

round town

Wine, women, and song in the vineyard...

# 2007 Winery Music Awards announce first-round winner

By Melissa Chavez

Lush, green surrounds were the setting for the 2007 Winery Music Awards in Paso Robles held June 10. Kathy Kelly Productions, Inc., first debuted "wine country's answer to Sundance" in 2005. Its winner, Threes and Nines, won a recording contract with RNB Music, was featured in a prime-time TV show, and has since released their new CD.

Following 2007's first Elimination Round in which five semi-finalists performed, judges' scores were counted to name singer-songwriter Shannon Curtis the winner. From a possible 100 points, Curtis earned a total average score of 86.73 points, scoring high in all categories. The Debra Arlyn Band from Portland came second by only four points.

Andrew Firestone, General Manager of Firestone Brewery and TV "The Bachelor" celebrity emceed the event with L.A. TV personality Janie Terrazas. The duo provided lighthearted banter between introductions to a supportive audience at Maloy-O'Neill Vineyards. Sustained by Paso vintages and barbecue, relaxed visitors mingled, listened, and grooved to talented performances.

Twenty influential movers and shakers from the wine, music, and

The Winery Music Awards featured Shannon Curtis (below), Emcees Andrew Firestone and Janie Terrazas (right), and Kerri Dopart (below right).



(songwriter/producer, whose songs have yielded \$1.6 billion in retail sales), and Jeffrey Weber (mega music producer and Grammy Award magnet), to name only a few.

Contestants are weighted in three categories: "Originality, Musicianship, and Marketability to the wine-consuming public - men and women, aged 21-54." This makes for an interesting set of criteria, considering the event is intrinsically market-driven and aimed at accomplished, non-professional talent. In fact, the artists must be unsigned at the time of submission throughout the finals. There really are no clear winners



four rounds. Afterward, Elimination Round winners and two Wild Card winners battle in the Final. Wild Cards are the two highest scoring artists of all four rounds who have not won previous eliminations. In October, six finalists will compete for a multiple-prize package to generously equip the top winner in his/her music biz career.

Lest anyone entertain the thought of American Idol-esque entrants of the "no-thank-you" variety, such isn't the case. Hundreds of submissions are received from throughout the U.S. and Canada, but only twenty (groups or soloists, male or female)



recognition went to Curtis ("Boomerangs and Seesaws"), Dopart ("Letters"), and Jean ("No Boys Allowed") for a three-way tie.

As Shannon Curtis's name was announced, she amusingly apologized for having to interrupt this interviewer to collect her prize, and again upon receiving multiple congrats after her win. Curtis developed her craft early, singing in church and lead singing in the rock band, Paradigm. As a senior in college, the biology major knew

soul-searching was in order as she lay in bed dreading the MCAT exam. Soon, music won over the medical profession. The songwriting pianist went solo and has since drawn a sizeable word-of-mouth following within a year's time on the road. "The audience is really important to me, and that we have an interaction," says Curtis. "I just love playing. Honestly, it's just my greatest joy to do and I feel grateful that people give me an hour of their time to listen to what I've written. I consider it a big privilege."

Rocky Gaines, second to Curtis for Originality by less than two points, shared her thoughtful perspective of songwriting: "It is my vehicle for my unique point of view, composed of stories," says Gaines. "I believe the world needs stories, runs on stories, and that (they) are most interesting told in song." Happy to rise to her calling, she adds it is "my special gift, privilege and challenge to capsule feeling, behav-

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