

## Using Music Awards To Find Out What's Hot

Not willing to sit through an evening-long show to find out who won the Grammy awards? Well, neither am I. Although music award shows focus primarily on the performers, “best album” awards are also given and are of interest to music fans. Some awards, such as the American Music Awards, are based on popular vote by fans. Other awards are based on selections made by music professionals or critics. A few of note include:

- **Grammy Awards** - <http://grammy.aol.com/awards>  
Yearly awards for artistic and technical achievement awarded by the Los Angeles-based Recording Academy. Over 100 awards are given in twenty-eight categories of music (Pop, Gospel, Classical, etc.) including “best album” in each category. Voting members are professionals with creative or technical credits on six commercially released tracks (or their equivalent). Awards can be searched back to 1958, the year the awards started. *Note:* VH1 radio has a Grammy Awards-focused radio station that allows you to hear music by current Grammy award nominated artists. Virgin Free Radio has a similar station.
- **Mercury Music Prize** - <http://www.mercurymusicprize.com>  
An independent panel of judges selects British “Albums of the Year” across a range of genres, which leads to the eventual selection of one album and performer as the Mercury Music Prize recipient. The site and the award process are a marvel of simplicity when compared to the Grammys.
- **Gramophone Awards** - <http://www.gramophone.co.uk/currentwin.asp>  
Presented in the fall in London each year, these are considered the “Oscars of the classical music world.” Voting is done by a committee of Gramophone reviewers and specialist critics. Approximately twenty awards are given, including Artist of the Year and Recording of the Year. Award information going back to 1977 is available.

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Of course there are scores of other awards that focus on particular genres of music or which are handed out in a particular country. Many of these can be found on the corresponding directory pages on Google or Yahoo:

- **Yahoo Award listings** - <http://dir.yahoo.com/Entertainment/Music/Awards>
- **Google Award listings** - <http://directory.google.com/Top/Arts/Music/Awards>

### **Two Measures of Importance: Popularity and Critical Acclaim**

Just because the critics love something doesn't mean the music-buying public will buy it. At the same time many recordings that are popular get little, if any, critical respect. This highlights the difference between critical acclaim and popularity, both of which are valid measures of an album's importance. Critical acclaim is found in the writings of critics, whereas popularity is measured on record sales and radio airplay charts.

Critical acclaim reflects the assessments of educated and knowledgeable music aficionados. A good critic will help you understand a piece of music, as well as the artist performing it, and will illuminate the strengths and weaknesses of a given piece as compared to similar music. At the same time, many people are less interested in what the critics think—and are more interested in what their fellow listeners and record buyers think. Hence they focus on the charts. Charts and record reviews are both useful to the music explorer—but it is best to understand the limitations of each and use them accordingly.