

SYRACUSE AREA MUSIC AWARDS



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March 5-6, 2026

Nominees and Inductees

Press Kit

syracuseareamusic.com



The mission of the Syracuse Area Music Awards has remained true since the first awards ceremony was held in 1993 to honor the musicians who work so hard to imbue the local music scene with their artistry. The SAMMYS has lived on since its founding in 1992, which speaks to the dedication of the volunteers on the Executive Committee, aiming to bring Syracuse's most prominent musicians to the forefront of public attention.

SAMMYS HALL OF FAME INDUCTION DINNER

The Hall of Fame Induction dinner, presented by Meier's Creek Brewing Company, will be Thursday, March 5, at Middle Ages Brewing Company from 7-10pm (doors: 6pm). The list of inductees and bios are available on pages 3-8 of this packet. Tickets are \$35 and can be purchased at syracuseareamusic.com/tickets. Free online streaming of the event will be available on our Facebook page, courtesy of Empire Live Sound.

SAMMYS AWARDS SHOW

The SAMMYS Awards Show will be Friday, March 6, at the Palace Theatre at 7:00pm (doors: 6pm). The list of nominees and additional awards is available on pages 9-13 of this packet. Tickets can be purchased at syracuseareamusic.com/tickets for \$25. Free online streaming of the event will be available on our Facebook page, courtesy of Empire Live Sound.

Featuring performances by:

Brass Inc., London McDaniel, Nate Gross, New York Flyers and Stephen Douglas Wolfe.

In addition to these performances, awards will be presented in 13 recording categories, as well as the People's Choice awards for Best Artist or Band, Best Event or Music Series, Best Academic or Musical Organization, and Best Venue, and the Brian Bourke award for Best New Artist.

PEOPLE'S CHOICE

Get in on The SAMMYS action by participating in our annual People's Choice vote. Each year we host a web-based competition to see whose fans are the most psyched about their favorites in each of four categories: Artist or Band, Event or Music Series, Academic or Musical Organization, and Venue. Since 2007, The SAMMYS has attracted millions of votes through its online voting system. Voting is free, open to the public and continues through March 2 at syracuseareamusic.com/peopleschoice.

THE SAMMYS – 2026 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

It is always our honor to honor esteemed individuals, with roots in the Syracuse Community. Individuals that have, throughout their careers, advanced to the top of their fields. We are proud to recognize the 2026 Hall of Fame class of outstanding individuals.



IAN CATTELL



NEW YORK FLYERS



DON AND DAVE MARTIN



ERIN ALTHEN

Music Educator of the Year



MUSIC CENTER

Lifetime Achievement

THE SAMMYS – 2026 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

IAN CATTELL

Ian Cattell is a Syracuse-based multi-instrumentalist and vocalist whose life has been shaped by music from the very beginning. Raised in a musical family, he knew in his early teens that music was his calling. Cattell began his formal training at the Fredonia School of Music in Trumpet Performance before shifting his focus to electric bass, Chapman Stick, and vocal; a turn that would shape a career spanning decades and continents.



His journey in live music began in 1985 at the Syracuse Civic Center and continued with his first bass gigs in 1989. Cattell enjoyed a long-running collaboration with the late Steve Schad in bands such as The United Booty Foundation and Childhood's End. He has also been a core member of many other Upstate NY bands, including Seconds Out (Genesis) and Crazy Diamond (Pink Floyd).

From these local beginnings grew an extraordinary career: more than 2,700 concerts across 51 countries. Cattell has performed on the world's most iconic stages, including Royal Albert Hall, Carnegie Hall, and Radio City Music Hall, alongside an extraordinary run of 12 sold-out shows at Red Rocks Amphitheatre between 2012 and 2025. He has also performed with notable musicians such as Tony Levin, Alan Parsons, Guy Pratt, and Harry Waters.

Bridging classical training and progressive rock, Cattell has spent over 20 years touring globally with Aussie Floyd and currently with Brit Floyd. His career is defined by longevity, dedication, and immense musical range.

On March 26th, 2024, Syracuse officials declared "Ian Cattell Day" in recognition of his significant contributions to the global music scene and his enduring part in Syracuse's history.

THE SAMMYS – 2026 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

NEW YORK FLYERS

In 1975, Chris Tso and Phil Dalessandro formed the New York Flyers with a mission to exceed fan expectations through high-octane performance and superior production value. After opening for Black Sabbath at Albany's Palace Theatre, the duo solidified their definitive lineup in the late 1970s with the addition of drummer Earl Hamilton and bassist/vocalist Mike Marzullo.

The band's meteoric rise on the East Coast circuit was fueled by a commitment to arena-quality sound and lighting. Managed by a skilled crew, the Flyers became a staple at state fairs and war memorials, sharing stages with rock icons like Pat Benatar, Eddie Money, and The Marshall Tucker Band. As their focus shifted toward original material, they recorded two singles and an album at Rose Hill Studios under the guidance of Mark Doyle. Beyond their own music, Tso and Dalessandro expanded their impact on the industry by founding Delso Records to promote emerging talent, notably The Headlites from Tampa, FL, LeRock from Ithaca, NY, and The Natives from Syracuse, NY.

With a legacy spanning over 2,000 shows across fifteen states and Canada, the New York Flyers are the only active Central New York band to achieve such extensive regional reach. Their enduring connection to their audience is best evidenced by a series of high-profile reunions between 2004 and 2025, including landmark 40th and 50th-anniversary concerts. Today, they remain a testament to the power of professional production and local rock history.



THE SAMMYS – 2026 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

DON AND DAVE MARTIN

For over 60 years, brothers Don and Dave Martin were pillars of the Syracuse music scene. Their journey began in their teens, fueled by a shared passion for performance. Don's guitar career took flight at age 13 with a \$39 Silvertone Danelectro from Sears & Roebuck, while Dave discovered his love for the stage in a local doo-wop group. Their bond was defined by mutual support; Dave even financed Don's first Stratocaster to help him pursue his ambitions as a professional musician.



Don first gained prominence in the early 1960s as a founding member of The Concepts. The group became a local staple, playing high school dances and fraternity parties before famously opening for The Animals at the Onondaga War Memorial in 1964. As his career evolved, Don transitioned into the jazz world. His trio was a featured act at the Syracuse Jazz Fest, and he became a sought-after guitarist for restaurants, country clubs, and private events across Central New York. He continued performing until his retirement in 2019 following an Alzheimer's diagnosis.

Dave was a versatile and virtuosic bassist who mastered genres ranging from country and R&B to jazz and rock. In the 1980s, he revisited his roots with the doo-wop group Vintage. Throughout his career, Dave shared the stage with national legends like Bill Doggett and Murali Coryell. He was also a cornerstone of the local community, serving as a member of the house band for the blues open mic at Rooters from the early 2000s until 2016.

Together, the brothers formed the band Company in the mid-70s and collaborated with local icons such as Bobby Green, Roosevelt Dean, and Dave Hanlon. They remained deeply proud of each other's achievements, and their musical legacy lives on through their sons, who remain active participants in the Syracuse music scene.

THE SAMMYS – 2026 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

ERIN ALTHEN – MUSIC EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR

Erin Althen is a music educator, mentor, leader, and advocate whose life's work centers on empowering students to discover their most fulfilled, authentic, and light-filled selves through the transformative power of music.

Now in her 23rd year with the Westhill Central School District in Syracuse, New York, she serves as Director of Bands and Chair of the Fine Arts Department at Westhill High School, where she conducts the Wind Ensemble, Musical Pit Orchestra, and Pep Band; advises the Tri-M Music Honor Society and Westhill Musical Leadership and Performance Academies; teaches lessons; and coaches chamber music ensembles.

Beyond her work in the classroom, Ms. Althen is the founder and co-conductor of the Syracuse Youth Wind Symphony, co-founder of the Central New York Music Teacher Mentoring Program, and co-author of The Sight Reading Book, a 21-volume series aligned with state-specific standards. As a clinician and guest conductor, she leads honor ensembles and presents professional development workshops for music educators at the county, state, and national levels.

An accomplished flutist and piccoloist, she maintains a private studio and has performed on world-renowned stages with exceptional music educator wind ensembles and orchestras. Ms. Althen's contributions to the field have been recognized with numerous accolades, including the Outstanding Band Director Award from the New York State Band Directors Association, the Music Teachers of Excellence Award from the Country Music Association Foundation, the National Federation of High Schools Outstanding Music Educator Award, and selection as a Semifinalist for the 2025 and 2026 GRAMMY Music Educator Award.

Ms. Althen earned both her bachelor's and master's degrees from Syracuse University and resides in Central New York with her husband, Corey; daughters, Isabella and Fiona; horse, Louie; and rescue cats: Callie, Clover, Josie, Caspian, and Frankie.



THE SAMMYS – 2026 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

MUSIC CENTER – LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

The Music Center has stood as a definitive pillar of the Central New York music community for over four decades. Originally established in 1981 by Chuck Cavallaro as an evolution of a smaller 1968 storefront, the business found its stride when current owner and operator Buke Babikian joined as a partner in 1982. For 25 years, the duo operated out of their landmark Eastwood location across from the Palace Theatre before Babikian took sole ownership in 2007 and eventually transitioned the shop to its current home in East Syracuse.



The store's reputation is built on a foundation of genuine performance pedigree. As the long-time drummer for the band Stroke, Babikian brings over 30 years of professional experience to the counter, having shared stages with iconic artists like B.B. King and Carlos Santana. This deep-rooted connection to the stage ensures that the store functions not just as a retail space, but as a consultative hub where gear and advice are backed by decades of life on the road.

Beyond its inventory, The Music Center has been essential to the professional ecosystem of Syracuse by providing dedicated lesson space for decades. This mission has supported local legends like Joey Beccheria, Al Dunn, and Mark Copani, offering them a platform to mentor the next generation while providing the community with world-class instruction. By bridging the gap between expert repairs, personalized lessons, and a curated selection of equipment, the store continues to serve everyone from beginners to international touring pros. Now located at 4277 James St, The Music Center remains a vital advocate for the vibrant, improvisational, and enduring spirit of the Syracuse music scene.

THE SAMMYS – 2026 SAMMY NOMINEES

SAMMY awards are given based on the judgment of submissions sent to The SAMMYS Board by musicians in Syracuse and the surrounding area. Congratulations to the 212 artists that submitted 279 recordings! An independent panel of music industry professionals and educators from around the country, led by Jim Elenteny, reviewed the submissions and made their selections based on their merit within their genre.

AND THE NOMINEES ARE...

BEST JAZZ

- Bob Holz – Honoring Larry Coryell
- Cheri Giraud – All My Tomorrows
- Jeff Martin – Roots & Legacy
- Jesse Collins Quartet – Soul Eyes
- Salt City Voices 2025 – Sweet Happy Life

BEST AMERICANA

- Autumn Sun – Autumn Sun
- Cielle On Solid Ground – Cielle On Solid Ground: 3 Song EP
- Golden Soul Revue – Golden Soul Revue
- J. Schnitt & the Colluders – Use Your Collusion
- Jessie Elizabeth – To Go and Grow

BEST OTHER STYLE

- Grupo Pagán – POWER
- Jeff Tripoli – Natural Habitat
- Pocket Bandits – Nine by Pocket Bandits
- Tom Rasely – Gallery

BEST JAM BAND

- One Man. The Band – Peaks and Valleys
- Slug – 25
- Tim Herron and the Great Blue – Lift That Stone
- Transient Kicks – Begin Again
- Vaporeyes – Still

BEST POP

- Dan Volpe and the Drifters – Favorite Records
- The Jess Novak Band – Tattoo
- PHEN – KID

BEST ROCK

- 4 Word Days – Just a Dragonfly
- Dylan Michael – Lorem Ipsum
- The Penetrators – High School Memories
- Plastic Sunface – Good Intentions
- violet. – with love.

THE SAMMYS – 2026 SAMMY NOMINEES

BEST HARD ROCK

- Design/Fracture – ACCOUNTABLE
- Masons Revolt – Camp
- Sent From Beyond – Anaconda Da Vida
- VØID EMPERØR – Marauders
- With Teeth – 1001

BEST R&B

- E Washington – Patiently Waiting
- Tyhier – Bloom Where You’re Planted

BEST HIP-HOP OR RAP

- Amier – Into the Abyss
- Christenelle Diroc – The Cancer They Found 722
- Christenelle Diroc – The Last Son
- ENAJYRAM – Gas Can & Match: The Final Chapter
- Trappin Quik – I95 MUZIK

BEST BLUES

- The Shylocks – “A Highfalutin’ Blues Bender II” LIVE
- Todd Shuffler with Mark Doyle and the Maniacs – Stoned and Lonesome, a Celebration of The Rolling Stones - Early Years

BEST ALTERNATIVE

- Boustrophedon – WINTER // STEEL (Remixes)
- Clove – after everything
- mistrials – The Culture Cool-Aid EP
- Porch Couch – Free
- Tame The Giant – Second Hand Sound

BEST COUNTRY

- Christian Parker, Earl Poole Ball, Patrick Cleary – American Cosmic Revival, Vol. 1: Back At Home (feat. Jaydee Maness)
- The Dust Devil Band – Better With Age
- The Endless Mountain Derelicts – Life Moves Fast
- Harvey Fonda – Guild Songs
- Jon Rogalia Ft. Whiskey Hollow Rush – This Side Of Heaven

BEST SINGLE

- AK Kastro – Played Like A Fool
- Atlantus – Tired of running
- Brandon Gambill – Craving
- SAME HUSTLE D-ROC – DO SHE LOVE ME
- Zak G – Lines (Made To Be)

ADDITIONAL AWARDS...

JACK O BOCCHINO SPIRIT OF THE SAMMYS AWARD

- Susan Coleman

BRIAN BOURKE AWARD FOR BEST NEW ARTIST

- Jeremy Kennedy

COMMUNITY SPIRIT AWARD

- Karen Mihalyi

THE SAMMYS – 2026 ADDITIONAL AWARDS

SUSAN COLEMAN – JACK O BOCCHINO SPIRIT OF THE SAMMYS AWARD

For Susan Coleman, music has never been just a hobby; it is a lifelong compass. From the radio-filled halls of her grandmother's Arkansas home to the vibrant stages of Central New York, Coleman's journey is a testament to the enduring power of live performance and community connection. Today, she continues that legacy as a founding member of the Syracuse-based band, Harmonic Dirt.

Coleman's musical roots were planted early, nurtured by the classic country sounds of Glen Campbell and Charley Pride. Her tastes expanded in high school, where she bridged the worlds of "Outlaw Country" and the improvisational spirit of the Grateful Dead. This eclectic foundation eventually led her to the Syracuse music scene, where she met her husband and musical partner, Mike Gridley.

After years of navigating the industry—including a formative period in Amherst, Massachusetts, and time dedicated to raising a family—the duo formed Harmonic Dirt. The band represents the culmination of decades spent both on stage and in the audience, driven by the belief that music provides essential solace and joy.

"So many of us find community connection and good feels from watching and playing live music," says Coleman. "I am no different. Whether it's a full concert or a quick 45-minute set at a local bar, that connection is vital."

Beyond her own performances, Coleman is a passionate advocate for the regional arts ecosystem. She frequently credits the local venues, die-hard fans, and fellow musicians for maintaining the "vibrant scene" that defines the Syracuse area. Through Harmonic Dirt, Coleman continues to contribute to that tapestry, inviting audiences to find their own "good feels" in the local live music circuit.



THE SAMMYS – 2026 ADDITIONAL AWARDS

JEREMY KENNEDY – BRIAN BOURKE AWARD FOR BEST NEW ARTIST

At 21, Jeremy Kennedy has already established himself as a prominent guitarist and visionary in the Syracuse music scene. As the founder of Sacred Medicine and JAMORA, Kennedy has spent the last three years cultivating a sound that bridges the gap between raw blues and ethereal experimentation.

Best known for his work with Sacred Medicine—a power trio featuring bassist Charlie Huff and drummer Lenny Printup—Kennedy leads a blues-driven jam experience that blends soul and psychedelia. His signature “sound-sculpting” technique allows him to pivot from explosive, high-energy solos to massive ambient soundscapes, creating an immersive, meditative journey for his audience.

A seasoned live performer, Kennedy's credits include regional highlights like the NYS Blues Festival and Sterling Festival, alongside notable appearances at Funk 'n Waffles, Wonderland Forest, and the Haudenosaunee Festivals. Whether performing at Nate Gross' Stratocaster Celebration or a local festival, Kennedy remains dedicated to the art of the improvisational jam, serving the moment and the audience through layered musical textures.



THE SAMMYS – 2026 ADDITIONAL AWARDS

KAREN MIHALYI – COMMUNITY SPIRIT AWARD

Karen Mihalyi is a dedicated cultural worker, musician, and activist who has spent over four decades harnessing the power of music to foster community and advocate for social justice. Growing up in rural Upstate New York, where music was woven into daily life, she was encouraged by her grandmother to learn harmony and organized her first singing group by the sixth grade.

While attending Syracuse University with the intent of pursuing a music career, the reality of the Vietnam War shifted Mihalyi's focus toward peace and justice. Inspired by interactions with figures like Pete Seeger and Holly Near, she embraced the role of a cultural worker. However, it was a pivotal trip to Nicaragua that solidified her vision for radical community engagement. Witnessing artists work with ordinary citizens to shape society, she returned home determined to create an inclusive, inter-generational choir based on the belief that every voice matters.

In 1985, Mihalyi founded the Syracuse Community Choir. What began with a call for singers at a peace day event in Thorndon Park has grown into a 40-year institution. The choir, comprised of 70–100 singers ranging from children to elders of diverse abilities, is known for its accessibility—offering transportation, childcare, and braille materials with no set fees.

Working within Syracuse, Mihalyi has used the choir as a tool to build bridges in a segregated city, fostering deep relationships with the Onondaga Nation, the Paul Robeson Performing Arts Company, and various diverse organizations. She continues to champion the idea that ordinary people can find their voices and sing out to move forward on the arc of justice.



THE SAMMYS – 2026 ADDITIONAL AWARDS

GEOFF “DEAFGEOFF” HERBERT – FOUNDER’S AWARD

Geoff Herbert is a reporter, SEO Lead, and content supervisor for syracuse.com | The Post-Standard, covering a wide range of topics, including entertainment news, concert reviews, and the “Syracuse Playlist,” which highlights music from Central New York artists.

Despite being born with a profound binaural hearing loss, he has also worked as “DJ DeafGeoff” for more than 20 years, including past roles on Syracuse radio stations Z89 (WJPZ-FM) and Hot 107.9 (WWHT-FM) and currently as a wedding DJ.

Herbert also serves as a motivational speaker and host of “Enable: The Disability Podcast,” celebrating amazing people with disabilities and different abilities while teaching others not to define people by what they can’t do, when there are so many things they can do.

He is a member of the WJPZ Radio Hall of Fame, a New York Emmy Award nominee, a Journalists Association of New York (JANY) award winner, a skilled lipreader, a lover of all kinds of music, and a proud husband and father.



THE SAMMYS – OUR SPONSORS

The Board of Directors would like to thank all of our sponsors for supporting this community focused event, which is produced by a dedicated group of volunteers and supported by grants as well as private and corporate donations.



IN MEMORY OF
Jack O Bocchino

