

# Awards celebrate African Canadian musicians

BY CHRIS LOCKE

Last Thursday, Nov. 5, I had the honour of attending actual history in the making.

Unfortunately, the first annual African Nova Scotia Music Awards weren't presented to a larger audience. Actually, they were kept kinda quiet.

The awards weren't advertised too extensively, and the talent of the event was barely contained in the small Halifax World Trade and Convention Centre.

The room that harboured the ANSMA (African Nova Scotia Music Association) awards had vibes of love and respect that could never be duplicated by a major corporate event like, say, the MTV music awards.

The awards celebrated the fact that black music from Nova Scotia was finally being recognized and appreciated. And, of course, the best artists were rewarded.

The ceremony began with an introduction by Delvina Bernard, the vice president of ANSMA. She then passed the mic to host Cecil Wright, who, full of jokes and laughter, warmed up the audience for the oncoming show.

There was a strong feeling of family and comfort throughout the event. It felt like the awards were long over due.

After Cecil said his welcoming words, young Shane Colley and his father began a pre-lunch duet. The audience was in awe at how Shane, only in his early teens, had already seemingly mastered the power of his own voice.

Later, Delvina Bernard outlined the benefits of the ANSMA music awards. She stressed the importance of acknowledging black music everywhere. The speech was very optimistic, with Delvina citing how African Canadian music is being looked upon with great enthusiasm. She also said how "ultra-important" the awards are for the black community. As Delvina said, the awards "allowed [the black community] to honour ourselves and musicians". The music not only got the black community heard, but also dealt with political, social and economic issues significant to everyone.

After Delvina Bernard's speech, she passed the mic to the secretary of ANSMA, Ed Matanawa. Ed added to the notion that it was important to "recognize our own", and then broke down a few goals of the ANSMA. Matanawa identified the need for increased development of the Nova Scotia African music industry, to create a viable resource so musicians would be provided with the resources they need — for example: recording locations and tools, promotion and copyright, all necessary for a musician to be heard.

Before the actual presentation of the awards commenced, Revered Michael Alden Fells sang a long gospel hymn consisting of many 'amens' — leading to a huge standing ovation.

Never have I bared witness to such a gospel performance. With a giant bellowing voice commanding complete attention, even the CBC reporters beside me got out of their seats in praise.

The actual awards presentation involved long speeches by presenters and

recipients that mainly drew on anecdotes and memories of perseverance in the industry.

The award for Best New Artist or Group went to Cherrybrook native Jamie Sparks. Sparks is a solo contemporary R&B artist that we had the pleasure of watching perform at the end of the ceremony.

The award for Best Live Performance went was taken home by the Nova Scotia Mass Choir. They were the only Canadian musical group that performed at the 30th anniversary of the Martin Luther King march, which took place in Washington, DC in 1993. This was a prestigious honour indeed for the choir.

Walter Borden, a very humorous and interesting character, gave a long speech before presenting the Pioneer award. Borden pointed out the trials and tribulations of black artists since the beginning of Nova Scotia's African music scene before handing the Pioneer to Bucky Adams.

Born in 1937, Bucky has been playing music since he was 11 years old. He has played his saxophone for the Queen, and has played with such jazz greats as Dizzie Gillespie, Louis Armstrong and Oscar Peterson.

Artist of the Year went to a capella group Four the Moment, who have been around since 1981.

Not surprisingly, this was not the first award given to the internationally-touring group. They've won ECMA awards as African Canadian artists of the year, and last March they won the Elizabeth Fry society's 'Rebel With a Cause' award.

The Music Heritage Award went to the Gospel Heirs and the Industry Builder award was given to CBC Radio for their role in helping the development of African Canadian music. The CBC has been a great supporter, giving many African Canadian artists their own shows and helping them release their own albums.

The closing remarks then

followed, led by Delvina Bernard, Cecil Wright, and ceremony coordinator Shelley Fashan. Door prizes were given out to ticket holders with winning numbers, but I, for some reason, didn't get one. Oh well.

Sparks ended the show with a song. The ANSMA awards though, ran a little too long out of the given time.

It was still worth the wait though, considering this was history in the making for Nova Scotia.

For more information on the African Nova Scotian Music Association call 423-6271 or 829-2414.

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