Justin Bieber, Benjamin Levin, Ed Sheeran
Publishers Songs of Universal o/b/o Please Don't Forget to Pay Me Music/Universal Music o/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 spare song consisted of just Biebs and guitar, with assistance from Ed Sheeran on backing vocals and a clutch trumpet break from Phillip Beaudreau. 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 floats 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.



"7 Years"

LUKAS GRAHAM

Songwriters Christopher Brody Brown, Lukas Forchhammer, Stefan Forrest, David LaBrel, Mortel Pilegaard, Morten Ristorp
Publishers Warner/Chappell Music Scandinavia, WB Music o/b/o Lukas Graham Songs/WB Music o/b/o Stef publishing & Halla!halla! Publishing/Then We Take the World/Westside Independent Music Publishing o/b/o Thou Art the Hunger/Late 80's Music/F*** You Dave
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.



"I Took a Pill in Ibiza"

MIKE POSNER

Songwriter Mike Posner
Publishers North Greenway Productions/Sony-ATV Tunes
From *At Night, Alone*
Label Island

It took a trop house-oriented remix from Norwegian trio SeeB 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.