

REWARDING TIMES

Breaking the sound barriers

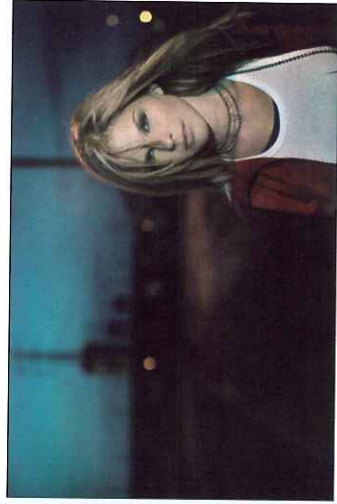
NOW IN THEIR THIRD YEAR, THE BORDER BREAKERS AWARDS, ORGANISED BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE EUROPEAN MUSIC OFFICE, IFPI, IMPALA, GESAC, ICMPI/CIEM, MTV AND BILLBOARD, WILL BE HELD ON JANUARY 22 IN THE PALAIS DES FESTIVALS. GARY SMITH REPORTS

A previous Border Breaker Award-winner, Finland's Redrama

W

HILE the majority of emerging artists still tend to build a following in their country of origin before breaking into the international market, there is a growing number of acts who are as much European as they are Danish, British, French or German. Whether this is due to the increased homogenisation of musical tastes in a maturing regional market, or proof that affordable recording technology is the ultimate musical democratiser, is hard to say. What the Border Breakers Awards clearly demonstrate, however, is that there is a steady flow of new talent emerging from across Europe.

According to Jan Figel, European Commissioner for education, training, culture and multilingualism, the Border Breaker Awards "are a testimony to the diversity and creativity of European music". He adds:



Former winner Ana Johnsson of Sweden

“A lot more could and should be done to promote artists across national boundaries”

“They also highlight the potential of the single market. We want to work together with the [music] sector in order to encourage the circulation of European artists and their works.”

“The basis of the awards is the Music & Media Border Breakers chart software, which identifies artists charting outside of their own territory,” says Billboard’s European bureau chief and global editor, Emmanuel Legrand. “Even though it’s very difficult for new artists to travel much in support of a first release, the awards nevertheless highlight the musical common ground in the European music scene.”

The conditions for eligibility are straightforward but strictly enforced. The release has to be a debut album recorded and produced in Europe by an artist who is an EU national, or legally resident in the EU, and signed to a European label. The only exception to the debut-album clause is that artists who leave one band to form a new group can end up being eligible a second time. The list of previous winners testifies to the growing ge-

PERVERTED LOGIC

TIZIANO FERRO’s debut LP, *Rosso Relativo* (EMI), was a major pan-European success, with over one million copies sold. It also earned the Italian R&B artist a Border Breaker Award in 2004. “Tiziano was between releases, so we didn’t see much effect on sales,” says Nico Spina, EMI Italy’s A&R director. “However, his follow-up album, *111*, sold much better in South America than in Europe. This was partly down to the title of the first single from *111*, which is *Perverso*. In Italian, *perverso* means difficult or contrary but, in several important territories such as Germany, it was understood to mean ‘pervert’, so radio wouldn’t play the track.”



Tiziano Ferro

ographical spread of Europe’s emerging talent: the UK’s Katie Melua (Dramatical); Corneille (Wagram) who, although a French resident, is of Quebeceois origin; Ireland’s Damien Rice (DRM); Germany’s Wir Sind Helden (EMI); Finland’s Redrama (EMI); Denmark’s The Raveonettes (Columbia); the Italian dance producer Benny Benassi (Off Limits); Sweden’s Ana Johnsson (Epic); Italy’s Tiziano Ferro (EMI); Portugal’s Mariza (EMI); and the Italian model turned singer Carla Bruni (Naive).

“The awards are based on album sales from the beginning of September through to the end of August,” Legrand adds. “In general terms, the winners for 2006 will demonstrate the strength and depth of Europe’s singer/songwriters. And once again, there’s a good showing from the Nordic countries.”

Europe may in principle be a borderless region, but Legrand believes that, in practice, this is not the case for emerging musical talent: “A lot more could and should be done to promote artists across national

boundaries. The industry is aware of this, but investing in breaking unproven acts pan-nationally is still something that doesn’t happen nearly enough — especially when you consider that what we are really talking about is the future of the music industry.” Evidence of the value of getting behind an act abounds, with the Spanish artist Bebe (Virgin) being just the latest example. “Bebe has sold over 500,000 copies of *Pafuera Teleranas* in Spain,” Legrand says. “Since then, EMI France has charted the album and it has now started to take-off in Germany.”

AND THE WINNERS ARE...

- KT Tunstall (Relentless/EMI), UK
- Hush (Universal), Denmark
- Amel Bent (Sony), France
- Bebe (Virgin), Spain
- Arash (Warners), Sweden
- Sarah Bettens (Flow Records), Belgium
- Hal (Rough Trade), Ireland
- Juli (Universal), Germany



KT Tunstall



Sarah Bettens



Amel Bent

“The Border Breaker Awards are a testimony to the diversity and creativity of European music”

HERE’S THE FINN...

FINNISH hip-hop maverick Redrama (EMI) was presented with his Border Breaker Award in 2005 for his debut album *Everyday Soundtrack*, which was released in 2003 and has sold in excess of 50,000 copies. “The award definitely had a positive effect on Redrama’s career,” says manager Lars Sonck. “He got excellent recognition in the media and earned a lot of respect and support from organisations that hadn’t previously acknowledged him.” Redrama’s new album, *Street Music*, was released in Finland in September. Its European release — a high priority for EMI — is now set for early 2006. “His next big show will be at MIDEM’s opening-night party,” Sonck says. “We are very much looking forward to it.”